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**THE IDEA OF RACE
IN LATIN AMERICA, 1870–1940**

Edited and with an Introduction by **RICHARD GRAHAM**
With chapters by
THOMAS E. SKIDMORE, ALINE HELG
and **ALAN KNIGHT**



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4. Racism, Revolution, and *Indigenismo*: Mexico, 1910–1940

ALAN KNIGHT

In this chapter I discuss the part that “race” and racial theories played in revolutionary Mexico, that is, in the Mexico that emerged from the armed revolution of 1910–1920. I have therefore chosen a fairly broad and sweeping approach, sacrificing detail for generalization, in the hope of facilitating cross-cultural comparison. I have also tried to go beyond the written word—the public and published statements of key thinkers—and to relate their statements to their social and historical context. Of course, certain thinkers/writers/politicians were important in enunciating racial theories, particularly in regard to the place of the Indian in revolutionary Mexico: Manuel Gamio and José Vasconcelos, later Alfonso Caso and Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán.¹ Since they addressed the question directly and publically, their opinions can be readily seized—and, in the middle sections of this chapter, they will be discussed. But an analysis that confines itself to the major thinkers can easily become abstract and rarefied; it may become an armchair quest for intellectual genealogies and relationships whose connection to broader historical trends—social, political, ideological—remains conjectural. How genuinely influential, for example, were Vasconcelos’ notion of the “cosmic race” or Molina Enríquez’s racial categorization of Mexican society?²

Of course, measuring the broad impact of ideas within society is notoriously difficult, especially when, as in this case, the ideas themselves—relating to racial equality or inequality—are embedded deep in social relations, may rarely be overtly expressed, and, indeed, may be deliberately disguised or disingenuously denied. Thus, while the official ideology of revolutionary Mexico has certainly been strenuously resistant to the classic Eurocentric racism, it would be wrong to infer from this that Mexican society is correspondingly free of racist beliefs and practices or that the latter remain, at worst, mere vestigial remnants of a moribund racism.³ The final section of the chapter will therefore touch on the question of racism in Mexican society, and will attempt to link theory to practice—will try, in other words, to test, in brief and tentative fashion, the impact of the theories previously discussed.

The chapter thus deals not only with racial ideas, their content, logic and provenance, but also with the social impact they achieved. The analysis proceeds from

theory to practice, from formal statements to informal relations, from the study to the street. But one further and longer clarification must be made at the outset, for any analysis of Mexican racism demands some grasp of Mexican race relations as they have historically developed. We need some roughly objective guideline against which to set both articulate racial theories and diffuse racial attitudes. Both theories and attitudes, of course, can be of signal importance, for all their subjectivity, prejudice, and even absurdity: "Most of us are aware," Ashley Montagu comments, "that in a very real sense nothing can be more real than the unreal."⁴ It is not sufficient, however, simply to recognize the power of racial theories and attitudes, taking this as the only historical given. Such a "phenomenological" approach—whereby "if men typify a situation as racial, racial it must be"—obviously fails to consider the reality beyond perception and, in doing so, makes it harder to understand how perceptions are constructed.⁵ I shall therefore start with an analysis of the "reality" of race in Mexico, before proceeding to the more relevant question of theories and attitudes.

The "Reality" of Race

Modern Mexico is a racial mix. This commonplace, the starting point for a host of theories, has no intrinsic explanatory power. The supposed genetic bases of "racial" differentiation have never been proven and, in consequence, the very category "race" has been rightly questioned.⁶ The modern Mexican population is, however, a mixture of several groups who displayed contrasting somatic features; in particular, it is the result of Indian and Spanish miscegenation since the sixteenth-century. Other "racial" groups—blacks, in particular—also contributed to this mix, but in this chapter it is the fundamental Indian/Spanish polarity that will be considered.⁷

The colonial regime that prevailed in Mexico (New Spain) for three centuries sought to preserve a degree of separation between Indian and Spaniard: careful "racial"—or castelike—divisions were maintained; power and privilege correlated closely with "racial" identification (an identification that was, of course, cultural as well as biological). In many respects, therefore, colonial Mexico conformed to the model of a caste or "estamental" society, within which ascriptive groups—whites, mestizos, Indians, as well as many subcategories—enjoyed differential access to power and property. Over time, however, such caste or castelike barriers eroded. Miscegenation proceeded apace, bureaucratic impediments notwithstanding. No rigid apartheid could be sustained, and the sheer proliferation of "racial" subtypes attested to the impossibility of thorough categorization.⁸ Increasingly—and the change crystallized during the economic boom of the eighteenth century—caste became secondary to class as a form of social identification. By the late eighteenth century "the term 'Indian' . . . meant more as a fiscal category than as an ethnic one."⁹ With Mexican independence (1821) and the liberal reforms of the mid-nineteenth century came a further demolition of the mechanisms that maintained castelike differentiation. By the time of the Porfirio Díaz regime (1876–1911), all Mexicans

stood as formally equal citizens before the law; "racial" labels were still applied by census enumerators but such labels carried no *formal* social or political connotations.

By then, of course, generations of miscegenation had thoroughly blurred the neat "racial" divisions of the early colony. In respect of somatic attributes, few Mexicans were "pure" Indians or whites (*criollos/creoles*); most were mestizos of one sort or another. True, "Indians" were seen to be darker, but "Indians" were not defined solely or even primarily in somatic terms. A range of other characteristics determined "racial"—or, we should properly say, *ethnic*—identification: language, dress, religion, social organization, culture and consciousness. Since these were social rather than innate biological attributes, they were capable of change; the ethnic status of both individuals and communities was not immutable. By dint of education, migration, and occupational shifts (in short, the catchall of "acculturation" or what some prefer to term "de-Indianization") Indians could become mestizos. Individual transitions were possible (with difficulty); collective transitions formed an integral part of the long process of Mexican "development." Upwardly mobile individuals were "whitened": the dictator Díaz ("an almost pure Mixtec" Indian, according to one historian) was, to a contemporary, "of supposed [*sic*] only one-eighth Indian blood" and, in fact, "probably all white."¹⁰ Social mobility thus created an optical illusion, in Mexico as elsewhere in Latin America.¹¹ More significant were the collective transitions, which can be traced both geographically and chronologically: the pronounced gradient of community acculturation that Redfield discerned running geographically from the (white/mestizo) northwest of the Yucatán peninsula to the (Indian) southeast; the "surprisingly clear-cut gradient of linguistic acculturation" which Friedrich sees chronologically spanning recent generations of Naranjeños.¹² Such patterns of acculturation are sufficiently clear, it seems, for some anthropologists to offer confident timetables of future transformations.¹³ Clearly, therefore, the process of *mestizaje*, sometimes seen as basically racial, is in fact social; "mestizo" is an achieved as well as an ascribed status—even though achievement may be difficult and, in the case of communities, may span decades.

The nature of this process, however, gives rise to certain analytical problems that we must initially confront. First, since acculturation represents a highly dynamic process, it becomes difficult to generalize about ethnic relations across time and space. Conventionally, Indian communities may be located at any given time on a rough continuum that stretches from the more thoroughly "Indian" (sometimes "tribal") societies, such as Chiapas' Lacandones, across to the more thoroughly integrated "Indian" peasant society of Central Mexico. Redfield plotted such a continuum within the Yucatán peninsula (from Tusik to Dzitas—and, ultimately, Mérida); Manuel Gamio offered a tripartite division of the continuum, typified by (a) the Maya of Quintana Roo, (b) the Yaquis of Sonora, and (c) the "Indians" of Morelos who had followed Emiliano Zapata's banner in the Revolution.¹⁴ Sometimes, the attribution of "Indian" is reserved for those groups located toward the

“Indian” end of the continuum (the Lacandonese, the Quintana Roo Maya, the Yaquis): groups that retain strong linguistic and cultural characteristics, and which are chiefly located in so-called “regions of refuge,” where an embattled Indian culture has survived, marginalized though not isolated. Conversely, according to this strict attribution, Central Mexican communities—Catholic, bilingual, suffused with supposedly “Hispanic” culture—are deemed mestizo. Yet, it has been objected, these communities display many of the diagnostic features of Indian society, in terms not only of language but also of social and religious organization. For that reason, some analysts would greatly expand the presumed “Indian” population of Mexico. Thus, while census figures would suggest that around one-third of Mexico’s population was “Indian” at the time of the Revolution, Manuel Gamio—chiefly by adding in Central Mexican “Indians,” such as those of Morelos—arrived at an estimate of two-thirds.¹⁵ So, too, in specific states: Chiapas was officially reckoned to be 38 percent “Indian” in the 1930s, yet a critic proposed 80 percent as the correct figure. More recently, protagonists of “Indianism” (*sic*) have denounced the “statistical ethnocide,” whereby Indian numbers are systematically underestimated.¹⁶

The problem, of course, is not so much one of statistical accuracy as of ethnic categorizations, which in turn reflect more general sociopolitical assumptions. Different observers—most of them aiming to achieve a neat dichotomy—slice up the broad Indian-mestizo continuum in different ways, using different criteria. Roughly, we can distinguish between official (census-taking) observers, who tend to favor a narrower category of “Indian” (based on language), and unofficial indigenista spokespersons who prefer a broader and thus more numerous “Indian” category. Both positions are, in a sense, political and polemical, and we need subscribe to neither; but we must recognize at the outset the marked discrepancies that occur whenever attempts are made to slice a long continuum into two (or more) discrete parts. And it bears repeating that these slices are socially, not racially, determined; even in respect to inherited somatic features “Indian” and “mestizo” people may be indistinguishable, individually or collectively.¹⁷

A second problem, highly relevant to the present discussion; concerns the *subjective* nature of Indian/mestizo status. Since it depends on a range of perceived characteristics, rather than on any immutable and innate attributes, status is obviously subjective. There may be broad agreement on Indian status in some cases, but not in others (and these others are far from being a small borderline minority). When perceptions differ in this fashion, whose judgment is to prevail? A key distinction must be made between the intrinsic perception of the individual or community on the one hand, and the extrinsic perception of outside observers—politicians, census-takers, gringo anthropologists—on the other, for the two may not tally. Depending on the criteria used, an individual or community may be deemed Indian or mestizo; an individual may seem a mestizo (or Ladino) to his erstwhile fellow-Indians, but remain an Indian in mestizo eyes.¹⁸ An “Indian” in El Salvador, Marroquín suggests, might pass for a mestizo in Guatemala.¹⁹

Some commentators, such as Alfonso Caso, lay heavy stress on the subjective perception of the community. A community is Indian if it considers itself Indian, whatever its social and cultural make-up; thus, at the individual level, “an Indian is one who feels that he belongs to an indigenous community,” while “a group which lacks the sentiment of being Indian cannot be considered as such.”²⁰ We have here an extreme formulation of the “phenomenological” approach, albeit the burden of definition is transferred from external society to the social actors themselves. Self-definition is, no doubt, a significant criterion, but this seems an excessive and problematic estimate of its importance. Self-definition is hard to get at; it may be fluid and often contradictory; above all, it may—and, in this case, certainly does—depend upon external determinants. A community’s self-definition, in other words, may be imposed from outside, in which case the neat criterion of self-definition masks external attributions and prejudices. Indeed, it seems likely that “Indian” identification is indeed imposed from without and, I shall suggest, negatively defined: “a person [in Hueyapan] is more or less Indian in relation to somebody else,” hence “Indianness”—rather like “peasantness”—must be conceived in relational terms, with self-definition forming but one part of a much larger complex.²¹

Indians are therefore socially defined, with race being used as a common but genetically unsound shorthand for ethnicity. But, as Montagu put it, unreal—that is, untrue—beliefs can acquire great power. As such, they deserve analysis irrespective of their untruth. The attribution of Indian identity began, of course, with the Conquest: “it was the European who created the Indian.”²² Thereafter, attributions changed, racial theories came and went, doctrines of *indigenismo* were developed. But throughout these were primarily the constructs of non-Indians: “Indian,” as a term either of abuse or of praise, was conceived and applied by non-Indians. No common Indian sentiment preceded the Conquest; it was only in the wake of the Conquest that the generic concept of “Indian” could be formulated in negative contradistinction to the dominant Spaniard/European. And this generic concept remained part of Spanish rather than Indian usage. It defined those who were not Spanish or mestizo and it lumped together a wide range of Indian groups, languages, and communities. The Indians themselves lacked any shared sentiment of Indianness (pan-Indianism is a very recent creation); they often lacked even the “tribal” allegiances imputed to them, in that they gave their primary loyalty to the community—to the old Mesoamerican *altepetl*, which the Spaniards had seen fit to conserve (or, with the *congregación*, to replicate) in the interests of social order and economic organization. Thus, a colonial elite confronted what was for it a relatively undifferentiated Indian mass; while—in terms of subjective consciousness—the Indian mass was divided into myriad semiautonomous communities, often mutually hostile and, certainly in populous Central Mexico, lacking any coherent tribal allegiance. Colonial government—and colonial Indian rebellions—reflected this atomistic pattern.²³

The colony “created” the Indian in one further respect. The blending of Spanish

and Indian cultures, paralleling the blending of Spanish and Indian blood, ensured that many of the features that were later taken to be “Indian” were in fact of European origin (just as some “European” traits were of Indian origin). Thus, “Indian” food, dress, technology, religion, and social organization—the whole battery of social traits diagnostic of the Indian—were all infused with Spanish elements: the “pure” Indian was as rare culturally as biologically. When later *indigenistas* set out to recover a pristine Indian culture, they either attempted the impossible or, more realistically, they took the syncretic culture of the colonial Indian as their yardstick. Precisely because this was a syncretic culture—a fusion of earlier cultures into one that was new and different—it becomes somewhat pointless to produce checklists of pristine Indian as against imported Spanish/mestizo elements or to try to sort them into piles of positive Indian assets and negative colonial accretions.²⁴

Neither independence nor the Porfiriato changed this colonial pattern of unequal reciprocal definition. Of course, the formal status of the Indians changed; protective colonial legislation (already waning during the eighteenth century) lapsed; economic development further eroded community resources; and, by the later nineteenth century, Porfirian state-building curbed communal political autonomy. Nevertheless, on the eve of the Revolution, there was scant evidence of a broad “Indian” consciousness (comparable to the nascent “peasant” consciousness that some historians have discerned in this period). Linguistic differences remained, rival communities still feuded incessantly, primary allegiances were given to the community (and/or to the cacique, or boss) rather than to any supra-communal entity.

