



Dear Saints, Dear Stella: Letters Examining the Messy Lines of Expectations, Stereotypes, and Identity in Higher Education

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Nancy G. Barron

Dear Saints, Dear Stella: Letters Examining the Messy Lines of Expectations, Stereotypes, and Identity in Higher Education

The following article focuses on Latino students' difficulties with higher education because of dual constructions of identity from and toward the Anglo mainstream. First, the article addresses Other perception: the potential problems Latino students (Mexican Americans) encounter in higher education based on how others perceive their individual and group identity. Second, it addresses self-perception: the contradictory expectations that Mexican Americans have of the mainstream in higher education. The discussion of these issues is presented in a letter format that primarily speaks to audiences outside the mainstream.

This article has a few purposes. The first and primary purpose is to address Other perception: the potential problems Latino students (Mexican Americans) encounter in higher education based on individual and group identity.¹ Second, I discuss self-perception: I present a few contradictory expectations that Mexican Americans have of the mainstream in higher education. The third purpose is to present this discussion in a format that includes Latinos. Instead of using the traditional format of a scholarly paper, I use letters addressed to

CCC 55:1 / SEPTEMBER 2003

two saints and a long-time friend, Stella. I am aware that this format could be considered artificial since these letters will be read by an academic—outsider—audience. However, it is an attempt to address the exclusivity of academic discourse, to encourage Latino students, parents, and community members to think about their perceptions of higher education, and to make mainstream academics aware of Latino students' possible ways of seeing college, teachers, and students who are from outside their community.

For this article, I attempt to articulate to outsiders what I often do not need to articulate for members of my own Mexican/American community.²

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First, I focus on a double layer often found with Latino students and most likely other students as well. The first layer is the individual layer. Making a decision to go on to higher education when the retention rate for Latinos is just over 50 percent is often an individual act.³ The second layer is the strong belief of being a member of a larger group. The Latino students I've worked and talked with often are upset or saddened by racist or general comments against Latinos. No one points to them, no one implicates them, no one says their names. As individuals, they are innocent; as members of a group, they are implicated.

While the student stories, the student sadness, sometimes the student anger, and mostly the student confusion with their role in higher education could be seen as independent and individual to the student, the group identity promotes a common thread in their stories. There is a *common knowledge* among Latinos toward the Anglo mainstream and the colleges and universities the mainstream controls. Sometimes I can guess what students' conclusions about school are because I've heard similar stories and watched similar actions unfold many times. Many times, telling stories means that students are reaching the end. Many students are not equipped to let some experiences against their group slide when those experiences have ready-made definitions from their often-segregated home communities. The stories are many, the stories are individual, but they are similar in that the biggest challenge is learning to *do school* and achieve some learning as individuals while also maintaining a sense of self as defined in their homes and by their groups.

Second, I present two contradictory expectations of higher education from a Mexican/American point of view. For more than fifteen years, I've worked with many nonmainstream Mexican/American students who carry two contradictory beliefs. These students often believe that (1) school is neutral, *and* they believe that (2) school is not a safe place. "School is what you make of it,"

I often hear, and it's common for the same student to say, "It doesn't matter how hard I work, you know what it's like." What it's *like* is to believe that school is meant for and maintained by the Anglo mainstream. These opposing views of campus neutrality and predetermined expectations are woven together, making it difficult for Latino students to learn and respond freely, mostly because of unarticulated interpretations and assumptions of the mainstream system. For many of the students I've worked with, there's little reason to trust that the person sitting in front of them won't put them into a stereotypical box. One reason for this tension may be the fear of what scholar Claude Steele calls a "stereotype threat." This is a fear of being placed under the negative stereotypes of the group they identify with (groups can be associated with race, ethnicity, economic status, gender, age, etc.). Not surprisingly, some "involuntary minority" students respond to these possible threats with self-defeating behaviors.⁴ The behaviors I observed seem to show how internalized systemic and institutional expectations become for some individuals, especially when color, with historical significance, becomes a variable to confront and live with.

Third, I changed the format of the discussion to include Latino audiences. As many academics and students of color can attest, being in the minority sometimes means becoming a subject to be studied. Often, I become weary and choose to remain silent rather than continuously explain parts of a cultural framework and worldview. However, I also understand that since the term *minority* means few or lesser in number, this means I, in fact, may be the one person or one among a handful of people who has a different perspective on issues that are often misunderstood or that resurrect 150-year-old stereotypes.⁵

The genre of the letter makes readers—except those specifically addressed—outsiders, allowed to look in. Readers are not specifically addressed, but they are given access to the discussion. There are a few references not fully described or developed mostly because those instances are *insider* points and are difficult to explain to outsiders at this point.

One of the results of being Mexican/American and not a Mexican and an American is that I am not two different people with two different worldviews and two different sets of experiences from which I can separate, analyze, hypothesize, and present in pieces. I am one person who is not completely sure when a Mexican would not understand or when an American would not understand. I mostly come to crossroads only because others tell me I am at a crossroad. Otherwise, the road is complete, wide, and encompassing of all my experiences, which is perhaps an example of *mestizaje* in the U.S. [further discussed in the article].

The recipients of my letters are two saints and a childhood friend, Stella. For those who have experienced Mexican and Mexican/American Catholic churches where notes and letters are allowed for saints, this format is not unusual.⁶ A note or letter is often a simple request of sorts, for prayers, for a miracle or two, but some letters are discussions in the way letters are written to friends. I chose the letters to be discussions to fulfill the content/purpose of a broader discussion. I chose saints because for me prayer can be discussion of often-broader questions that might seem philosophical in Western thought but are youthful questions within my family. I write these as letters to individual people, but I do have an outside audience in mind. The format helped me get into writing what I couldn't write if I chose the scholarly article format mainly addressed to a mainstream audience. Here, then, I begin to address how students and academics of color can address issues of self and Other presentation and how mainstream educational institutions can address Mexican/American students' often contradictory perceptions of college and their role as college students.

Indeed it is a tribute to the Chicana sense of struggle that many of them are still optimistic about the future: but this optimism is, again, a determination to succeed in the face of the system—not because of it. (227)
—Rodolfo F. Acuña

Santo Niño's letter

El Santo Niño De Atocha is the Christ child who is most popular in New Mexico but is found throughout Catholic homes in the Southwest/West. He has an

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elaborate site for adoration at La Placita, located in downtown Los Angeles. He's the patron saint of travel and long journeys. His little statue always wears a pair of huaraches.⁷ Legend or belief says that when

travelers run into trouble out in the desert (a flat tire, a dry radiator), someone usually shows up and lends a hand. Since locals are known for helping, the stranded person doesn't think much of the assistance until the help is completed. The stranger who helped almost always seems to disappear quickly. The belief is that the stranger was Santo Niño driving or walking solely to help travelers in the heat of the desert.