Hence, the Revolution that began in 1910 could be fought and was fought on the basis of considerable Indian participation (more so if the broad definition of “Indian” is adopted), but in the absence of any self-consciously Indian project. True, there were abundant *agrarian* demands/programs/projects—some local, some regional, some national; and these were not, as sometimes suggested, primarily the work of manipulative leaders and intellectuals; they reflected genuine popular—including Indian—grievances. But they were usually couched in class rather than caste terms; they pitted peasants against landlords, not Indians against whites or mestizos. Incidents of ethnic conflict occurred—Zapatistas disliked city slickers, the Naranjeños’ attacked mestizo interlopers—but these were manifestations of agrarian (i.e., class) polarization and did not form part of a sustained policy of *Indian* self-assertion (indeed, the “Indian” label, I shall note, was used as a deliberate smear by opponents).²⁵

The chief exception was the Yaqui Indian rebellion in the northwest, which fused peasant and Indian struggles in a sustained resistance to *gorri* (white/mestizo) exploitation. But the Yaqui rebellion was precisely an exception. In Southern Mexico, where Indian populations (even narrowly defined) remained numerous, agrarian revolt was weak, and Indian participation in the Revolution tended to depend on the leadership of local caciques, committed to the defense of regional autonomy: in the Sierra Juárez of Oaxaca, for example, or the highlands of Chiapas.

Thus, where attributions of *Indian* rebellion cropped up, they were more often polemical attacks by hostile—and fearful—outsiders than proud statements of Indian rebels themselves. When Tuxtla Gutiérrez warded with San Cristóbal for supremacy in Chiapas, the *tuxtilecos* made free with allegations of caste war alleging their opponents were “Indians.” Zapatismo, it is important to note, was linked to the “Indian” cause first by outraged planters, who similarly shrieked the dangers of caste war, and later by *indigenista* reformers like Gamio (and even Vasconcelos), who chose to see Zapatismo, in retrospect, as the awakening of the Indian people of Morelos.²⁶

This *indigenista* appropriation—and misattribution—was necessary precisely because the Indian contribution to the Revolution had been so anonymous. Plenty of Indians had fought, but not *qua* Indians (the same could be said, for example, of Catholics, or even of women). The conscious *indigenismo* that came to permeate official circles after the armed Revolution was not, therefore, the product of direct Indian pressure (one could contrast the agrarian reform which *was* to a significant degree the result of *agrarista* pressure). Perhaps for that very reason it could be safely adopted: *indigenismo* came more easily to Mexican elites than, say, to Andean elites, for whom the threat of caste war and reversion to barbarism seemed truly present.²⁷ *Indigenistas* like Gamio therefore had to display a certain ingenuity in order to justify their position: “it is not the Indian who made the Revolution,” he conceded, “nevertheless, its deepest roots grew and continue to grow in the Indian race.” Or again: “the revolutionary movements never took shape or rose up in the heart [of the Indian population], yet it was in that population that it found its primordial origin.”²⁸

Postrevolutionary *indigenismo* thus represented yet another non-Indian formulation of the “Indian problem”; it was another white/mestizo construct (specifically, Aguirre Beltrán stresses, a mestizo one), part of a long tradition stretching back to the Conquest.²⁹ Certainly it was a more enlightened and sympathetic formulation than its colonial or Porfirian predecessors. But, like them, it involved the imposition of ideas, categories, and policies from outside. The Indians themselves were the objects, not the authors, of *indigenismo*. This the *indigenistas* frankly admitted. As Gamio apostrophized this “poor and suffering race”: “you will not awaken spontaneously. It will be necessary for friendly hearts to work for your redemption.” The “intellectual baggage of the Indian race,” Gamio went on, weighed them down, retarding consciousness and action. The Indian suffers, “but unfortunately does not understand, does not know, the appropriate means to achieve his liberation.” It was therefore the task of skilled and sympathetic intellectuals, ethnographers, and anthropologists above all, to “forge . . . an Indian soul.”³⁰

If, in this respect, revolutionary *indigenismo* was simply the latest in a long line of elite formulations of the “Indian problem”; it acquired a distinctive significance because it coincided with the social upheaval of the Revolution (roughly, 1910–1920). This brings me to the empirical crux of this chapter: the connections linking the Revolution to racial ideas and relations. Many such connections have been asserted,

then and since; in discussing them, we must guard against the perennial danger of attributing all post-1910 change to the thaumaturgic power of the Revolution (and thus neglecting common global trends that may have influenced Mexican thought and practice). A careful analysis must start with some sort of perspective. What was the status of racial ideas and relations on the eve of the Revolution? How did they change and why?

The Impact of Revolution

We have noted that the nineteenth century saw a progressive breakdown of the castelike, colonial order and its replacement by a society stratified by class. Van den Berghe, who takes Mexico as one of his key cases, sees a “paternalist” colonial model giving way to class-based society in which “racial” divisions (that is, ethnic divisions that are often deemed racial) lost their social significance. But this is too sweeping. Independent Mexico did not go the way of a *Herrenvolk* society, but neither did it eliminate ethnic in favor of class stratification. As in the colony, the two coexisted and, while the balance gradually tipped from caste to class, this was a long, slow process, still far from complete at the time of the Revolution.³¹ Class now counted for more, but caste—ethnic status—was far from irrelevant. Indians were usually peasants, but they were not peasants *tout court*, as some on the Left have chosen to argue. Rather, they were peasants who suffered a double oppression: “as poor peasants, resident peons, and city lumpenproletariat, they suffered an exploitation characteristic of their social class position; and, as ethnic groups in a condition of inferiority vis-à-vis mestizos and creoles, they were culturally oppressed by the carriers of the dominant culture, that is, they suffered an exploitation characteristic of their colonial situation.”³²

What is more, it seems probable that racism, buttressed by racial theories, became stronger in the course of the nineteenth century. The question cannot be fully discussed here. However, powerful ideological as well as economic factors favored the development of a more virulent racism in the later nineteenth century. The heyday of European racist thought—dated from approximately 1850 to 1920—roughly coincided with Mexico’s phase of liberal state-building and capitalist export-oriented economic development. Both of these processes, which culminated in the neo-liberal or “order and progress” dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz (1876–1911), lent themselves to racist interpretations and rationalizations. At the intellectual level, Porfirian thinkers were profoundly influenced by social Darwinism; Spencer’s evolutionism, with its denigration of human hybrids, exercised a strong appeal.³³ Policymakers, convinced of the superiority of the white European, vainly sought to attract immigrants to Mexico: they were needed, as Justo Sierra explained, “so as to obtain a cross with the indigenous race, for only European blood can keep the level of civilization . . . from sinking, which would mean regression, not evolution.”³⁴

Yet more significant and pervasive, I would suggest, was the inherent logic of the

Porfirian model of development, which required the dispossession of peasant communities (many of them Indian) and the creation of a reliable labor force, urban and rural. These trends were not new; they followed old colonial precedents. But the pressures and opportunities were now far greater (not least thanks to the advent of the railway) and they lent themselves to new racist and social Darwinist rationalizations. As in colonial countries, the “myth of the lazy native” was invoked—by foreign and Mexican employers—to explain peasant resistance to proletarianization and to justify tough measures to overcome it.³⁵ The coffee planters of Chiapas deplored the “natural indolence” of the sierra Indians; a Morelos planter lamented that “the Indian . . . has many defects as a laborer, being, as he is, lazy, sottish and thieving.”³⁶ Only by strict discipline, which in Yucatán and elsewhere became virtual slave-driving, could these traits be countered.³⁷

Meanwhile, the Porfirian elite was also engaged in the parallel task of state-building. Here, the Indian figured as an antinational element requiring prompt and, if necessary, forcible assimilation. Some Porfirian thinkers, foreshadowing postrevolutionary *indigenismo*, looked to the transforming power of education.³⁸ In this respect, we can detect clear continuities stretching from Porfiriato to Revolution, and we can rightly question the old *leyenda negra* of undiluted Porfirian racism.³⁹ In practice, however, Porfirian *indigenismo* was more rhetorical than real: its material manifestations were statues of Cuauhtémoc in Mexico City rather than Indian schools in the countryside.⁴⁰ Even when rural schools were established, the teachers who went among the Indians were quite capable of displaying racist hauteur.⁴¹ In this respect, Porfirian *indigenismo* belonged to an old tradition of elite indigenismo, which appealed to Creole nationalist sentiment, but which implied no genuine social reform, no real amelioration of Indian life.⁴²

Furthermore, irrespective of shifts in elite intellectual fashion, the practice of the Porfirian regime was one of Indian oppression. If the regime offered its subjects the famous *pan o palo* (“bread or the club”) alternative, it was the second half of the formula that Indian populations came to know and fear. Individual communities suffered agrarian dispossession, and collective groups, which had maintained a degree of “tribal” independence, were forcibly integrated: in Yucatán, where the rebel Maya were finally defeated, and in Sonora, where the old Yaqui war reached a new crescendo. These large-scale Indian wars—integral parts of the Porfirian state-building project—were carried out with all the operational and ideological panoply of U.S. or Argentine frontier expansion. In Sonora, the Yaquis were hunted down, deported, and enslaved; genocide was justified by the Yaquis’ stubborn refusal to submit to the rule of the nation-state.⁴³ In the final years of the Porfiriato (no emergent *indigenismo* here) the campaign became a virtual crusade, carried through with fanatical disregard for its deleterious economic consequences, as a racist ideology triumphed over the self-interest even of the landlord class.⁴⁴ The parallel with formal colonialism, evident in the economic domain, was thus repeated in the political and ideological. Not only were the natives lazy, they were also stubbornly refractory to civilized rule. Quasi-colonial attitudes and methods

became hallmarks of the Porfiriato: the army resembled a colonial force (pale officers, dark troops) and resorted to the usual counterinsurgency excesses; state governors displayed a proconsular disdain for their subject populations.⁴⁵ The logic of Porfirian “development” thus conspired with imported ideology to create a climate of racism that was both official (that is, justified, albeit not uniformly, by elite intellectuals) and, more important, unofficial (practiced by the regime’s minions and by social elites more generally).

It is against this backdrop that the Revolution must be set. How did the Revolution affect this prevalent racism? It is sometimes said that it brought emphatic change, that the elimination of racism and the rehabilitation of the Indian were central, even *the* central, elements within the revolutionary project: “In some sense it can be said that the very essence of the Revolution is based upon the vindication of the Indian and of the Indian community.”⁴⁶ Certainly a change can be discerned in the realm of official rhetoric—a realm more vulnerable to ideological coups and upheavals than the torpid kingdom of custom and prejudice. The new regime, raising the standard of the 1917 Constitution and consolidating itself through the 1920s, incorporated *indigenismo* into its official ideology.⁴⁷ It claimed, in other words, to seek the emancipation and integration of Mexico’s exploited Indian groups: emancipation from the old oppressions of landlord, cacique, and *cura* (priest); integration into the new revolutionary state and nation.