I chose to write to Santo Niño first for two reasons. One is because of the weariness and constant travel into memories associated with this topic. I

needed to travel to the past and to relive experiences, memories that were successfully repressed and almost forgotten. I also needed to do more than pay an intellectual visit. I revisited the past so that I could think about the present day and maybe imagine the future for involuntary minorities in higher education. The second reason is because my paternal nana always said two prayers for my family the day before we headed out to Phoenix, Arizona, and on the morning of our departure. During my childhood, mom woke us kids up earlier than usual, for some reason scrubbed *my* face, brushed then pulled my hair back tight, and soon I stood before my nana, pink and with no hair over my eyes as she said a quick prayer to Santo Niño. She always concluded her prayer by grabbing my right hand and offering her soft kiss goodbye. My family always made it home. I begin these letters then by straightening out my goals and worries with Santo Niño, hoping I'll get a hand if and when I'm stranded.

We all—writers, storytellers, scholars—negotiate the terrain between private and public in our own ways and for our own reasons. Sometimes the reasons may be located in family or tribal custom—rules for how to talk to strangers; sometimes they are purely individual. (13)

—Ann Cummins, et al.

Dear Santo Niño De Atocha,

I'm requesting some assistance as my nana, Elvira Barron, did back in Phoenix, Arizona. You've probably met her by now since she's been there for more than twenty years, *y tenia mucho fe en tus Milagros*.⁸ I'm sure you remember that she always asked you to watch over her hijo y su familia (her son and his family) as we traveled to Phoenix and back to Los Angeles. Her prayers worked because we always made it through the heat of the lonely desert in our *carcanchas*—the white Falcon and later our blue Volkswagen bus.

I know your job is to help people in the desert. I'll need your help and need to know you'll lend a hand when necessary. I want to write to one friend and continue our discussions on our school experiences as students and why we, as Latino/Chicano students, seem to continue believing in higher education even though we keep leaving in high numbers.

I want to articulate some of the complications involved when people with a connected past, present, and future come together in "higher" learning. It seems that most of our difficulties working together come from our difficulties talking together. We really don't talk about color and our histories anymore, *verdad*? Actually, it's unusual to come together and talk *together*, as it

seems we're more comfortable taking turns talking. We seem to accept that we know enough about each other, so, really, the only point in coming together is to be heard but not really to listen. *Asi son y ya*. That's how they are, *y ya*.⁹ Yet there's a tendency to say in one conversation, "Ah, we're all the same *y ya*," meaning there's not much to talk about because we're human beings after all; yet a

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stereotypical Anglo behavior appears and Latinos I know often say, "They'll never get it *por que asi son y ya*." So, it seems we're all human until *they* show *us* their elitist and egocentric stereotypical nature.

But, how much is individual elitism and

when is it a consequence of our current systems? Okay, I admit I know I've said both, and meant both, and sometimes have thought both about the same person. I know I've said *they* and meant an entire group, an entire skin color, and I like to think I learned it from *them*. But, I also know this kind of reasoning is very simplistic; it's very easy to blame an entire faceless group rather than choosing one person and becoming responsible for my thinking, words, and feelings to that one person. I know, after all those years of catecismo, *que me paso?* *Me parece que es bien complicado*.¹⁰ Complicated or not, I want to give this articulation a try because I lose my patience when I see the high Latino dropout rates alongside the strong Latino belief in education.

When I narrow my focus onto higher education, I see there are still possibilities with at least two sites *que nos podria ayudar con nuestros estudios*¹¹—writing center work and computer-mediated communication (*se significa* CMC). I know that writing centers began as places to help the *atrasaditos*, for the students who didn't get it, and CMC initially was hoped to be the equalizer in the classroom because all the students, regardless of color, class, gender, would have a chance to participate online. Both sites continue to evolve and develop new strategies, making them more complicado¹² than when they first began. There are differences between the two, but there's a common characteristic that could possibly be taken advantage of. En los dos, the students have the opportunity to practice verbal and written forms of communication. Better yet, they have an opportunity to ask questions about the intention and purpose of the assignment, the reading, the school. They're guaranteed a listener and a reader who is trained as an academic. But, and here's where I'd think you've heard prayers before, the academic (writing coach or instructor) needs some training that includes learning how to reflect on their own value systems, their own cultural frameworks, as well as maintain an openness to

Difference. You know I seem to work best with those academics who don't pretend to know me, who don't pretend to understand diversity, who don't pretend they know how they're perceived, and who are curious and genuinely allow for change in their own thinking and ways of doing things. I mean, can't they see we change all the time around them, and we resist when we sense we're *supposed* to change as if their ways are the only ways? And students need to hear that even academics with advanced degrees share views of the degreeless. A degree isn't magical. Most students want to succeed, at least the students I've met and worked with. That's why I see writing centers and CMC as two possible places for hard work to happen.

Remember that letter I wrote to my friend Lupita?¹³ I discussed with Lupita how typical it is for Latinos of Mexican descent to have such high hopes for college and, yet, still have one of the lowest retention rates. Schools mostly mirror society in general, and as we continue to recognize that diversity means more than color, the challenges and misunderstandings *van a seguir*.¹⁴ In strong Latino communities where culture, customs, language, and experience with mainstream institutions are similar, there's little contact with the living Anglo mainstream and vice versa; *y hay vamos ignorantes y inocentes ha conocer nos en las escuelas*.¹⁵ Pero when we come together at the schools, most students and teachers seem to believe we know one another, giving ourselves the right to quickly construct one another regardless of the amount and kind of contact we've had with one another. And worse, most students of color hold the Anglo students to the mythic group of whiteness (regardless of region, generation, or economic class) because we know how they are. And once the word *minority* is used, that means any student of color (regardless of region, generation, or economic class). It's as if we live with a very prescribed script with little room for complications. Once individuals acknowledge some of the complexities, then that seems to mean there are no problems. Once I say, "This problem is more economic than cultural" *sas!* That means it's not an issue to talk about since economics simply means you can't afford it like so many others can't.

In Lupita's letter, I tried to make it clear that we needed to accept que las escuelas are not a neutral ground nor a territory donde somos iguales.¹⁶ If we talk in our homes and among friends de *los Americanos*, que se espere entre las escuelas?¹⁷ Then there's the extreme where Latinos are taught to say "I'm

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an American” and refuse to speak Spanish or to acknowledge their cultural differences (this seems to happen with the “grandchildren” generation). The sad thing is that the messages from most of the Anglo mainstream *especially in higher education* is that full monocultural monolingual assimilation is what

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we should all do; yet from what I've seen, those who try to assimilate are never fully accepted.¹⁸ So it seems that while we *are* Americans, we only fool ourselves to believe everyone's the same kind of American. We're the same in that we're all

citizens, but citizenry is not tied to with one culture or lifestyle. For most Latinos, being an American isn't an either/or full Anglo assimilation or full rejection of Anglo mainstream. We don't have to become like them because we're learning from them. Something tells me there are those Anglos who change because of us—though few ever seem to acknowledge this. They'll affect us, and we'll change some, but we can resist as they resist us. Our current cultura doesn't support schools' expectations of working to be the best, to be number one, to fight for the A, to impress the instructor, partly because those values are aligned with *presumidos que se creen*.¹⁹ But our cultural teachings are equipped for balance, change, and adaptation to our environments if and when we're willing to work a little differently. No mas que we need the Anglo mainstream to work a little differently tambien. And that's difficult since there's no single way to do anything differently. But, we can't just work differently as we need to believe in ourselves, as Americans, that we are a part of this country and, therefore, an internal part of the school system. We need to work harder than the next student because for now, that's just how it is. There are plenty of reasons to blame, but we need to contain blame as a form of venting and not get caught up using all our energy on the blame or we lose reason to work hard. We need to get through and pursue higher degrees so we can understand better what they don't understand. And we need to talk, not just to vent, but to talk about possibilities for working with each other as Latinos (you know how bad we are there), other nonmainstream groups, and with the Anglo crowd. In the end, it gets all complicated, and many of us end up asking you and others for more patience, *verdad*?²⁰ Anyway, if we understand that differences truly exist, then maybe we can imagine how one-to-one work might work differently. How we can we talk about listening, observing, respect, and dignity so that all groups begin to accept that we must always translate, always make explicit underlying intentions?

That was Lupita's letter, but the letter that follows is to Stella. La conoces?²¹ She just finished her bachelor's a few years ago from a prestigious university in Long Beach, Califas,²² where she was usually the only involuntary minority in class. From her home, the school is twenty-four miles away by freeway but is worlds away by ideology and experiences. Stella y yo siempre hablamos de nuestro experiences with schools.²³ While we both managed to find reasons to stay and mostly struggle with our undergraduate work, we both agree that the difficulties aren't so much in getting into a school but in *believing there's purpose* for staying in higher education. Our discussions led us to consider coping strategies. Speaking of strategies, can you tell me why does it seem our coping strategies in higher education are a lot like the problems among families and friends of alcoholics? When another friend showed me her Al-Anon book, I kept trying to deny the similarities, but I could see that at some level, there's a lot to consider. If I'm saying that schools mirror communities off campus, then maybe we're dealing with forms of schoolism.²⁴ No, not like the segregation beliefs of the 1950s but more like *multiculturalism-can-be-intellectualized-commodified-and-controlled* beliefs of the 1990s. Unfortunately, the word *multiculturalism* gave way to darker skin tones, anything outside of the Anglo mainstream. Unintentionally, multiculturalism gave us books with people hardly ever in print and wide circulation, yet they became segregated collections. Probably the worst consequence of multiculturalism was the exclusion of the colorless tribe (the Anglos), but at the same time, this makes sense as they're the large numbers doing the intellectualizing in the first place. There was an acknowledgment that more ideas outside of the mainstream exist, but they remained outside.

Like in Lupita's letter, I need to show that writing centers and CMC, these one-to-one sites where we can talk and listen, are great opportunities to practice communication from various worldviews. But, in general, most Chicanos don't talk because we don't want to offend; we feel uncomfortable talking about fundamental beliefs, values, traditions that seem ordinary because we know our words put us on opposite ends with a traditional Anglo. I still unwillingly tremble when I talk to anyone I consider my friend about issues or topics that I believe will lead to their defensive walls being activated. But what would happen if we stopped walking on eggshells? What would happen if we refused to split anymore, not out of spite or purposefully to not fit in but to be who we are

What would happen if we refused to split anymore, not out of spite or purposefully to not fit in but to be who we are and to continually learn who we are to others and to ourselves? What if we detach but without leaving the schools?

and to continually learn who we are to others and to ourselves? What if we detach but without leaving the schools? What if we don't care if they don't care? What if we work on remembering it's not about us as individuals but that the dismissive behavior (as most involuntary minority students often interpret much of Anglo mainstream behavior) from most Anglo academics is part of their cultural framework? We accept, sometimes consciously and some-

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times not, that we're all from the same Norte Americano experiences and worldviews. And we believe, mostly unconsciously, that we've entered school at a deficit because we're in-

voluntary minorities. We know in our hearts that we need to prove we do belong in schools, and we feel that on top of schoolwork we have lots of other issues going against us because we're Latinos. And while there are those who challenge and let their instructors know racism abounds, I find most other students feel they can't say they feel different because they don't want to whine, to complain, to rock the boat, so they try to convince themselves that everything is okay. It's going to be all right if they only work a little harder. They can't see that it's not only a matter of working harder as it is working a little differently. In one small way, representing ideas electronically seems to be a start, especially on an asynchronous medium. There's time to think, to reflect, to read and reread our writing. The best part is that students practice communicating to more than the teacher. It's the kind of practice we need if we're serious about making it through school, of preparing ourselves to make a difference. Detaching and accepting that the bad feelings aren't about us isn't easy. Leaving school, that's easy. Our statistical numbers are proof of this.