Integration was not, of course, a new objective or accomplishment. But in the past, the revolutionary *indigenistas* argued, it had been achieved by means of coercion and at the expense of the Indians’ pre-existent culture. Now, in contrast, integration would be planned, enlightened, and respectful of that culture: Indian economic and intellectual development could proceed, Gamio argued, “without this, of course, signifying the annihilation of the original [Indian] culture.” At the interface of ethnic contact and acculturation Indian-fighting generals would give way to applied anthropologists; meanwhile, Indian culture would receive due respect, Indian history would be rehabilitated.⁴⁸ Accordingly, the more enlightened (or optimistic?) *indigenistas* believed that integration could proceed without de-Indianization; indeed, an Indian population genuinely integrated—that is, educated, bilingual, and politically mobilized—could better sustain its own culture (language, dress, religion, mores) than one that remained marginalized, uneducated, monolingual, and politically inert.⁴⁹

Constituting, as it did, an official orthodoxy, revolutionary *indigenismo* included a range of emphases and positions. But its varied protagonists shared a common belief in the need to integrate the Indian, albeit in an enlightened, noncoercive fashion. Before analyzing this belief, we should note that several alternative positions existed. The old policy of coercive integration, which, I have suggested, represented Porfirian practice, if not entirely Porfirian theory, has been termed by Aguirre Beltrán “rightist Westernism,” marked by “excessive esteem for European and Anglo-Saxon culture,” “openly racist” attitudes and solutions, and forced acculturation.⁵⁰ As an official ideology, this was bankrupt after 1910; as a matter of

daily practice it lived on lustily, as I will note. Meanwhile, in opposition to the mainstream *indigenista* current, two further heresies were evident. One—Aguirre Beltrán’s “leftist Westernism”—has already been mentioned: It is the belief that Indians are merely peasants, suffering the common oppression of peasants, therefore deserving no special discriminatory treatment: “The vindication of the Indian fits into the general framework of the economic liberation of the proletarian masses.” But, Aguirre Beltrán further notes, this position *in practice* stood pretty close to revolutionary *indigenismo*; in certain cases, like that of President Lázaro Cárdenas, reformers tended to oscillate between the two.⁵¹

Then, there existed a more radical alternative—Aguirre Beltrán’s “Indianism,” quite distinct from *indigenismo*—which denied the very imperative of integration, and which asserted the Indians’ potential for autonomous development. Indianism could take several forms. Sometimes, it was typified by a vicarious romanticization of Indian history and culture, usually on the part of urban middle class mestizos: parlor Azteccófilos, “erudite contemporary idolaters,” as Octavio Paz has called them, people straight from the pages of Lawrence’s *Plumed Serpent*.⁵² Such “cultural extremists” cultivated a somewhat spurious Indianism and allegedly sought “to rid Mexico of all Spanish and other foreign influences and to revive indigenous traditions”; though their influence and numbers were scant, they could prove vocal, as they showed in the famous furor over the bones of Cuauhtémoc.⁵³ Other Indianists have argued, more coherently if not always more soberly, for the autonomous development—as against the integration—of the Indian. In the 1930s certain radicals, impressed by the supposed achievements of Soviet policy toward the nationalities, expounded the view that Mexico’s Indian groups were, in fact, submerged nationalities, deserving of “national autonomy.”⁵⁴ More recently, the standard *indigenista*/integrationist position has also been attacked by anthropologists who similarly cite examples of allegedly successful multiethnic nation-building.⁵⁵ Finally, in recent years, a vigorous Indianist movement has developed in Mexico and elsewhere in Latin America that roundly rejects the “false states” created at the expense of Indian autonomy, conceives of Indian populations as “potential nations,” and—joining hands with the “cultural extremists”—sees Indian culture (allegedly the only “authentic” culture in the continent) as “a valid alternative in the face of Western civilization.”⁵⁶

Though these alternative positions must be noted, it is the mainstream integrationist/*indigenista* current that deserves chief attention. From the 1910s to the present its representatives have adhered to the principle of enlightened, planned, noncoercive integration and strongly repudiated Indianist heresies. Luis Cabrera, for example, dismissed the “artistic snobbism” of those who sought to revive “Indian customs” and insisted that “the essential problem in regard to the ethnic question consists of achieving homogeneity”; years later, the mainstream *indigenista* spokesman Alfonso Caso denounced the “raving Indianists” (*indigenistas delirantes*) who, for example, urged “that we should abandon Spanish and speak Nahuatl.”⁵⁷

Mainstream *indigenismo*, advocating the progressive, persuasive integration of

the Indian into Mexican society, looked to a range of policies that might advance this objective. Education was the chief weapon in the *indigenista* armory, although, as Gamio stressed, it could not be the only one.⁵⁸ Rural and Indian schools were established through the 1920s and 1930s, one of their principal tasks being the training of a new generation of bilingual Indian teachers. The rural school, however, became a center not only of education (neutrally defined), but also of technological diffusion, agrarian reform, political mobilization, and nationalist propaganda. The *maestro rural*, acting, like his French Republican counterpart, as the front-line soldier of the secular state, was expected to counter the influence of the church and to stimulate sentiments of patriotism, to inculcate, as one study puts it, “the new ‘religion’ of the country—post-Revolutionary nationalism.”⁵⁹ “Indian” customs, music, dance, and rituals were rehabilitated and woven into a new tapestry of folkloric nationalism; revolutionary martyrs, like Zapata, were claimed for the *indigenista* cause; and reformers like Carrillo Puerto in Yucatán subtly blended radical discourse with traditional Maya symbols.⁶⁰ The *ejido*, the village land grant sanctioned by the agrarian reform program, was somewhat misleadingly equated with the old Aztec *calpullalli*; and a new school of government-backed applied anthropologists—the great champions of *indigenismo* like Gamio and Caso—advanced the study of both contemporary Indian communities and their ancient native American predecessors (the didactic value of historical study was repeatedly emphasized). The most celebrated representatives of this new official philosophy were, of course, the revolutionary muralists, who provided pictorial affirmation of Indian valor, nobility, suffering, and achievement, which they set against a revived black legend of Spanish oppression.

Most authorities agree that the Revolution thus wrought a significant transformation in official thinking concerning race and ethnic relations. The old Porfirian racist orthodoxy—an orthodoxy, to be sure, that was neither uniform nor unchallenged—gave way to a new, self-consciously reactive, antiracist orthodoxy. The relative success of this transformation, however, gave rise to the erroneous conclusion that, as if by official fiat, racism had been banished from the land. “Fortunately,” Cabrera wrote, “race prejudices do not exist in Mexico,” a sentiment echoed later by Caso, as well as by outside observers like Van den Berghe.⁶¹ To state, as I shall in conclusion, that this is a misleading view is neither original nor surprising. However, before reaching that conclusion, it is worth probing somewhat further the character of official revolutionary *indigenismo*; for it could be suggested that its very failure to banish racism from Mexican society is related to its own internal tensions and anomalies.

We should first consider why *indigenismo* flowered as an official philosophy when it did. As an elitist, non-Indian construct, it cannot be attributed to any direct Indian pressure or lobbying; in this, it resembled anticlericalism or economic nationalism (comparable elite “projects”) rather than agrarianism (which enjoyed genuine popular roots and, indeed, encountered strenuous elite resistance). First, to guard against the *post hoc ergo propter hoc* fallacy (whereby everything is

attributed to the Revolution), we should note a broader Latin American shift toward *indigenismo*, characteristic of the early twentieth century and partly related to the combined cerebral introspection and patriotic junketing of the independence centennial of 1910.⁶² Just as economic nationalism was a Latin American trend in which Mexico participated (and would have done so, *mutatis mutandis*, revolution or no), so some form of *indigenismo*—rhetorical, folkloric, nationalist—was on the agenda. As Stabb, Powell, and others have shown, Porfirian thinkers were already reformulating the “Indian problem” well before the Revolution began.⁶³

But the Revolution certainly gave a great stimulus to this ideological shift. The Indian contribution to the Revolution had not been premised on any Indianist project but it had revealed the “Indian problem” and brought non-Indians into contact with Indians on a grand scale. (The Chaco War, obviously, had nothing to do with *indigenismo*, but it similarly served to awaken Bolivia’s non-Indian intellectuals and *políticos* to “the Indian.”) During the Revolution, mestizo commanders like Alvaro Obregón or Gabriel Gavira commanded and depended upon their Indian veterans, Yaquis and Juchitecos, respectively; northern proconsuls like Salvador Alvarado and Jesús Agustín Castro, sent to govern the benighted south, waxed indignant at the degradation and oppression of the Maya. Their sentiments were by no means pure and altruistic, however. Some northerners regarded their southern, Indian compatriots with outright racist contempt; but the proconsuls, governing in distant states, needed to win support against hostile local elites, especially the planter class.⁶⁴ *Indigenismo* offered a means to delegitimize these elites, to prize the Indians away from their lamentable deference, and to bind them to the new revolutionary state.⁶⁵ In Chiapas, in fact, *indigenismo* eventually emerged as a key weapon in the central government’s struggle against local particularism.⁶⁶

The revolutionaries’ discovery of the Indian—of the Indian’s capacity for either troublesome sedition or supportive mobilization—was paralleled by their commitment to state and nation-building. In both respects, of course, they followed Porfirian precedents, but they did not like to admit as much and, like any incoming revolutionary regime, they preferred to distance themselves from their blackguard predecessors. If the Porfiristas had labored to build state and nation, the revolutionaries had to continue the work but to a different tune. The very continuity of practice demanded some abrupt changes of rhetoric. In 1926 the revolutionaries quelled the last Yaqui revolt with an efficiency Don Porfirio would have envied (and it was a revolutionary, Manuel Diéguez, veteran of the famous Cananea strike, who in 1915 coined the inevitable plagiarism: “the only good Yaqui is a dead Yaqui”), but such unfortunate parallels made it all the more necessary to put rhetorical distance between the “revolutionary” present and the “reactionary” past.⁶⁷

This effort involved, first, a commitment to state interference in the realm of ethnic relations. A standard feature of revolutionary ideology was the insistence on the state’s role as a social arbiter. The state had a vital, interventionist role, that would enable it to correct major social imbalances and inequalities. This did not mean engineering outright equality but, rather, protecting the weak against the

strong in the interests of social equilibrium (another key revolutionary concept). Thus, the state should bolster the infant labor movement in its confrontation with capital—not because capital was inherently malign, but because it was excessively powerful.⁶⁸ So, too, the *indigenistas* argued, in so many words, for positive discrimination, which would protect the weak unorganized Indian population. Formal equality before the law, the old liberal nostrum, was meaningless so long as the Indians were denied education, political access, and economic development.⁶⁹ The night watchman state had to give way to the *estado papá*, the paternalist state. This shift, of course, responded to state self-interest as well as to considerations of social justice, but it nevertheless involved a repudiation of the strict social Darwinism of the Porfiriato.

Even more important, the Revolution gave a fresh stimulus to the process of nation-building. This process was far from new: the mid-nineteenth-century Reforma has been depicted as an exercise in “liberal nation-building”; Porfirian ideologues—Justo Sierra especially—continued the tradition.⁷⁰ But the revolutionaries faced special circumstances. Between 1910 and 1920 the chaos of civil war had shattered the state and reduced Mexico to a patchwork of warring factions. Yucatán and Oaxaca had virtually seceded from the federation. Freelance caudillos, like Peláez in the Huasteca or Cantú in Baja California, ruled in defiance of the central government. Twice the United States had violated Mexico’s territory. The task of creating a viable, coherent nation—a nation that was more than a mere “geographical expression”—was never more daunting, never more pressing. It is only in terms of these circumstances that we can understand Carranza’s prickly nationalism or Calles’ fervid anticlericalism. As for Mexico’s Indians, they constituted a major challenge to the nationalist project. For them the nation-state was, at best, a source of fiscal and other demands; they owed it no loyalty (revolutionaries lamented the Indians’ blind support of antinational reactionary caudillos like Mcixueiro in Oaxaca or Fernández Ruiz in Chiapas); Mexico’s Indians lacked “the essential sentiment of the citizen, that political solidarity which is the very base on which the principle of nationality rests.”⁷¹ It was vital to inculcate that sentiment, to convert passive subjects into active citizens.

Amid all the rhetoric, exhortation and self-examination that followed the Revolution, one constant theme stands out: that of “forjando patria,” in the words of Gamio’s celebrated tract.⁷² Nationalists like Gamio were explicit about their commitment to create a new nationalism, to combine Mexico’s disparate population in a solid patriotic union. There could be no question of creating Indian enclaves or nations: the old liberal horror of *republiketas de indios* was resurrected in Obregón’s denial of Yaqui tribal pretensions, or in Alfonso Caso’s later repudiation of a policy of reservations.⁷³ However, Indian values, myth, and history had a necessary place in the new nationalism. It was not a question of disparaging Mexico’s European heritage (as the *outré* Indianists would later do) but rather of recognizing the process of cultural (often called “racial”) mixing that had created the unique Mexican people. For, according to the emerging orthodoxy of the

Revolution, the old Indian/European thesis/antithesis had now given rise to a higher synthesis, the mestizo, who was neither Indian nor European, but quintessentially Mexican.