I want to remind Stella that one of the hopeful signs at campuses is the sites where students can work one-to-one because it is an *acknowledgment* of Differences. Sure there are some who may see learning centers and Netforum discussions as un gasto de tiempo, maybe even set up para los tontitos who can't work like the majority.²⁵ Not surprisingly that kind of thinking is similar to the same kind of arrogance we find off campuses in discussions over which degrees are worthy and which are worthless. Don't you think that people with the greatest fears seem to place values on other people's ways? And when those ways are different from theirs, hay te va. Not all writing centers are the same, but in general writing centers and CMC can give students time for either face-to-face or electronic opportunities ha platicar, discutir, escuchar y observar.²⁶ Great possibilities to practice and learn about Other's ways of thinking as well as our own. But, when these sites are staffed by academics suffering not only

from historical amnesia but from a blind arrogance of their own sense of self, these places can easily remain stagnant, tense, difficult to deal with—all reasons for involuntary minority students to split and give them what they want, as we believe they want. Help us to remember we shouldn't see these sites as places for one group to teach another about their culture. I don't mind answering a few questions for the inquisitive "outsider," but as an outsider I've got questions of my own. I'm not sure why involuntary minority students have difficulties seeing beyond the mainstream's systemic power. It's as if we buy into our places as minorities, somehow second, somehow on a lower footing. We can learn a whole lot about how they see the world, where their blinders are, where they're less sensitive and inexperienced, and then we can use that (whether it's disappointment, anger, or rage) to fuel our own learning and to recognize when we've limited them and their good intentions. And, if it's not extra work, maybe you could send a strong wind, or trip them or something, to let the mainstream crowd know when they're moving too fast with their intentions and listening only with their ears.

I want to begin to articulate for myself what some students of color experience at schools—sadness, isolation, and hurt. *Se lastiman en las escuelas.*²⁷

But to talk about it in general, especially to a mainstream individual, is to risk sounding like a baby, someone who isn't mature enough for higher education. Sure there are lots of immature college students of all colors, yet I keep meeting students of color who describe classroom and campus experiences in painful glimpses. Their sense of worth takes a beating. Their understanding of who they are no longer stays internal. They begin to believe the external words and behavior instead of seeing Differences. They fight off their emotions and try to intellectualize but usually end up angry and need to leave. They have *secarises*, scars because they're *lastimados*, hurt. They cry, have cried, and tremble at some of the pressures of the schoolism I hope to identify a little better. And you know, my identifying much of anything isn't easy since I know I certainly got tense, cried, had nightmares, felt anger, rage, and disappointment. And I know all of these emotions are natural, worse can and does happen, but it sure is difficult, isn't it? Here's where the Al-Anon work seems to ring true. The students, and me too, get all hung up and mostly unconsciously accept the contradictions (neutral schools means biased campuses) to their core truths. They begin to believe that maybe they've done something wrong, or that their ways of seeing need to adjust to the external behaviors from the Anglo mainstream, exclu-

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sively. If articulating isn't useful, then send me a sign because my soul gets wrung out every time I remember, relive, rethink the past I buried so nicely. Okay, so I'm stronger for it, but if my traveling is supposed to be for just for me, I'd rather travel internationally than internally.

Sorry to make this letter so long, y por favor; don't let me forget that I live with two languages, sense, feel, y pienso en dos culturas and that my words are dispensable, momentary, sometimes ineffective as effective, replicating life itself.

Gracias y Amen.

nguerrabarron

flagstaff, arizona, u.s. of a.

Stella's letter

I chose to write to Stella because she is my long-time friend who lives in the old neighborhood where I grew up. We share educational youth, dreams, and we shake our heads at what now seems like true ignorance and "innocent" cruelty from our teachers. We talk about the *good* teachers, and I wonder what makes those teachers good. Stella is a Latina stereotypical statistic who transferred from a community college to a university and graduated with a BS in Business Management. The process took more than ten years because she needed to work full time to support herself and her family after her father passed on. Higher education means more than a degree for her, or she wouldn't have continued the struggle to maintain her nuclear family and her studies. Together we often talk about social, political, and educational issues with our nephews and nieces in mind. We believe our culture is strong, rich in tradition (mostly because of the historical moves by the mainstream to segregate our communities away from their own). We know, for instance, that our families like most Latino families have generations that moved from Mexico to the U.S., usually to southwestern/western states in search of employment opportunities. Those generations left home with the goal of improving their families' conditions. In the U.S., however, there's an unspoken expectation for us to stay within a Latino community. I haven't fully accepted this need to stay in Latino communities, but I understand the pull and the strength of family networks. With this in mind, Stella and I often try to figure out what kinds of moves can we make that include education and still keep core cultural values.

Independence at the cost of giving up the cultural value of interdependence and relationship to others is simply not a Mexican/American goal. (77)

—Jeanette Rodriguez

Dear Stella,

Remember when Cecilia's sister said, "How can you live up there, by yourself, con ellos?" She found it odd that I spoke positively of the Upper Peninsula (UP) where there are no communities of color, no other Chicanos to talk to, only English-speaking radio and TV stations to choose from. I always told her it was actually easier in the UP than here in Los Angeles. In the UP, I *knew* few people knew where I was coming from, what it meant to have two languages, communities, different values, and traditions; I knew I wasn't from there, and I knew why I got frustrated. I sometimes thought I experienced what international students do, except I lacked international status. I often wished they knew all the things they didn't and really couldn't unless they left the UP and lived where you do, in the neighborhood, with your family, and somehow could relive our childhoods. Maybe then, there would be a slight possibility I could speak in that comfortable code most people use among the people they know best. Sometimes, it seems more complicated there in the neighborhood where we grew up because I was never sure what I knew. I mean, think about it. The Mexican/American community isn't a pocket in the city. It's not a new group from a foreign land. Chicanos are an old group from the same land or just a couple of hours away. Don't you think it's odd that we live con Ellos,²⁸ so close yet so unfamiliar to one another? It's as if everyone accepts the stereotypes and assumptions about one another as knowledge.

Not only is school ideologically influenced by the Anglo middle class, but schools, like the country, have legacies of racism. I don't just mean the blatant racism heard and seen on some campuses; I also mean how the mainstream system selectively favors groups. I'm sure you heard of Rodolfo Acuña? The professor at CSUN²⁹ who's synonymous with Chicano studies and Chicano activism? Acuña points out that in the 1940's "Europeans ethnics" averaged less than tenth grade, which is "about the same educational level as Mexicans do today" (291). He says, "Only after massive government spending programs in the 1940s and 1950s such as the G.I. Bill, federal aid to education, low tuitions at public colleges and universities, flexible admission standards, government subsidies for homebuyers, and government loans did their median level of edu-

cation completed rise to today's median of 12.9 years" (291). Acuña more directly says, "Euramericans have conveniently forgotten how much lower their educational status was when they were new immigrants—and how much government aid was involved in helping them raise it" (291). Then he says that instead of "studying the role of class and race" as correlated with education, the focus by administrations is often on testing gaps (291). Currently there's a push to test teachers as if learning happened in a vacuum. Yet, I know there are educators who are interested in other influential factors such as class, race, politics of difference, and it's their work that mostly helps me understand the larger issues that affect us all.