The cult of the mestizo, like so much revolutionary ideology, was not new. It had been hinted at a century earlier by Fray Servando. Justo Sierra (so often a bridge between Porfirian and revolutionary thought) had “defined the mestizo as the dynamic element within the Mexican population,” which had risen to power with the Reforma and whose epitome was Porfirio Díaz.⁷⁴ But it was with the Revolution that the mestizo cult blossomed. “In the great forge of America,” Gamio began his famous work, “on the giant anvil of the Andes, virile races of bronze and iron have struggled for centuries”; from this struggle emerged the mestizo, the “national race” of Mexico, the carrier of “the national culture of the future.” Now (1916) it was time for Mexico’s rulers “to take up the hammer and gird themselves with the blacksmith’s apron, so that they may make rise from the miraculous anvil the new nation [*patria*] of blended bronze and iron.”⁷⁵

In this formulation, Gamio followed Andrés Molina Enríquez, whose *Grandes problemas nacionales* (1909) had offered a diagnosis of Mexico’s ills, based on a mixture of Comte, Spencer, Darwin, and Haeckel. Molina Enríquez analyzed Mexican society in terms of ethnic groups and came close to equating them with social classes.⁷⁶ But he stressed, above all, the historic rise of the mestizo, who was destined to dominate Mexico: “The fundamental and unavoidable basis of all the work that in future will be undertaken for the good of the country must be the continuation of the mestizos as the dominant ethnic element and as the controlling political base of the population.” Thereby, Mexico could achieve demographic growth without recourse to immigration; the population could become a “nationality”; and that nationality could “establish with precision its own concept of patriotism.”⁷⁷ Again, therefore, *mestizaje* and nationhood were equated. Almost thirty years later, Molina Enríquez still harped on this theme, although he had converted his earlier tripartite ethnic scheme into a simple dichotomy in which a minority (15 percent) upper caste [*sic*] of creoles, Spaniards, and “creole/mestizos” confronted an exploited majority (85 percent) lower caste, “that of color, of Indian blood . . . chiefly represented by Indians and Indian/mestizos.” He also echoed Gamio’s opening motif: “Over time, the anvil of Indian blood will always prevail over the hammer of Spanish blood.”⁷⁸

Thus, by the mid-1930s—years of radical *indigenismo*—Molina Enríquez’s cult mestizo had been assimilated to the Indian (this mestizo was, we may say, a lopsided rather than a balanced synthesis). But the basic racial schema remained intact, just as the Indian/mestizo remained, for Molina, the essence of Mexican nationality. Molina Enríquez is generally regarded as an important influence on revolutionary thinking. Certainly Luis Cabrera believed as much and echoed some of his conclusions. Mexico’s “unification,” he argued, “must be achieved around the mestizo element, which is the most numerous and homogeneous element”; thus, the necessary consequence of nation-building was “to dissolve the Indian element in the

mestizo element.⁷⁹ Lesser ideologues concurred, as did foreign observers like John Lind, Woodrow Wilson's Mexican emissary of 1913–1914 (and their endorsement of mestizo destiny did not go unnoticed).⁸⁰

But the most celebrated cultist of *mestizaje* was, of course, José Vasconcelos, writer, philosopher, and politician, who provided brief but dynamic leadership for the new Ministry of Education from 1921 to 1924. Vasconcelos formulated the idea of the “cosmic race,” the new mixed race that would prevail not only in Mexico but in the world at large. Reversing older biological assumptions—those of Spencer and Agassiz, which had deemed hybrids inferior to pure races—Vasconcelos both saw and applauded the process of global mestization. The mestizo was the “bridge to the future”; he also displayed a distinctive character (not entirely dissimilar to Vasconcelos' own self-image): quick, vivacious, subtle, mercurial, lacking prejudice, and loving novelty.⁸¹

The mestizo thus became the ideological symbol of the new regime. *Indigenismo* fitted well within this vision, since the very aim of the *indigenistas* was, we have seen, to integrate the Indians, in other words to “mestizo-ize” them. Or, rather, as the more thoughtful *indigenistas* put it, the aim was to mestizo-ize the Indians and, at the same time, to Indianize the mestizos, to create a national synthesis on the basis of reciprocal contributions.⁸² For the new revolutionary elite, this was a particularly appealing philosophy. First, it was nationalist, mobilizing and agglutinative, appropriate to the political tasks they faced. Second, it fitted their own self-image (not just Vasconcelos'). Were not the victorious northern revolutionaries—as Gamio put it—an “element of mixed blood,” an “intermediate race,” who now joined hands with their revolutionary allies, the “Indian race” of Central Mexico?⁸³ Third, the cult of *mestizaje* offered a means to distance revolutionary rhetoric from that of the past, and to do so without falling into the trammels of socialism or communism. Despite certain embarrassing parallels (such as the repression of the Yaquis), and despite the ideological antecedents to be found among Porfirian thinkers, the cult of the mestizo did represent a departure from the cosmopolitan, Europhile ethos of the Porfiriato. The mestizo class could thus be depicted as “the eternal rebel, the traditional enemy of the class of pure blood or foreign blood, the author and director of uprisings and rebellions, and the class which has best understood the just laments of the Indian class.”⁸⁴

The new *indigenista-mestizaje* cult thus fitted very comfortably within revolutionary thought. If it was intellectually derivative and unoriginal, it nevertheless acquired unprecedented power and relevance by virtue of the “revolutionary” circumstances of post-1910. It was an idea whose time had come. It is worth pausing to reiterate three key aspects of this new, officially dominant idea. First, it was an idea imposed on the Indian from outside. Second, it embodied the optimistic belief that acculturation could proceed in a guided, enlightened fashion, such that the positive aspects of Indian culture could be preserved, the negative expunged. This belief was optimistic in several respects: it presupposed that the process could be rationally controlled (not least, by applied anthropologists); it tended to perpetuate

the notion of a bipartite Indian culture, possessing distinctive and potentially separable Indian and European elements (whereas it would be truer to talk of a tight unitary fusion); and it thus assumed that the adding or subtracting of elements was feasible, if not straightforward. Yet, as more thoughtful students have pointed out, cultures cannot be modified according to simple arithmetical principles of addition and subtraction; cultures are more than the sums of their constituent parts, and those parts cohere in mutual interdependence—and, of course, tension.⁸⁵ Elements cannot be removed or added at will; nor, of course, can there be easy agreement as to which elements are desirable, which detrimental.⁸⁶

Third, and most important, *indigenismo* tended to reproduce many of the racist assumptions of the preceding “Westernism,” which it formally opposed. It did so because, even where it reacted against Porfirian racism, it continued to operate within the racist paradigm—it could not, in other words, break out of that paradigm, but chose rather to criticize and invert several of its basic tenets. Like Marx, shackled to Ricardian political economy, the *indigenistas* could shake the bars of their conceptual prison but not escape from it. Thus, while some later *indigenistas* exorcised “race” from their schema, insisting that “race” was, in fact, purely a socially defined category, many others—especially the pioneers—retained “race” as an independent (innate, biological) factor, which operated alongside distinct social and historical factors.

Though their formulation of “race” was not always coherent and explicit, they seemed to argue three positions. Virtually all agreed that racial, that is, innate and probably biologically determined differences were significant, but the earlier “Westernist” assumptions of Indian or mestizo inferiority were wrong. First, for some *indigenistas*, who came to espouse the extreme “Indianist” position mentioned earlier, the Indian or mestizo was actually superior to the white. This was straightforward reverse racism. Others, in contrast, argued for innate racial differences, but not for racial subordination or superordination. In other words, they saw Indians and whites as innately different, possessing contrasting skills, virtues, and vices, but they did not believe that these differences justified imputations of superiority and inferiority. However, inasmuch as they regarded innate racial differences as significant, they too subscribed to a racist explanation of society. Finally, the mildest—and also the wooliest—view avoided any such explicit assertion of racial difference, but continued to talk of “race” as if it were a meaningful category. Indians were not inferior, nor were they innately distinct from whites, yet they belonged to an Indian “race” and this was a significant fact. Logically, these theorists could have dropped the use of “race” altogether or at least they could have made clear that for them “race” denoted a social category. Instead, they remained prisoners of the preceding racist discourse, and continued to scatter references to “race” among their ostensibly antiracist *indigenista* writings. Inasmuch as politicians, officials, and the public generally tended to follow suit, it can be suggested that the perpetuation of this discourse probably helped maintain both the notion of “race” and, to some degree, the practice of racism.

Indigenista view of race

Indigenista superior

Indigenista inferiority of

Ref. to Indian race

This perpetuation of racist ideas among a group of thinkers committed to resist the older, Eurocentric racism is hardly surprising. On the one hand, they had in many cases been nurtured in the old tradition—that of Spencerian positivism and social Darwinism. They might react against its Eurocentric conclusions, but they could not entirely free themselves from its pervasive racial categorizations: as Marvin Harris points out, “no major figure in the social sciences between 1860 and 1890 escaped the influence of evolutionary racism.”⁸⁷ Furthermore, to the extent that racist terminology and assumptions peppered the political discourse of postrevolutionary Mexico, Mexico was not so different from many countries, whose political elites habitually resorted to racist shorthand by way of social explanation well into the twentieth century.⁸⁸ And, even when Mexican *indigenistas* strove hardest to expunge Porfirian racism, they easily fell into the familiar error of reverse racism, attributing an innate superiority to the previously “inferior” Indian or mestizo. This was, perhaps, intellectually tempting and even politically shrewd, but it further muddied the waters, perpetuating racial explanations and attribution instead of eliminating them.⁸⁹

Examples are legion. Manuel Gamio strenuously advocated the elevation of the Indian, whose “aptitudes for progress” were the equal of the white’s, yet he retained “race” as a crucial independent variable in his social and historical analysis (that is, he did not reduce “race” to ethnicity, a socially and culturally defined identity). Man, he reiterated, is a product of race, language, and culture (Molina Enríquez would have agreed); his character is decisively formed by “the physical-biological-social environment.” Mexican history demands a racial explanation. Initially, an “invading race,” the “white race,” confronted the indigenous “race,” of which some “Indians of pure blood” still remained. The Reforma favored the “mixed race” (shades of Sierra) but, as in Latin America generally, Mexico failed to create a genuine, unitary nation—after the model of France, Germany, or Japan, nations from which “there arises a solemn cry of shared blood, of shared flesh, that cry which is above all else, since it is the voice of life, the mysterious force which pulls material together and resists its disintegration.” Only in Yucatán, Gamio suggested, had a comparable fusion resulted: only Yucatán displayed “that racial homogeneity, that unification of physical types, that advanced, happy fusion of races [which] constitutes the first and most solid basis of nationalism” (and this homogeneity is physically demonstrable in the predominant brachycephalism of the peninsula’s population). It is the task of the Revolution—itsself the work of “two social classes, two races”—to replicate that outcome nationwide.⁹⁰

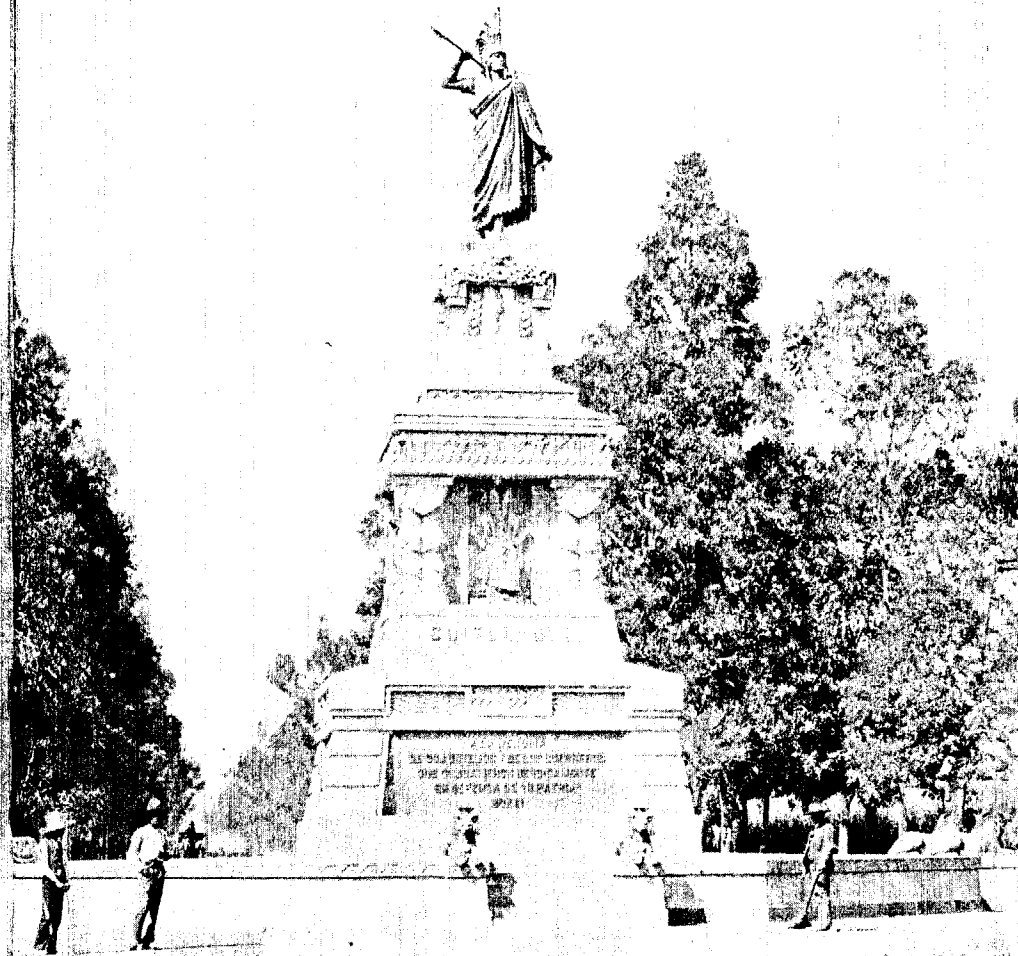
Although such views place Gamio in category three—*indigenista* protagonists of racial equality and national unification who, superfluously and perhaps dangerously, perpetuated explanatory notions of race—he also occasionally slips into category two, arguing for racial *differences* (but not racial *inferiorities/superiorities*). The Indian’s capacity for work and privation, for example, exceeds that of the white, though the latter may display more power on the job. Of Mexico’s Indians he comments: “We will not find, save in very few countries, human entities whose



President Lázaro Cárdenas (1934–1940) listening to the Indians’ requests.
Photographer unknown.