To complicate matters more, consider what a national survey found about the value of higher education among three big groups. There was a poll published in the *Washington Post*, May 2000, by the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education. Their findings were "65 percent of Hispanic parents and 47 percent of African American parents said that a college education is the single most important thing a young person needs to succeed, compared with 33 percent of white parents" (Morin 34). And, "two in three whites and a slight majority of blacks (54 percent), but only a third of Hispanics, agreed that 'there are many ways to succeed in today's work world without a college degree'" (Morin 34). Kind of surprising, isn't it, when you consider all the indirect low expectations we've experienced in college and universities. Mexican/Americans say they believe in school; they're the largest group of Latinos in the country, and they rank at the bottom of all Latinos who graduate from high school and higher education.³⁰ You'd think Chicanos would be the last group of students to believe schools are neutral and value free. But for the most part, we keep that myth alive. I suppose we're either hopeful or pocos atrasados.³¹

Involuntary minority students I've worked with are not so good at naming those highly uncomfortable times when core values, stereotypes, assumptions become obstacles. Seems the words we have, *racism* or *oppression*, are too harsh for most campus and classroom situations. Most students I know don't like those words because they carry too much history of white-hooded horse riders, swastika arm bands, pink-faced politicians; as a result, few involuntary minority students talk about issues that clearly need to be addressed. But, not talking or naming anything often magnifies the problem. That's when I can tell something's eating at them, but they don't know how to talk about it. Worse, when students do want to talk, do need to write something down and present it to class, whom do they tell and with whom do they go over their

writing? Who's familiar with the difficulties of talking about a problem that may be connected with color? How many academics (Anglo and of color) understand how difficult it is for students of color to talk about color, maybe even about the mainstream, to an Anglo? How many academics of color are trained not only to listen but to explain mainstream expectations and differences and to describe their own ways of maintaining a sense of self? Beats me. I wonder if people are ready for change, *to* change, to move beyond collecting trivia about each other's practices. It's one thing to slow down and figure out cultural practices and yet another to understand another's agenda and worldview—and to accept we might have to change our views of Them and how education might affect views in general. Since I can't articulate most of these overlapping issues, you know I always go to someone else.

How many academics (Anglo and of color) understand how difficult it is for students of color to talk about color, maybe even about the mainstream, to an Anglo? How many academics of color are trained not only to listen but to explain mainstream expectations and differences and to describe their own ways of maintaining a sense of self?

There is work I find useful to explain how difficult talking about color can be. One scholar, Iris Marion Young, talks of oppression in ways that I think may apply to these difficult discussions. Young publishes work on philosophy and social theory, as well as ethics. She explains that there isn't one idea of oppression as there is "a family of concepts" that she breaks into five categories and calls them "five faces of oppression." The five are, "exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence" (*Justice* 39). Her explanation of cultural imperialism is what I want to talk through with you because I think it's most applicable. Keep in mind that I'm saying if we begin to accept schools aren't fair or value free, then maybe we can name those points of pressure; we can begin to recognize and name the complexities—we can differentiate between racist and ignorant behaviors.

Like Acuña, Young maintains, "Justice should refer not only to distribution, but also to the institutional conditions necessary for the development and exercise of individual capacities and collective communication and cooperation" (*Justice* 39). Basically she's saying it's one thing to look at the uneven distribution, but really you need to look at what all needs to happen for individuals to develop themselves as well as contribute to the group. Young's discussion on cultural imperialism may explain why success for some involuntary minority students is not just a matter of individual determination. There are the societal structures that affect how schooling is experienced.

Young says, "Entering the political discourse in which oppression is a cen-

tral category involves adopting a general mode of analyzing and evaluating social structures and practices which is incommensurate with the language of liberal individualism that dominates political discourse in the United States”

It's difficult to persuade people that *oppression* explains U.S. experience when the term oppression is too connected with behaviors and experiences *outside* of the U.S. experience. The U.S. is supposed to be the place where freedoms and individual pursuits are the core of democracy.

(*Justice* 39). In other words, if we're going to analyze and evaluate social structures and practices, we'll use language that doesn't fit with the language of liberal individualism that's common among the Anglo mainstream. Young explains it's difficult to persuade people that *oppression* explains U.S. experience when the term oppression is too connected with behaviors and experiences *outside* of the U.S. experi-

ence. The U.S. is supposed to be the place where freedoms and individual pursuits are the core of democracy. That's why our experience of the Natural History museum with my *abuelita* at the entrance isn't something I can talk about outside of trusted friends.³² I run the risk of sounding like an emotional, irrational, sensitive graduate student. Young says, "... it is not legitimate to use the term oppression to describe our society, because oppression is the evil perpetuated by the Others" (*Justice* 41). Even though I think the U.S. is mostly democratic, and definitely still has room to reinterpret what democracy may look like, for some reason color is one of the "nonmainstream" characteristics that still affects experience in the country. But, how we go about and make this clear for us and for others is touchy, and everyone from all cultural groups seems to lack practice.

Young gives a quick history on the concept of oppression and groups: "[the] New left social movements of the 1960s and 1970s" moved the concept of "oppression" from evil to designating "... the disadvantage and injustice some people suffer not because a tyrannical power coerces them, but because of the everyday practices of a well-intentioned liberal society" (*Justice* 41). Young cites South Africa as an example of unquestionable oppression, but she also says "systemic constraints" that don't result from a tyrant are also oppressive. She says in this case, oppression is structural rather than from "a few people's choices or policies" (*Justice* 41). Oppressive "... causes are embedded in unquestioned norms, habits, and symbols, in the assumptions underlying institutional rules and collective consequences of following those rules" (*Justice* 41). Get it? *Oppression* means more than the harsh pre-Civil-Rights era in the U.S. when segregation was thought to be democratic by too many. Accord-

ing to Young, oppression in a structural sense has more to do with the consequences of “often unconscious assumptions and reactions of well-meaning people in ordinary interactions, media and cultural stereotypes, and structural features of bureaucratic hierarchies and market mechanisms—in short, the normal processes of everyday life” (*Justice* 41). The everyday life part makes me smile because it’s so true, isn’t it? Remember how exciting it was when those first Latina magazines hit the newsstands? I didn’t even care for most of the stories or the products, but the idea that Latina and Latino culture was in polished trade magazines—Why did it take so long, and why do we even need a separate magazine? It’s Them, isn’t it. But, do we really have a face to blame? Most of the time we don’t, and that’s why Young’s discussion on structural oppression is important. She says the “systemic character of oppression implies that an oppressed group need not have a correlate oppressing group” (*Justice* 41). People just doing their jobs, without reflecting how they currently and potentially affect the system, often perpetuate branches of the oppressive system because they “do not understand themselves as agents of oppression” (*Justice* 42). Young concludes “. . . for every oppressed group there is a group that is *privileged* in relation to that group” (*Justice* 42). I think for Chicanos, their closest oppressed group is the new immigrants. You know how crazy that situation is. Later we’ll talk about that, but not now.³³ So, with a structural oppressive system, there are good people of all colors; there aren’t necessarily any evil people but, rather, unquestioned assumptions, beliefs, and experiences.