José Vasconcelos, paladin of the raza cósmica. Photo courtesy of the Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, General Libraries, University of Texas at Austin.



Statue in Mexico City commemorating Cuicuilco, defender of Tenochtitlán against Cortéz. Photo courtesy of the Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, General Libraries, University of Texas at Austin.

output is so high in relation to their limited consumption of food.”⁹¹ If this is mild stuff, Gamio had no doubt that some of his fellow *indigenistas* went much further in propounding both racial differences and even racial hierarchies (with the old racist assumptions reversed). He reproved those who “preach and practice *indigenismo*, [who] limitlessly exalt the faculties of the Indian and consider him superior to the European in respect of intellectual and physical aptitudes.”⁹²

Again, examples of such reverse racism are not difficult to find, some focusing on the mestizo, some on the Indian. In the 1920s the mestizo carried off the palm. Cabrera argued that the dominance of the mestizo in Mexico derived inevitably from his superior adaptation to Mexican conditions. Vasconcelos wove an entire theory around the presumed virtues of hybridism (a deliberate riposte to Spencer), virtues that manifested themselves in the Mexican mestizo, the representative of the “cosmic race” (“By virtue of my race the spirit shall speak” was the motto Vasconcelos gave to the new autonomous national university). Hybridism, Vasconcelos argued, “tends to produce better types,” since it blends different races possessing different qualities (“some races chiefly develop artistic ability; other people [*sic*] develop commercial aptitude; and so on”); thus—and here comes the familiar appeal to consensus—“the advantages of a mixture of races . . . have been generally recognized.” The Mexican mestizo is a new biological product, the happy result of Spain’s “superior” (i.e., miscegenating) colonial model.⁹³

Similar “racial” explanations can be culled from the writings of revolutionaries like Salvador Alvarado, who saw world history as a racial struggle, with Mexico tied to the white race by “bonds of blood and ideals.”⁹⁴ The automatic use of “race” as a rhetorical or explanatory device is evident in the discourse of key figures: Manuel Gómez Morín, Marte Gómez, Francisco Múgica, Lázaro Cárdenas.⁹⁵ Philosophers like Samuel Ramos, while echoing the standard denials of racial inequality, still resorted to “race” as a fundamental concept, still imputed attributes to “races,” and still explained historical trends in “racial” terms (thus: “Our race lacks neither intelligence or vitality”; “the Spanish characteristics of our race have undergone important modifications”—its “primal energy” being dissipated in the “isolation of Mexico”; the Indian, “naturally inclined to passivity,” lapsed into “Egyptianism”—a kind of torpid inertia, and the Indian “has influenced the soul of the other Mexican group, because he has mixed his blood with theirs”).⁹⁶ Note that in these contexts “race” is not being used simply as a loose surrogate for ethnicity, and therefore we are not just disputing an inappropriate nomenclature: rather, “race” here carries connotations of innate, including biological, characteristics, determined at birth and subject only to long, slow processes of change.

By the 1930s, with radical *indigenismo* at its apogee, reverse racism focused on the Indian rather than on the mestizo. For some, the Indian represented “the most perfect moral and physical entity of our population”; Indians were “almost perfect, biologically speaking,” and they possessed “a power of intellectual assimilation much greater, without comparison, than that of the white man”; thus, for example, “when he hates, [the Indian] hates with all the force conferred by his perfect organic

constitution.”⁹⁷ The Chamulas of Chiapas, reported a sympathizer, were a “strong race, not at all degenerate . . . lacking any hereditary disease, and almost pure, since there is very little or no admixture of white blood.”⁹⁸ Ramón P. De Negri, painting a Spenglerian picture of Western decadence, saw hope in the Indian: “Biologically the Mexican Indian is more perfect than any of the other so-called colored races that exist in other continents; and in many cases equal or superior to the so-called whites.”⁹⁹ The radical Indianists of the 1970s, whose reverse racism and anti-Westernism have already been noted, thus had a significant precursor group forty years earlier.

Although these examples testify to the continued strength of “racial” ideas and theories, even on the part of self-consciously antiracist activists, it should be noted that the bases of supposed racial attribution were tending to shift. Innate biological traits were still often stressed, as we have seen. But these traits were now also linked to environment and history, and the precise interrelationship of these different determinants often remained obscure. We have seen that Gamio, Molina Enríquez, and others alternated “race” and “class” with apparent intellectual abandon. Gamio made much of diet, physique, and environment; for Cabrera, the superiority of the mestizo was a question of superior environmental adaptation.¹⁰⁰ An alternative approach stressed mentality or collective psychology: the problem of the Indian (his “Egyptianism,” in Ramos’ phrase) derived from his long, collective acquaintance with conquest and oppression.

On the face of it, both of these formulations represent breaks with, and advances on, strict biological racism. For some critics, therefore, these would not be “racist” formulations, for the determination of supposed collective attributes has here shifted from genetics to geography and history.¹⁰¹ But I do not think it is as simple as that. As John Rex has noted, a deemphasis on genetic determinism does not necessarily eliminate racism: “We should not take the disappearance of the specifically biologically oriented theories of race that were so important in the 1930s to mean that the class of sociological problems to which they referred has disappeared. Other deterministic theories would still be used and the essential distinguishing feature of this class of situations, namely, inequality between men being justified in a deterministic way, would still be present.” According to this alternative view, racism may be discerned wherever “the inequalities and differentiation inherent in a social structure are related to physical and cultural criteria of an ascriptive kind and are rationalised in terms of deterministic belief systems.”¹⁰² The key terms here are *ascriptive* and *deterministic*. To equate ethnicity and race, and to suppose that they determine significant ascribed characteristics of such strength and staying power that they are, in practical terms, immutable, is to fall prey to racism, even if those characteristics are not alleged to be biologically determined. In other words, if Mexican Indians are what they are because of environmental pressures—and what they are scarcely admits of change, since it is part of their very being—then the question of whether biological, environmental, or historical factors determined this being is secondary. It is the inescapable ascription that counts.

Alfonso Caso, for example, who stresses the mutability—the capacity for acculturation—of the Indian, largely avoids this pitfall. Yet even he detects in the Indian a “marvelous intuition [*sic*] for the transformation of the crudest materials into beautiful artifacts.”¹⁰³ In contrast, other *indigenistas*—and, today, Indianists—go much further, readily imputing a collective psychology, distinctively Indian, the product of centuries of oppression, transmitted through generations. In its more extreme forms, this theory makes Indians the carriers of a kind of Jungian collective unconscious no less determinant of their being than the old biological imperatives. And, given that racism involves the imputation of such ascribed and immutable characteristics, such psychological determinism seems to me to be racist, as was its biological predecessor.

Again, early manifestations of this psychological determinism appear in Gamio, who recurrently invokes the “traditionalist spirit of the [Indian] race, the faithful guardian of the memory of its glories and miseries.” Like most of these psychological theorists, Gamio both homogenizes the Indian (all Indians share a common mental make-up) and also lays great stress on the common trauma of the Conquest. In the breast of the Indian is mixed “the vigor of the wild Tarahumara . . . the Athenian refinement of the divine Teotihuacano, the wisdom of the family of Tlaxcala, the unbending valor of the bloody Aztec”; yet all contemporary Indians are held back—not by innate, biological impediments—but rather by their ancient “intellectual baggage,” which has condemned them to live “four hundred years behind the times, because their intellectual accomplishments are no more than a prolongation of those developed in pre-Hispanic times, and recast by the force of circumstances and environment.”¹⁰⁴

A similar theme runs through Ramos’ psychological portrait of the Mexican (where debts to Spengler and Jung are acknowledged). While questioning crude biological racism, Ramos contrasts the “Faustian” spirit displayed by the “white sector” of the population with the passive, inert, anti-technological spirit of the Indians: “Mexican Indians are psychologically incapable of accepting technology, because . . . they lack the will to power; they do not belong to the race [*sic*] of rapacious men”; indeed, more generally, “the colored races do not possess the spirit to dominate.” In Mexico’s case, this inertia derives from a “collective conscience which is steeped and consolidated in its traditions,” which, in turn, trace back to the trauma of the Conquest. The latter Ramos interprets—in a grotesque misapplication of psychoanalytic theory—as the formative childhood experience which “projected the evolution of the Mexican soul into a determined orbit.” Indian inertia may, therefore, be historically and psychologically—not strictly biologically—determined, but it is nonetheless deterministically inescapable. Indeed, its transmission through generations appears to follow biological imperatives that defeat attempts at change or reform: “Superior to man’s will is a biological law which precludes any fundamental suppression of the past.”¹⁰⁵

Such psychological determinism, with its bizarre borrowings from Freud and Jung, has remained a staple of *indigenista*—and Indianist—thought. Marroquín,

offering a milder version, sees the Indian as “a socioeconomic category historically conditioned ever since the Spanish conquest,” since that involved “a psychological trauma . . . transmitted to [the Indians’] descendants.”¹⁰⁶ And the radical Indianists of recent years have reworked the theme, stressing the “collective memory” of the Indian, and the latent “residues” that must be recovered and utilized in the reconstruction of the Indianist utopia.¹⁰⁷ Nor is the idea confined to intellectual theories. A *político* landlord of the Valle del Mezquital observes: “The Indian is a completely isolated type . . . [who] carries the complex of the epoch of the Conquest.”¹⁰⁸ It should be stressed that this quasi-Jungian psychological attribution is not only deterministic (imputing to all Indians a common, ineluctable psyche), but also unproven, and probably unprovable. Empirical evidence points to the great gulf—of historical experience and cultural transformation—which separates twentieth-century Mexican Indians from their supposed sixteenth-century forebears, and which consigns any notion of a collective psychological inheritance to the realm of metaphysics.¹⁰⁹

Revolutionary *indigenismo*—and, later, Indianism—thus embodied assumptions that were, arguably, racist. In some (moderate) cases, racism was an intellectual encumbrance that could not be shaken off; it stood as testimony to the continuities linking Porfirian and revolutionary thought. In other cases, reverse racism developed by way of reaction against Porfirian prejudices. In almost all cases, too, the positive rehabilitation—or even exaltation—of the Indian and mestizo carried negative implications for other “races”: that is, the racist tendencies of *indigenismo*/Indianism manifested themselves—logically—in derogations of non-Indian or mestizo “races.” Here, the potential evidence is abundant, but it is not always easy to establish whether *indigenista* antipathies to blacks, Spaniards, North Americans, or Chinese are strictly racist, or merely nationalist.

The United States, for example, figured as a bugbear of much revolutionary nationalist *indigenista* thought. Just as Sierra had urged nation-building in order to counter the looming threat of the United States, so Gamio, who was no outright xenophobe, deplored the Americanization of Baja California (“absolutely exotic, Yankeeified”) and expressed confidence that Protestantism (“abstract, exotic, iconoclastic, and incomprehensible”) could never appeal to Mexico’s Indians.¹¹⁰ Vasconcelos argued that North Americans and Latin Americans, being offspring of different “parental races,” revealed contrasting “racial, temperamental and spiritual differences”; later, as he shifted right, he penned yet more bitter diatribes against the United States, denouncing both *pochismo* (the hybrid U.S./Mexican culture of Northern Mexico) and pro-Americanism, that “Saxonism, which disguises itself with the cosmetic of the most deficient civilization which history has known.”¹¹¹

Generally, however, North Americans escaped racist—as against political or cultural—deprecation, and other ethnic groups, more readily stigmatized, bore the brunt. Molina Enríquez, keen to rehabilitate the mestizo, had no time for blacks; for some enthusiastic *indigenistas*, the necessary corollary of rehabilitating the Indians was sweeping, “systematic” condemnation of Spaniards, the hated *gachupines*.¹¹²

But the clearest example of xenophobia, undoubtedly racist and, I suggest, functionally related to *indigenista* nationalism, was Sinophobia.