The idea of the individual was so strong at Tech, I had difficulties talking about what it means to identify with a community of people.

The idea of the individual was so strong at Tech,³⁴ I had difficulties talking about what it means to identify with a community of people. Raro, isn’t it?³⁵ I tell you, whenever I heard a person say “We’re all the same” meaning human beings are human beings, I knew they hadn’t lived outside of their neighborhood. I also understood lots of people hardly live outside of their neighborhoods, so they weren’t so unusual. I’m still not certain what it means to live as an individual the way the kids and locals talk about it there. It’s difficult to explain, but economic class seemed to determine how they identified themselves. Here’s another odd thing. Most of the Anglo middle-class students weren’t under community or parish pressure to do well because they weren’t role models for the community, neighborhood, or family. I met, though, working-class Anglo kids who were role models in their small towns and live under

the similar pressures most of us do. I suppose that's why Young says "A social group is defined not primarily by a set of shared attributes, but by a sense of identity" (*Justice* 44).

I think what can be most difficult to explain is the fluidity of group identity. It isn't as if there's a character sketch or script we follow. I'm sure you do some stereotypical things Chicanas are *expected* to do (you have a hand in your extended family's well-being). I love making tortillas, atole, tamales, cosas asi.³⁶ And I know I enjoy potato salad and Irish music. Okay, food and music are the easiest cultural transfers. Well, whatever. To recap Young so far, she says we can't just talk about oppression without making it clear that we're talking about structural systemic oppression. Otherwise we call up images that only shut down any compassionate listening and most likely bring out a defensive listening. Since the kind of oppression I'm interested in is structural, this means the oppression happens to groups, not just an individual here and there. Now, with these definitions in mind, consider the idea of cultural imperialism and how it connects to student behavior.

Where exploitation, marginalization, and powerlessness (Young's first three faces of oppression) have to do with "power relation to others—of who benefits from whom, and who is dispensable" (*Justice* 40), cultural imperialism means to experience "how the dominant meanings of a society render the perspective of one's own group invisible at the same time as they stereotype one's group and mark it out as the Other" (*Justice* 58–59). Her definition reminds me of that common saying we hear about mainstream Anglos; they don't listen (making us invisible), and they think they know everything (stereotype and decide we're Other). It's important to know that Young isn't holding the Anglo mainstream as *the* dominant group. She's using the term "dominant group" loosely to define whatever group is dominant in the situation. But, for the most part, the country's long-term dominant group is an Anglo mainstream. Young goes on to say that cultural imperialism "involves the universalization of a dominant group's experience and culture, and its establishment as the norm" (*Justice* 59). This idea of the norm is similar to when we hear Anglo students and often teachers say, "I'm just average," or even, "I'm normal and boring," and then anyone *not* Anglo is somehow the only one with an ethnicity and culture. Young goes on to say, "Often without noticing" the dominant groups "project their own experience as representative of humanity as such" (*Justice* 59). This idea is interesting to me because it isn't common to assume they don't mean it, right? In general and for the most part it seems clear they do mean it. The local gas station attendant may not notice he's being a fleahead

with his assumptions because he isn't exposed to all the studying, books, and different perspectives (in books at least) instructors and students usually are. But, for a group who values education as highly as they seem to, it doesn't make much sense that they continue to limit their worlds with one perspective and cancel out the others.

Young says that the dominant groups use their own perspective to check out a different group. Of course, they're going to find differences from their own beliefs, but instead of accepting there's more than one way to see the same issues, they more than not see "deviance and inferiority" (*Justice* 59). Frustrating to consider, especially if you think about your experiences in the classroom.

If only you were in my classes when we read articles on the Other. I was always so frustrated, irritated, wishing I was anywhere but in the classroom. The confidence and authority students took to talk about the Other rather than talk about themselves—senti asco.

So, get it so far? Young says the dominant group believes their perspective and beliefs are normal, making anything different abnormal. The dominant group may listen, but they're working with uncontested stereotypes. Here's a sad point if you're in the out-group. Young explains, "The stereotypes confine them to a nature which is often attached in some way to their bodies . . ." (47), so it isn't a matter of saying the wrong things as it's more what you look like. Kathe Jervis puts it this way "People identify others by their skin color before their cultural identity" (553). I use Young's and Jervis's works to articulate how I see my experiences in graduate studies. Young maintains, "Those living under cultural imperialism" are defined "from the outside, positioned, placed, by a network of dominant meanings they experience" from elsewhere, from people "with whom they do not identify and who do not identify with them" (*Justice* 59). If only you were in my classes when we read articles on the Other. I was always so frustrated, irritated, wishing I was anywhere but in the classroom. The confidence and authority students took to talk about the Other rather than talk about themselves—senti asco.³⁷ I even walked out of one class early in my career at Tech. I couldn't hear the birds as I walked home, my head was so full.

All that talk on Young's work is so I can say school is part of a larger system, the network of cultural imperialism that seeps into the classroom. From my experiences working with students, cultural imperialism is extremely difficult to talk about because most students don't recognize how large and systemic it is. And if they do, they don't have the practice or words to talk about it. This goes for all groups, not just the dominant group.