During and after the Revolution, Mexico's Chinese population was subjected to sustained persecution, which led to mass expulsions in 1931.¹¹³ The background can be quickly sketched. Chinese immigration to Mexico, actively encouraged by the Díaz government, had never been extensive—the total Chinese population in 1910 was probably less than 40,000—but it was sufficient to create sizeable colonies in certain states, especially in Northwestern Mexico.¹¹⁴ During the late Porfiriato, anti-Chinese sentiment surfaced, but it was not until the Revolution that it reached major proportions, evident in both popular violence and official policy. During the years of fighting, 1910–1920, the Chinese were repeatedly intimidated, attacked, robbed, and murdered. Over two hundred died in a single pogrom at Torreón in May 1911.¹¹⁵ There is no doubt that anti-Chinese feeling, while permitted and often encouraged by the authorities, had genuine popular roots. And, during the 1920s, politicians courted support by advocating, and implementing, anti-Chinese measures: economic controls, taxes, ghettoization, and ultimately expulsion. Such campaigns were conducted with all the panoply of xenophobic racism. The Chinese were stereotyped as filthy, disease-ridden, money-grubbing, parasitic, and sexually threatening. They spread sickness, gambling and drug-addiction. In the face of this “Chinese flood,” Mexican patriots had to “heal the country of this grave evil” which was “corrupting the organism of our race.”¹¹⁶

Several aspects of revolutionary Sinophobia deserve emphasis. First, it possessed a clear economic rationale. The Chinese, originally brought into the country to provide cheap labor, soon became highly successful shopkeepers, traders, and businessmen, especially in the booming Northwest. In particular, they established a profitable symbiotic liaison with the big U.S. mining companies, such as the Cananea Company, for whom they provided many of the basic retailing services and, in doing so, squeezed out Mexican competitors.¹¹⁷ They also sold to the urban poor, which made them vulnerable to popular and populist attacks, especially when times were hard. The circumstances were therefore appropriate for the growth of what Van den Berghé terms “competitive” racism—racism that, in terms of its socioeconomic rationale, differed from the racism that had historically afflicted Mexico's Indians.¹¹⁸

But Sinophobia also embodied a range of powerful “irrational” prejudices, which served to legitimize persecution and to lend it “theoretical” justification. Like Europe's Jews, the Chinese were seen as both parasitic and idle, yet also industrious and overly successful. They spread disease (trachoma and beriberi), encouraged vice (opium addiction and gambling), and debauched Mexican womanhood (Chinese immigration had been overwhelmingly male). Thus, they prostituted the Mexican “race.” Images of tentacular octopuses and corrupt blood, of contagious disease and exotic perversion, accompanied the anti-Chinese campaigns. Damned if they miscegenated, the Chinese were damned if they didn't; their separateness—“otherness”—gave rise to bizarre speculations and fantasies, which focused on the

Chinese' secret societies, their cloistered rituals, their penchant for poisoning. The Torreón pogrom was triggered by a supposed poisoning of revolutionaries by devious Chinese; the death of the great Sonoran Chinese-baiter, José María Arana, was attributed to Chinese poisoners.¹¹⁹ Even today, stories redolent of medieval anti-Semitism concerning the abduction and ritual murder of Mexican infants by Chinese are told in Northern Mexico.¹²⁰ The parallels with European anti-Semitism do not need to be labored. Here was a “racial” group (one that was somatically more recognizable than Jews, furthermore), engaged in successful economic competition with the Mexican petit bourgeoisie, a class which supplied many of the new revolutionary leaders of the 1920s. Here, too, was a group lacking powerful diplomatic protection, against whom the populist nationalism of the Revolution could be safely vented. Thus, just as that nationalism sought to “forge the nation” by integrating the Indian, so it also sought to cleanse the nation by expelling the Chinese (since integration, in this case, would mean racial surrender and decline). Sinophobia was the logical corollary of revolutionary *indigenismo*. And the outcome, in Mexico as in Europe, was discriminatory legislation, ghettoization, and expulsion.¹²¹

The final point to stress is the functional interdependence of *indigenista* nationalism and Sinophobia. That is not to say that all *indigenista* nationalists were Sinophobes or vice versa, but that the two were logically related, and, in fact, coexisted in the theory and practice of certain groups, notably the revolutionary nationalists (rather than, say, their conservative Catholic enemies). The first coherent statement of Sinophobia was the work of the Partido Liberal Mexicano, radical opponents of Díaz in the 1900s. The Sonorans who battled to national power in the following decade were also carriers of Sinophobia. Salvador Alvarado, eager to uplift the Indian and to modernize Mexico, not least by the promotion of immigration, was adamant that no Chinese should be admitted to the country: “Asiatics are in no respect . . . suitable, neither to improve our race, nor to increase and develop our resources. They never assimilate. They remain Asiatics and are in effect leeches sucking the money from our country”; those already in Mexico should be subjected to “the most severe sanitary regulations and should be directed to districts outside the cities where they might reside.”¹²² In the Northwest, a vigorous movement “in defence of the race,” which claimed five thousand members drawn from all social classes, called for similar measures against the Chinese.¹²³ And, with Calles, the Sonoran archnationalist, in the presidency, their wishes were progressively gratified. Regulation and discrimination increased, culminating in mass expulsions in 1931.¹²⁴ Thereafter, their target eliminated or much reduced, the Sinophobes quietened. Interestingly, however, the years immediately after were marked by a rising, vocal anti-Semitism, which emanated from similar sociopolitical circles: the petty-bourgeois revolutionaries who, having entered upon power and flaunted their nationalist credentials through the 1920s, now, in the economically depressed, ideologically innovative 1930s, sought to defend their notion of the Revolution—nationalist, capitalist, racist—in the face of new radical movements.¹²⁵

I began this discussion of race and revolution with a brief outline of race relations on the eve of the Revolution. Against this backdrop I discussed revolutionary theories and motives, noting how the revolutionaries, consciously reacting against Porfirian ideology, sought a nationalist incorporation of the Indian but how, in doing so, they tended to perpetuate alternative, subtler forms of racism. It cannot be denied, however, that the official ideology of the regime thoroughly repudiated the old, “Westernist,” Eurocentric racism and that this represented a significant change. But how significant was the change in society at large? How were practical race relations affected by this formal, maybe “superstructural,” reassessment? I cannot adequately answer so complex and intangible a question, but I can suggest some rough conclusions.

Postrevolutionary Race Relations

Some authorities, we have seen, deny the existence of racism in postrevolutionary Mexico, crediting, in part, the conscious exhortatory efforts of the regime.¹²⁶ But the antiracist rhetoric of national elites cannot be taken as sufficient proof. Racism can be driven underground (not necessarily very far underground); it can shift its premises (e.g., from biological to other, ostensibly more plausible, determinants) without that ideological shift substantially affecting its daily practice; and daily practice may even acquire added virulence as a result of official attempts at positive discrimination.

It is certainly true that the Revolution further accelerated the breakdown of castelike ethnic barriers, speeding Mexico’s transition to a society fully stratified along class lines; by 1970, with only 8 percent of the population linguistically classified as “Indian,” Mexico was approaching the status of a “monoethnic mestizo nation.”¹²⁷ In this, as in other respects, Molina Enríquez stands as an inspired prophet.¹²⁸ This outcome, however, owed less to government action (“the Revolution” as conscious policy) than to the unplanned consequences of revolutionary upheaval (war, social and spatial mobility, the making and breaking of fortunes) and the rapid economic development which the Revolution helped encourage over time (in short, “the Revolution” as unconscious process). Government efforts to educate and uplift the Indian population achieved only modest success.¹²⁹ In contrast, massive labor migration—national and international—and rapid urbanization, have both served to break down the old “regions of refuge” and to acquaint Indian groups with wage labor, Spanish, literacy, and political activism.¹³⁰ Incidentally, this has not invariably resulted in the “de-Indianization” which latter-day Indianists deplore; the old revolutionary *indigenistas* were right to suggest that acculturation could proceed without the inevitable destruction of Indian culture and identity.¹³¹

The secular decline of castelike ethnic barriers—assumed by many to be “racial”—thus proceeded apace, accelerated by the Revolution; and the social space in which racist beliefs and practices prevailed consequently tended to contract (we could phrase this less optimistically: other forms of inequality and prejudice held

sway in their place). But racism did not wither on the vine. Against the confident obituaries of Mexican racism already cited, we could set more sombre estimates of an “omnipresent dimension” of racism in Mexican society, or of a “profoundly racist ideology” which, according to one analysis, underpins the rule of both traditional rural caciques and also newer “liberal technocratic” regional bourgeoisies.¹³²

It may be hypothesized, first, that the very elimination of castelike ethnic barriers produced a racist reaction. In some areas, it is clear (though the subject has been little researched) that the political mobilization of Indian groups, their conquest of limited political or economic gains, their acquisition of new skills, all provoked a Ladino backlash. Especially in “regions of refuge,” where ethnic relations had retained a more archaic, quasi-colonial form, the transition to a more open, less ascriptive society displayed some of the features of Van den Berghe’s “competitive” racism—which, I have argued, underpinned popular Sinophobia. But whereas Sinophobia could boldly trumpet its message since it was legitimized by the regime, Ladino racism had to remain more mute and circumspect, as it clashed with official norms. Nevertheless, it is clear that white and mestizo victims of caste erosion denounced Indian uppishness and sought to counter it, reasserting their traditional “racial” (i.e., ethnic) superiority. Landlords lamented the postrevolutionary insouciance of once-docile Indians; lower-class mestizos (the racist constituency Van den Berghe would emphasize) cleaved to their eroding ethnic privilege. At Dzitas (Yucatán), the Indians had “got out of their place,” securing political office and “no longer, by gesture and manner of speech, indicat[ing] that respect for *vecinos* which old *vecinos* regard as their due”; in response, the *vecinos* clung doggedly to their sole social asset—Spanish surname and lineage.¹³³ Down to the present, in Indian zones, one hears the (mestizo) comment that “the Indian who frees himself is dangerous . . . if he enters respectable circles [*el medio cultural*] without dominating himself he is a bad character; and if he manages to dominate himself, he becomes a protector of his own kind.”¹³⁴

The erosion of “regions of refuge”—the classic Indian zones, especially of the South—has tended to swell, relatively, the number of acculturated Indians: the “Indo-mestizos” of Molina Enríquez and “folk” peoples of Redfield and Eyer Simpson, groups that are more bilingual, more integrated into the national economy and politics, yet still ethnically “Indian” (in terms, for example, of dress, religion, “cargo,” and *compadrazgo* systems). Indeed, the Revolution has tended to foster this development by means of *indigenista* policy, agrarian reform, and rural education. From the 1920s to the present, allegedly “Indian” values have been officially exalted. Official policy has produced the great showpiece of Indian culture and, according to the logic of revolutionary *indigenismo*, the “monument to Mexican nationalism,” namely, Mexico City’s Museum of Anthropology; it has encouraged a romantic valorization of “Indian” arts and crafts, dance and music (witness the Ballet Folklórico); it has created symbolic constructs like the Plaza of the Three Cultures at Tlatelolco.¹³⁵ Latter-day “cultural extremists,” we have seen,

seek to go even further in exalting Indianness.

Yet there is a paradox at the heart of such policies. The Indians whose culture is valorized and whose emancipation is proclaimed find themselves once again in the position of reacting to an imposed ideology. Their reaction is utilitarian: they exploit whatever opportunities official *indigenismo* confers, even playing up to their exotic or romantic official image. At Hueyapan, villagers “put on an ethnic show” for a visiting gubernatorial candidate, complete with ersatz Indian garb and Nahuatl script.¹³⁶ In the Valle del Mezquital, Otomí political bosses use Indian identity in order to maintain ethnic marginality and traditional *caciquista* authority.¹³⁷ In Michoacán, Indianness becomes a useful political weapon for hardheaded Tarascan caciques engaged in rough power-politics. In this last case, it is clear, ethnicity represents a political option more than an ascriptive inevitability.¹³⁸

Official ideology, we may say, has thus perpetuated a kind of instrumental Indianness. But this Indianness stands at odds with social reality. For perceptions of Indian inferiority still permeate society, official ideology notwithstanding. White/mestizo deprecation of supposed Indian attributes keeps alive the old pattern of negative Indian identification: “to be Indian in Hueyapan is to have a primarily negative identity”; Indians, in other words, are still defined in terms not of positive attributes but rather of negative failings—lack of education, of fluency in Spanish, of shoes or baths or other material possessions.¹³⁹ And, as in the past, these criteria constantly shift, as Mexican society itself changes, creating new cultural desiderata.

A whole range of prejudices and discriminations therefore exists, but exists in defiance of official ideology. Indian languages are officially endorsed, unofficially frowned upon. Naranjeños “assert that they know Tarascan too, or express guilt when their language is faulty. On the other hand, monolingual Tarascans from Acajo are scoffed at and many people avoid using the indigenous tongue for fear of being mocked as ‘Indians’ in the streets.”¹⁴⁰ So, too, with dress: an Indian woman spurns the traditional skirt “because her husband did not want her or his daughters to dress like ‘Indians’.”¹⁴¹ And religion: Agustín Gómez, a member of one of Oscar Lewis’ “five families,” “was of the opinion that [his wife] Rosa was more backward and ‘Indian’ than he in religious matters,” since she skimped on Catholic ritual.¹⁴²

The ancient practice of “whitening” also continues, reinforced by film, television, and advertising stereotypes. The aesthetic preferences of earlier literary elites (“You find almost in every one of our Indian or mestizo poets, dark of skin themselves, the ardent eulogy of the white hands, the pale cheek, of the *amada*,” Vasconcelos observed) become the stock-in-trade of today’s soap operas.¹⁴³ Naranja witnessed the “romantic suicide of a girl whose mother would not let her marry a nephew of Primo Tapia [the Indian *agrarista*] because he, the nephew, was ‘too Indian’.” The Naranja caciques, in fact, have tended to practice ethnic exogamy (so, too, have Mexican presidents; no president, I am reliably told, has ever married a woman darker than himself).¹⁴⁴

Above all, Indians have remained subject to informal discrimination, based on anti-Indian prejudice, which is rooted in the subsoil of Mexican culture. The people

of Hueyapan are “acutely aware of still being Indians, for they are constantly so designated by outsiders.”¹⁴⁵ In the Sierra de Puebla, mestizos are still the self-styled *gente de razón* (respectable folk), Nahuatl-speaking Indians are *coyotes*.¹⁴⁶ Other pejorative terms abound, not least *indio* and *indito*: there are no *indios* in Mérida, Redfield commented in the 1930s, “except as the term becomes an epithet addressed to any low-class person, especially if dark in complexion or rude in behavior.”¹⁴⁷ The practice has not died. In the Valle del Mezquital, for example, much of the old grass-roots racism lives on: the Otomí “have always been negligent . . . they are difficult people, stubborn by nature of their race”; “they’re half-mules, they lack training”; “the Otomí is a person backward by nature.” And, again, we encounter the lazy native: “the chief problem that most of the dominant class cite is that of the apathy, idleness, and boorishness of the Indian population.”¹⁴⁸

It is worth adding that the Valle de Mezquital data do not reveal a uniform attachment to strict biological racism on the part of non-Indians; rather, biological racism consorts with vaguer imputations of Indian backwardness, which for some is environmentally determined, for some corrigible by means of education. To that extent, perhaps, official *indigenismo* may have left a mark. But the weight of evidence supports the contention made earlier, in more abstract terms: that is, the demise of biological racism by no means spells the end of racism, which may be predicated upon other deterministic factors, and which is likely to survive, irrespective of shifts in official ideology, so long as sociopolitical circumstances are propitious.

The conflict between official ideology and sociopolitical circumstances leaves Indians—still victims of externally imposed categories—caught in a dilemma. Official ideology proclaims their worth, even their superiority (hence the phenomenon of instrumental *indigenismo*); but sociopolitical circumstances repeatedly display the reality of prejudice. Indians “are discriminated against for being Indian and at the same time admired for being the ‘real soul’ of Mexico, living proof of Mexico’s noble pre-Hispanic heritage.”¹⁴⁹ The dilemma is apparent at both the individual and the collective levels, and one recurrent consequence, at the latter level, is the frequent polarization of Indian communities not according to conventional political criteria of Left and Right but rather in terms of a conflict between modernizers and traditionalists, between those who ally with the forces of acculturation and those who cleave to tradition, between those who, in the Tepoztlán of the 1920s, were known as the *correctos* and those who were denoted *tonitos*.¹⁵⁰

Official *indigenismo* may thus have softened—or at least silenced—some of the earlier excesses of full-fledged biological racism. But it contained its own contradictions, which led it to devise racist formulae of its own, and it wrestled with an intractably racist society. There can be no doubt that racism has declined since the days of Díaz, but that decline has been principally the result of rapid acculturation, spurred by social upheaval and economic development. The “Indian problem” has become more manageable chiefly because the number of Indians has declined, certainly relatively; and, one might add, because alternative problems have become

more acute. But where Indians remain, racism remains, and government fiat can no more eliminate racism in Mexico than it can in Britain or the United States. Government fiat is a necessary but far from sufficient condition for its elimination. The racial theorists of the Porfiriato may have been relegated to dusty bookshelves, but the daily practice that their theories rationalized continues. And it is likely to continue until either the sociopolitical circumstances that nurture it are radically changed, or Indian ethnic identity is rendered socially neutral, that is, until ethnically patterned forms of subordination are completely replaced by class relations, a process that is well advanced, but still far from complete. If radical change does not solve the “Indian problem,” continued “development” will eventually remove it altogether.

Notes

1. All four were prolific writers as well as active administrators. Basic careers were as follows. Manuel Gamio (1883–1960): pioneer anthropologist and archaeologist; undersecretary of education, 1925; first director of the Interamerican Indigenista Institute (1942–1960); considered “the true pioneer of modern indigenismo in Mexico and the Continent” (*Diccionario Porrúa de Historia, Biografía, y Geografía de México* [Mexico: Editorial Porrúa, 1986], p. 1143). José Vasconcelos (1881–1959): philosopher, revolutionary intellectual, and political activist; director of the National University; secretary of education (1921–1924); unsuccessful presidential candidate, 1929; director of the Biblioteca de México, 1940. Alfonso Caso (1896–1970): archaeologist and *indigenista*; excavator of Monte Albán; director of the National Museum, 1933–1934, of the National Preparatory School, 1938, and of the National Institute of Anthropology and History, 1939–1944; rector of the National University, 1944–1945. Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán (b.1908): physician; director of *indigenista* affairs, Department of Education, 1946–1952; federal deputy, Veracruz, 1961–1964; director-general, National Indigenista Institute, 1971–1972.

2. José Vasconcelos, *La raza cósmica, misión de la raza iberoamericana* (Paris: Agencia Mundial de Librería, 1925); Andrés Molina Enríquez, *Los grandes problemas nacionales* (Mexico: A. Carranza, 1909).

3. Pierre L. Van den Berghe, *Race and Racism: A Comparative Perspective* (New York: Wiley, 1967), pp. 55–56.

4. Ashley Montagu, *Race, Science and Humanity* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1963), p. iii.

5. John Rex, “The Concept of Race in Sociological Theory,” in Sami Zubaida, ed., *Race and Racialism* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1970), pp. 37–38.

6. Frank B. Livingstone, “On the non-existence of human races,” in Ashley Montagu, ed., *The Concept of Race* (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1964), pp. 46–60; Stephen Jay Gould, *Ever Since Darwin: Reflections in Natural History* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1986), ch. 8, pt. A.

7. Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán, *La población negra de México, 1519–1810* (Mexico: Ediciones Fuente Cultural, 1946).

8. In the jargon of genetics, such “nomenclatural stasis” could not handle a “patently dynamic system”: Gould, *Ever Since Darwin*, p. 236. Anselmo Marino Flores, “Indian Population and Its Identification,” in Manning Nash, ed., *Handbook of Middle American Indians*, VI, *Social Anthropology* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1975), p. 14; Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán, *Obra polémica* (Mexico: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1976), p. 127.

9. Richard J. Salvucci, *Textiles and Capitalism in Mexico: An Economic History of the Obrajes, 1539–1840* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), p. 18.

10. Enrique Krauze, *Porfirio Díaz* (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1987), p. 8; Alan Knight, *The Mexican Revolution*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), I: pp. 3–4. The source is an American, although an American who had lived in Mexico for twenty-four years, and whose views would have tallied with those of elite Mexicans.

11. Hence the old adage, “Money whitens.” F. Fuenzalida, cited by Françoise Morin, “Indien, indigénisme, indianité,” in *Indianité, ethnocide, indigénisme en Amérique Latine* (Paris: Editions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1982), p. 4.

12. Robert Redfield, *The Folk Culture of Yucatan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1950), pp. 13, 79; Paul Friedrich, *The Princes of Naranja: An Essay in Anthrohistorical Method* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), p. 185.

13. Hugo G. Nuttini and Betty Bell, *Ritual Kinship: The Structure and Historical Development of the Compadrazgo System in Rural Tlaxcala*, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), I: p. 13.

14. Manuel Gamio, *Forjando patria* (1916; reprint, Mexico: Editorial Porrúa, 1960), pp. 171–181.

15. *Ibid.*, pp. 9, 171–181; Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán, “Prólogo” to Alfonso Caso, *La comunidad indígena* (Mexico: Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1971), p. 20.

16. F. Rodríguez Cabo to Departamento de Trabajo, 30 September 1935, Archivo General de la Nación, Presidentes, Lázaro Cárdenas, 533.4/12 (henceforth: AGN/LC); Guillermo Bonfil Batalla, *Utopía y revolución: El pensamiento político contemporáneo de los indios en América Latina* (Mexico: Editorial Nueva Imagen, 1981), p. 21.

17. Judith Friedlander, *Being Indian in Hueyapan: A Study of Forced Identity in Contemporary Mexico* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1975), p. 77.

18. Oscar Lewis, *Pedro Martínez: A Mexican Peasant and His Family* (London: Panther Books, 1969), p. 28; see also Gregory G. Reck, *In the Shadow of Tlaloc: Life in a Mexican Village* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1978), p. 57.

19. Alejandro Marroquín, *Balance del indigenismo. Informe sobre la política indígena en América Latina* (Mexico: Instituto Indigenista Interamericano, 1972), p. 8.

20. Caso, *La comunidad indígena*, pp. 10–11, 89–90.

21. Friedlander, *Being Indian*, pp. 72–73.
22. Bonfil Batalla, *Utopía y revolución*, p. 19. On which, see Guillermo de la Peña, "Orden social y educación indígena en México: la pervivencia de un legado colonial," in Susana Glantz, ed., *La heterodoxia recuperada: en torno a Angel Palerm* (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1987), pp. 286–299.
23. Ida Altman and James Lockhart, eds., *Provinces of Early Mexico: Variants of Spanish American Regional Evolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), p. 99; William Taylor, *Drink, Homicide and Rebellion in Colonial Mexican Villages* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1979).
24. Eyster N. Simpson, *The Ejido: Mexico's Way Out* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1937), p. 243; Friedlander, *Being Indian*, pp. 83–100.
25. Paul Friedrich, *Agrarian Revolt in a Mexican Village* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), pp. 47, 51; John Womack, Jr., *Zapata and the Mexican Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1969), p. 243.
26. Womack, *Zapata*, pp. 100–102, 142; Gamio, *Forjando patria*, pp. 176–177. An indication of Gamio's misguided understanding of Zapatismo comes with his appreciation of that revolutionary who has "most sensibly grasped the Zapatista problem and conceived adequate measures to resolve it"—namely, the corrupt scourge of Morelos, Pablo González, p. 181.
27. Claude Bataillon, "Note sur l'indigenisme au Mexique," in Morin, *Indianité* (see n.11), p. 93.
28. Gamio, *Forjando patria*, pp. 93, 174; Marroquín, *Balance*, p. 59.
29. "Indigenismo represents neither the ideology of the Indian nor of the Spaniard, but rather that of the mestizo": Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán, "The Indian and the Mexican Revolution," lecture, University of Texas, n.d., p. 1.
30. Gamio, *Forjando patria*, pp. 22, 25, 94–95.
31. Van den Berghe, *Race and Racism*, pp. 29, 55; Moisés González Navarro, "Mestizaje in Mexico in the Nineteenth Century," in Magnus Mörner, ed., *Race and Class in Latin America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), pp. 145–155.
32. Rodolfo Stavenhagen, "México: minorías étnicas y política cultural," *Nexos* 19, July 1979, p. 13. Note also Rex's critique of Oliver C. Cox's class-reductionist thesis, "The Concept of Race," p. 42, and Jorge Hernández Díaz, "Relaciones interétnicas contemporáneas en Oaxaca," in Alicia M. Barabas and Miguel A. Bartolomé, eds., *Etnicidad y pluralismo cultural: La dinámica étnica en Oaxaca* (Mexico: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1986), pp. 310–315.
33. Aguirre Beltrán, *Obra polémica*, pp. 35–40; Arnaldo Córdova, *La ideología de la revolución mexicana: La formación del nuevo régimen* (Mexico: Ediciones Era, 1973), pp. 53–54, 63–64; Moisés González Navarro, *Historia moderna de México: El Porfiriato, la vida social* (Mexico: Editorial Hermes, 1970), pp. 150–177.
34. Justo Sierra, *The Political Evolution of the Mexican People*, transl. Charles Ramsdell (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1969), p. 368.
35. Syed Hussein Alatas, *The Myth of the Lazy Native* (London: Frank Cass, 1977); Alan Knight, "Mexican Peonage: What Was It and Why Was It?," *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 18 (1986): 55–56; and note the interesting educational examples given by Mary Kay Vaughan, *The State, Education and Social Class in Mexico, 1880–1928* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1982), pp. 26–29.
36. Knight, *Mexican Revolution*, I: 88; Womack, *Zapata*, p. 41.
37. Knight, "Mexican Peonage," pp. 61–73.
38. Sierra, *Political Evolution*, pp. 352, 368.
39. Martin S. Stabb, "Indigenism and Racism in Mexican Thought, 1857–1911," *Journal of Inter-American Studies*, I (1959): 405–443; T. G. Powell, "Mexican Intellectuals and the Indian Question, 1876–1911," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 48 (1968): 19–36; William D. Raat, "Ideas and Society in Don Porfirio's Mexico," *The Americas* 30 (1973): pp. 32–53.
40. Vaughan, *The State*, ch. 2; De la Peña, "Orden social," pp. 306–307.
41. Frederick Starr, *In Indian Mexico: A Narrative of Travel and Labor* (Chicago: Forbes & Co., 1908), p. 100.
42. For a stimulating analysis of the tradition of elite *indigenismo*, see David Brading, *The Origins of Mexican Nationalism* (Cambridge: Centre of Latin American Studies, 1985).
43. Knight, *Mexican Revolution*, I: 10.
44. Héctor Aguilar Camín, *La frontera nómada: Sonora y la Revolución Mexicana* (Mexico: Siglo Veintiuno, 1985), pp. 59–66.
45. Knight, *Mexican Revolution*, I: 18; Womack, *Zapata*, pp. 41–42, 63. Recent scholarship has revealed, at the level of the state executives, a clear shift away from the popular, home-grown, caudillo-style governors of the early Porfiriato, to the more cosmopolitan, elitist, and "plutocratic" governors of the 1890s and 1900s. This shift, from populists to plutocrats, was associated with more openly contemptuous and racist elite attitudes: see Friedrich Katz, ed., *Porfirio Díaz frente al descontento popular regional, 1891–1893* (Mexico: Universidad Iberoamericana, 1986), p. 21, and F.-X. Guerra, *De l'Ancien Régime à la Révolution*, 2 vols. (Paris: Editions L'Harmattan, 1985), I: 94–95.
46. Caso, *La comunidad indígena*, p. 127.
47. *Diario de los debates del congreso constituyente, 1916–1917*, 2 vols. (Mexico: Talleres Gráficos de la Nación, 1960), I: 703. For a resumé of *indigenista* policy in the 1920s, see Simpson, *The Ejido*, ch. 16.
48. Gamio, *Forjando patria*, pp. 73, 175; Aguirre Beltrán, *Obra polémica*, p. 27; Caso, *La comunidad indígena*, pp. 47–52; and Aguirre Beltrán's prologue to Caso, *La comunidad indígena*, p. 23: "for Gamio as for Caso, archaeology in our country has, as its predominant practical function, that of supplying the Mexican with an identity, that is, with a root in the most remote past." David A. Brading, "Manuel Gamio and Official Indigenismo in Mexico," *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 7 (1988): 87–88, exaggerates Gamio's desire to "destroy the native culture which had emerged during the colonial period."