At the same time, it's not as if everyone is waiting for one group to become more articulate. Individuals are at different stages when it comes to dialogue and curiosity about other values and expectations. No one hardly ever

We need to accept that while we're living in times when more of the Anglo mainstream is beginning to understand the road is two-way instead of that missionary or colonizer one-way, now is our opportunity to take risks, to take the lumps, to create uncomfortable times because we may be approaching another plateau, another point in time where color will give way to experience.

stays in one stage all the time. We need to accept that we've arrived at a time when the doors are open, though we don't trust *why* they're open. They don't understand why we don't want to come in. One way we can gain a bit more control is to open more doors their way and not expect them to come in since they hardly have in the past. We need to accept that while we're living in times when more of the Anglo mainstream is beginning to understand the road is two-way

instead of that missionary or colonizer one-way, now is our opportunity to take risks, to take the lumps, to create uncomfortable times because we may be approaching another plateau, another point in time where color will give way to experience. But, if we continue on the same road, we will continue to construct them as much as they construct us.

Say hi to your mom and family. Later.

Nancy

Guadalupe's letter

I couldn't resist finishing these letters with one to La Virgen De Guadalupe, patron saint to the Americas. She's mestiza and an image I grew up with alongside the "European Mary." Theologian Jeanette Rodriguez writes about her image this way,

The image of Our Lady of Guadalupe is found throughout Mexican/American neighborhoods: as a statue or painting adorning a sacred corner of the home, as a medallion worn around the necks of young and old believers, as an image on T-shirts, on the sides of buildings, and even on business logos. To be of Mexican descent is to recognize the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe. In the barrios and businesses of Mexican Americans, Our Lady of Guadalupe has a home. (xxv)

The purpose of this last psuedo-letter is to include the one individual that I know understands everything I struggle with to explain. I don't mean to sound self-righteous, I mean simply she's always there. I use her letter to recap the

article. As Rodriguez says, you can't be culturally Catholic and Mexican/American without acknowledging La Virgen De Guadalupe.

*What makes up the experience of Mexican/American women?
Words that come to mind are "conquest" and "resistance,"
"borderlands," "born and/or raised in the USA." And yet another
group of words accompanies the first, words like "integrity,"
"anger," "pain," "economically and politically marginalized," and
"multiple identities." Other women may have multiple identities
in terms of their roles, but here I mean something profoundly
metaphysical: a woman from a dominant culture does not have
to learn another culture's point of view to survive, but Mexican/
American women must know the ways of the dominant culture. (62)*
—Jeanette Rodriguez

Dear Virgen De Guadalupe,

Aqui hay otra carta para el monton que tienes.³⁸ I know we're not supposed to expect to understand everything like scientists would like to believe they can, but it sure seems a part of our nature to try. So I'm trying.

Maybe you can help make sure the readers understand that the format for these letters wasn't me trying to be clever, witty, sappy, maybe even a cultural victim of traditions and conventions.

I'm not sure that I made my letters explicit enough or whether I kept too much of the discussion in a friend code or with filtered language that only Stella would understand. You know, often our responses and reactions are hurtful to ourselves. I wonder if it might be a good idea if Anglos and involuntary minorities who are interested in diversity and not full assimilation would learn what we need to talk about, what we need to listen to, and would work with one another on how we might adjust and respect one another's core values.³⁹ I wanted to show my readers how too many Latinos learn unhealthy coping strategies that may work to get by, but our strategies of splitting and denying any problems mostly carry a heavy consequence that can leave deep scars leading to further mistrust and possibly anger toward higher education as well as educators. I then wanted to show what kinds of general beliefs Latino students carry to campuses that often contribute to our difficulties in school.

I wonder if it might be a good idea if Anglos and involuntary minorities who are interested in diversity and not full assimilation would learn what we need to talk about, what we need to listen to, and would work with one another on how we might adjust and respect one another's core values.

Here are a few concerns I'd appreciate any help with when you have time. I do not want to come across as someone making sweeping generalizations, lumping people unfairly together, limiting thinking, or, worse, making some people upset by revealing some not-so-friendly general beliefs about a group they might identify with. Basically, I fear doing exactly the opposite of what I set out to do—making readers upset when I'm trying to figure out how we can change our own uncomfortable feelings about the institutions many regard so highly. I figure I've got to continue practicing if I'm ever going to get to a point where my words may be uncomfortable but not insulting.

I'm also not sure I got my main message across—we all come together with constructions of one another. The problem is we often have the wrong constructions, and we use filters that inevitably will cancel out the other's intentions, good or bad. Mostly we Latinos see the bad for many good reasons. But, we sometimes get stuck as we know others get stuck with misconceptions about us. Because we are often under one umbrella as "Hispanics," we also see the Anglo group as one large group, no matter if they're Jewish, Mormon, working class, middle class, men, or women. They're "white" first as we're Hispanic or minority first; then they fall into different categories as we get to know them. But we can't just "get to know them" because we come together with prescribed scripts of one another. We don't get to know them beyond our constructions of them, so they remain largely white or Anglo. And we, the minority, Hispanic, or Latino.

I'm also not sure I was able to show that we don't have a bag of healthy coping strategies partly because our differences in the individual vs. group identification and what school is supposed to be often cancel out expectations of one another. The frustrations are real; the problem is to know when those frustrations are part of schooling or unnecessary. Most seem necessary considering the different core values at work. For now, I am not very confident I know what is necessary and what is not. With more talk, true listening, and self-reflection, I think the words will be created for the experiences that mostly are interrupted with high dropout rates and disappointment.

Te lo agradezco.

n. guerra barron
flag, arizona

Notes

1. For this article I use two terms interchangeably: Latino and Mexican American. These terms have different histories and political bents. In the Los Angeles area where laws and conservative public sentiment toward undocumented Mexicans continues to be cruel and dismissive of language, customs, and worldviews, many Latinos prefer to identify with Mexicans and *not* Americans (U.S. citizens). For my parents during the 1940s and the 1950s, they saw themselves as Mexican Americans because they were both born in Arizona and not in Mexico. For my parents to this day, a *Mexicano* is someone born in Mexico and more so if they were raised in Mexico. Otherwise, *son de aqui*, they are from here, *Norteños de los Estados Unidos*, therefore, *Americanos* from the U.S. I've been reminded by Mexicans from Mexico that the California politics exist in fact because of an American experience, being Latino in the United States and *not* being Latino in Mexico. When I consider life as a Mexican in Mexico, I have only my mother's stories from the 1930s and early 1940s. As a result, I choose to keep the *American* if only to remind myself I'm working, thinking, and presenting a few ideas for the institutions in the U.S., *not* in Mexico.

2. I use Mexican/American as discussed by Maria Lugones in "Purity, Impurity, and Separation." As she explains it, "... I choose the forward slash that signifies a separation and also shows a connection. My identity is a hybrid (which a hyphen would signify), but it is also two separately connected entities. Mexican/Americans are not Mexican, nor are they mainstream American. We are Mexican and we are American, but we are these things to different degrees. We can't be easily boxed in and hyphenated because the complexities of our identities are too numerous" (478–79).

3. According to the U.S. Census Bureau figures for 2000, Latinos have a 53 percent high school graduation rate. The numbers are lower for higher education.

4. Anthropologist John Ogbu differentiates between voluntary minorities and immigrants who chose to live in the U.S. and the involuntary minorities (indigenous Americans, African Americans, Mexican Americans, and Puerto Riqueños) who were either here, forced to come, or part of an annexation and treaties.

5. I want to add that this challenge to speak to a group about behaviors works the same way for the Anglo mainstream as well. There's 150 years of constructed understandings of the Anglo mainstream by Latino communities. Since the common misperception of minority groups knowing the Anglo mainstream better than the Anglo mainstream knowing other groups persists, the Anglo mainstream remains one big group that carries negative stereotypes and misunderstood behaviors as well.

6. The genre of letters and prayers are also inspired by fiction authors Sandra Cisneros, "Small Miracles, Kept Promises;" Ana Castillo, *The Mixquiahuala Letters*; and linguist Mary Louise Pratt's description of Guama Poma's letter to the King of Spain in the 1500s.
7. huaraches: Sounds like "wha-ra-ches" with a trilled *r*. A pair of Mexican sandals that have a history of being the peasant and working-class shoe.
8. . . . she had a lot of faith in your miracles.
9. That's how they are and that's that.
10. catecismo, [Catholic religious education], what happened to me? It seems it's pretty complicated.
11. that could help us with our studies.
12. complicated.
13. Lupita's letter is a lengthy discussion about how Latinos have constructed the Anglo mainstream just as we are quick to say we are constructed by the Anglo mainstream. Lupita's letter is not included in this article for reasons of length, but the ideas in that letter are background for the letters presented here.
14. will continue
15. and there we go ignorant and innocent, to meet each other at the schools.
16. where we're the same.
17. what do we expect at schools?
18. Latinos I've met who assimilate, in many ways, and end up just as angry as someone who didn't fully assimilate. I don't see many successfully assimilated Latinos or any fully assimilated Latinos I'd like to identify with. I prefer the mestizos, the ones who slip and slide, split and grow, pause and reflect at will.
19. stuck-ups who believe they're better than others.
20. Literally the *verdad* means truth, but in this context the meaning is "Right?"
21. Do you know her?
22. California.
23. Stella and I always talk about our . . .
24. schoolism—like racism or any other "ism," I see schoolism as the problems that are mostly due to misinformation, fear, and distortion of experience. There is very little benefit of doubt as most behaviors and actions (teacher to student, student to teacher) are interpreted through one cultural lens, leaving little to no room for true diversity. It's similar to most communities that are segregated by geographical landmarks (mostly freeways and the occasional railroad tracks) or living arrangements—where the diversity is found at the workplace, but then people go

home to their mostly monocultural neighborhoods. Some of this separation is economic class, but it's not unusual to find pockets of Anglo working class among large Latino working-class communities, and so on.

25. Netforum discussions as a waste of time, maybe even set up for the slow students, (or less serious students).

26. to talk, discuss, listen and observe.

27. They get hurt in schools.

28. with Them: meaning Anglos or Euro-Americans, people who call themselves "white."

28. CSUN (California State University, Northridge): pronounced "see-sun."

30. According to the 1998 Census Bureau, there were 30.4 million "Hispanics" in the U.S. constituting 11.3 percent of the total population. The Hispanic population increased 35 percent since 1990, the majority of Mexican descent. In 1990, the breakdown was Mexican 61.2 percent, Puerto Rican 12.1 percent, Central American 6.0 percent, Cuban 4.8 percent, South American 4.7 percent, Others 3.9, and Dominican 2.4 percent. Yet, "Latinos have the lowest rates of high school and college graduation of any major population group" (U.S. Census Bureau). In 1996, 53 percent ages 25 or older had completed high school, less than 10 percent had a bachelor's degree compared to nearly 85 percent of non-Hispanic high school graduates and nearly 25 percent college graduates. Mexican Americans are bursting to either participate or to lose hope.

31. a little slow.

32. Stella joined my parents and me on a DC trip some years ago. We entered the Natural History Museum and saw a special exhibit on Indians. The poster/photo was of three people, the main person an elderly woman who looked like my maternal grandmother. We all picked up our pace through the shadowy halls because, unlike the triumphant exhibit of historical innovators at the National Air and Space museum, this exhibit was on dead people, a culture of the past. Stella's father's side is mestizo Navajo, and both our families are mestizo southwest; therefore, Indians and culture make up our framework. It was difficult to see a national museum displaying such an eerie defeated people.

33. Unfortunately many Chicanos buy into the idea of separating themselves from immigrants because somehow the further away, the more educated or more American a person is. Like other ethnic groups in the U.S., rather than helping or translating American culture, lots of Chicanos either speak English only or use terms like "wetbacks" or *mojados* (same thing) as a code among other Chicanos that they're not like the immigrants. What's worse is that most Chicanos who use the terms are living in rough neighborhoods, haven't had many opportunities, are not

financially well-to-do people, but somehow they need to believe and emphasize they are more American than the hard-working immigrants.

34. "Tech" is Michigan Technological University, Houghton, Michigan, where I did my doctoral work.

35. Strange.

36. things like that.

37. I felt sick in my stomach.

38. Here's another letter for your stacks.

39. The insistence of assimilation is something I do not understand. When someone seriously asks me why Chicanos do not want to fully assimilate, I sometimes say what about the Indians and the African Americans? These two groups were around since the planning of the country. They've had more than 200 years to assimilate, and it's got them . . .? And, it seems people are more interested in Indians who practice their heritage, know some of their language, and so on. It's national news when an indigenous tribe teaches their tribe's language on the reservation. For some reason, it's good that the Navajo and the Hopi and other tribes retain and regain their language, customs, traditions. People get all excited if they visited a reservation or buy turquoise from a *real* Indian. I guess Spanish and cultures from the Americas, specifically from California, just don't have the high regard of Spain's language or cultures or the exotic respect of the indigenous languages and cultures. I wonder how different opinions would be if the larger involuntary minority were indigenous? Would I ride on their coattails and slip in their shadows or would they be too big and troublesome, leaving them undesirable as our group seems to be?

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