49. Programa de Acción del Departamento de Asuntos Indígenas, 10 September 1936, AGN/LC 545.2/5.

50. Aguirre Beltrán, "The Indian and the Mexican Revolution" (see n. 29).

51. Thus, on the one hand, Cárdenas stressed the need to give "great attention" to the Indian question (which, arguably, he did); yet at the same time he leaned to the "leftist Westernist" position, stating that "the program for the emancipation of the Indian is, in essence, that of the emancipation of the proletariat of any country, without forgetting the special conditions of his climate, past and needs, which give him a distinct physiognomy": Luis González, *Historia de la revolución mexicana, 1934–40. Los días del presidente Cárdenas* (Mexico: El Colegio de México, 1981), pp. 117–128.

52. Octavio Paz, *The Other Mexico: Critique of the Pyramid*, transl. Lysander Kemp (New York: Grove Press, 1972), p. 91.

53. Friedlander, *Being Indian*, pp. xv–xvi, and ch. 7.

54. Vicente Lombardo Toledano, *El problema del indio* (Mexico: Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1973), pp. 82, 94, 101; Aguirre Beltrán, prologue to Caso, *La comunidad indígena*, p. 27.

55. Aguirre Beltrán, prologue to Caso, *La comunidad indígena*, pp. 33–36, discusses van Zantwijk vs. Caso; and Aguirre Beltrán, *Obra polémica*, pp. 173–227, rebuts recent radical critiques of traditional *indigenismo* launched by those who denounce acculturation and assert the nationhood of Indian groups "whom *indigenista* ideology denies the right of a separate cultural existence" (p. 220).

56. Bonfil Batalla, *Utopía y revolución*, p. 30; Marie-Chantal Barre, *Ideologías indigenistas y movimientos indios* (Mexico: Siglo Veintiuno, 1983):

57. Luis Cabrera, "El balance de la revolución," in *La revolución es la revolución* (Guanajuato: Ediciones del Gobierno del Estado de Guanajuato, 1977), p. 282; Friedlander, *Being Indian*, pp. 166–167.

58. Gamio, *Forjando patria*, p. 159; Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán, *Teoría y práctica de la educación indígena* (Mexico: Sepsetentas, 1973).

59. Friedlander, *Being Indian*, pp. 68, 129–131.

60. *Ibid.*, pp. 135–136, 155; Gilbert M. Joseph, *Revolution from Without: Yucatán, Mexico and the United States, 1880–1924* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 220–224.

61. Cabrera, "El balance de la revolución," p. 281; Van den Berghe, *Race and Racism*, pp. 55–56; Caso, *La comunidad indígena*, p. 109.

62. Aline Helg, "The Idea of Race in Argentina, 1880–1930," unpublished paper, 1987, pp. 12, 66. For Mexico 1910 marked not only the centennial and the outbreak of the Revolution; it also signaled—so it has been argued—"the beginning of the contemporary period of Mexican thought," a break involving a rejection of positivism and "scientism," a turn toward idealism, mysticism, and Bergsonianism, and a certain emphasis on shared Latin American culture. The Ateneo de la Juventud (1909) is seen as the institutional pioneer of this intellectual shift which, while it had little direct connection to the Revolution, certainly lent encouragement to new

departures in political philosophy, such as *indigenismo*. See Patrick Romanell, *Making of the Mexican Mind* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1971), pp. 56–66 and Enrique Krauze, *Caudillos culturales en la revolución mexicana* (Mexico: Siglo Veintiuno, 1976), p. 51.

63. See note 39.

64. Joseph, *Revolution from Without*, pp. 107–109; Thomas L. Benjamin, "Passages to Leviathan: Chiapas and the Mexican State, 1891–1947," PhD diss., Michigan State University, 1981, pp. 137–141. The response of revolutionary elites to their confrontation with "the Indian" varied. "In the hard struggle which we sustained against the soldiers of reaction," Gen. Felipe Dusart later recalled, "we were able to acquire a profound knowledge of the problem of our Indian race"; "fortunately," an academic concurred, "the violent phase of the Revolution brought about the exact and indisputable revelation that the Indian is an active force within our nationality" (Dusart speech, 18 October 1935; Rafael Molina Betancourt to Cárdenas, "Al margen de las afirmaciones presidenciales sobre el problema social de la incorporación indígena en la vida nacional," 30 June 1936, both AGN/LC 545.3/147). But compare the contemporary opinion of Ciro B. Ceballos, a prominent Carrancista propagandist, who argued the beneficial consequences of the revolutionary triumph of the northerners (*los fronterizos*), unless it were to turn out that "on putting themselves in intimate contact with the rest of the Mexican population . . . the former [northerners] were to acquire the vices of the latter, leading to the degeneration, if not the transformation, of the essential conditions of their present indisputable racial superiority" (*El Demócrata*, 18 January 1916).

65. Salvador Alvarado to Carranza, 25 January 1916, in Isidro Fabela, *Documentos históricos de la revolución mexicana, revolución y régimen constitucionalista* 27 vols. (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1960–1973) V: pp. 22–23.

66. Benjamin, "Passages to Leviathan," pp. 229–230.

67. Diéguez's exact words translate: "The best Yaqui is a dead Yaqui" (Hector Aguilar Camín, "The Relevant Tradition: Sonoran Leaders in the Revolution," in D. A. Brading, ed., *Caudillo and Peasant in the Mexican Revolution* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980], p. 94).

68. Córdova, *La ideología*, pp. 270–273.

69. Caso, *La comunidad indígena*, pp. 63, 103.

70. Richard Sinkin, *The Mexican Reform, 1855–76: A Study in Liberal Nation-Building* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979); Córdova, *La ideología*, pp. 46–62.

71. Caso, *La comunidad indígena*, p. 110.

72. For active *políticos* like Calles, Obregón, or Alvarado, "national reconstruction" was the slogan, to which end Calles preached "a robust nationalism . . . above all; and a firm and energetic resolve to 'make the nation' [*hacer patria*]": (Córdova, *Ideología*, pp. 274, 384). For intellectual variations on this theme, note Krauze, *Caudillos culturales*, pp. 106, 201–202, 212–218, 220–221. Romanell, *Making of the Mexican Mind*, p. 63, concludes that the "cultural rehabilitation" initiated in

1910 by the Ateneo de la Juventud “is the ideological expression of the Mexican Revolution, insofar as we take that Revolution to signify a *discovery* of Mexico by Mexicans as well as a *recovery* of Mexico for Mexicans.”

73. Knight, *Mexican Revolution*, II: 373; Caso, *La comunidad indígena*, pp. 101–102.

74. Brading, *Origins*, pp. 53–54, and idem, *Prophecy and Myth in Mexican History* (Cambridge: Centre for Latin American Studies, 1984), p. 67.

75. Gamio, *Forjando patria*, pp. 5–6, 98.

76. Brading, *Prophecy*, pp. 64–71, offers a succinct and perceptive analysis of Molina Enríquez.

77. Cited by Cabrera, “El balance de la revolución,” p. 282.

78. *El Reformador* (founder and editor, Andrés Molina Enríquez), no. 31 (18 September 1936), in AGN/LC 545.3/147.

79. Cabrera, “El balance de la revolución,” p. 282.

80. Lind, an ex-governor of Minnesota of Swedish extraction, asserted the superiority not only of the “Teutonic” over the “Latin” races, but also of Mexico’s northern mestizo over its southern Indian people; this second judgment was warmly received by racist Carrancistas like Ceballos (*El Demócrata*, 18 January 1916).

81. José Vasconcelos, “The Latin-American Basis of Mexican Civilization,” in José Vasconcelos and Manuel Gamio, *Aspects of Mexican Civilization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1926), pp. 83, 92–94, *passim*.

82. Gamio, *Forjando patria*, p. 96; Aguirre Beltrán, *Teoría y práctica*, p. 24.

83. Gamio, *Forjando patria*, p. 94.

84. *Ibid.*, pp. 96–97.

85. Simpson, *The Ejido*, pp. 243, 535ff.

86. Caso, *La comunidad indígena*, p. 105, cites the “positive values” of Indian culture which should be protected and conserved during the process of acculturation that he advocates; these include “communal labor, the obligation to perform services [and] respect for natural authorities”—a contentiously normative list!

87. Marvin Harris, quoted by Michael Banton, “The Concept of Racism,” in Zubaida, *Race and Racialism*, p. 27.

88. The racist assumptions that underlay high politics are well illustrated in Christopher Thorne, *Allies of a Kind: The United States, Britain and the War against Japan, 1941–1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), pp. 4–11, 167–168, *passim*.

89. Reverse racism was apparent not only when conventional hierarchies of “racial” worth were dogmatically reversed, but also—albeit more subtly—when “racial” differences (as against hierarchies) were asserted, often with a view to displaying the distinctive cultural contributions of different “races.” “To countenance the concept of race by seeming to show that the great ethnic groups constituting human kind as a whole have, as such, made their own peculiar contributions to our common heritage . . . would simply result in a reversal of racist doctrine. To attribute special psychological characteristics to the biological races,

with a positive definition, is as great a departure from scientific truth as to do so with a negative definition” (Claude Lévi-Strauss, “Race and History,” in Leo Kuper, ed., *Race, Science and Society* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1975], p. 95).

90. Gamio, *Forjando patria*, pp. 7–8, 12–13, 21, 24, 94. Writing a decade later, Gamio still retained his racial assumptions: while the “racial characteristics” of the original Mesoamerican native population were “normal,” subsequent Indian-Spanish miscegenation, lacking “social, ethical or eugenic tendencies,” was “inharmonious” and abnormal, which it remained down to the nineteenth century (when “inter-breeding was still a very abnormal and anti-social thing . . . a convergence of the bad in the two races, not the good”). Furthermore, even today the differences between white and Indian remain “pathologically, anatomically, [and] physiologically . . . extremely great,” Gamio, “The Indian Basis of Mexican Civilization,” in Vasconcelos and Gamio, *Aspects*, pp. 105, 119, 124. In light of this, as well as of his own evidence, it is difficult to see how David Brading concludes that Gamio was able “to escape from the genetic determinism that then afflicted social thinking in Mexico,” “Manuel Gamio,” p. 79.

91. Gamio, *Forjando patria*, p. 21.

92. *Ibid.*, p. 23.

93. Vasconcelos, *Aspects*, pp. 84–87, 97. Parallels with Gilberto Freyre’s thesis of Luso-Brazilian colonialism spring to mind.

94. Salvador Alvarado, *La reconstrucción de México. Un mensaje a los pueblos de América*, 3 vols. (Mexico: A. Balleza y Cía., 1919) I: 339, 383–384.

95. Gómez Morín sees Mexico as the “bulwark of the race” against North America; Marte Gómez praises Vasconcelos’ grasp of “our racial future”; Múgica invokes “the Aztec blood that . . . generously shed over the centuries . . . in pursuit of the highest ideals, courses holy before the problems of the race” (Krauze, *Caudillos culturales*, p. 250; idem, *Vida política contemporánea: cartas de Marte R. Gómez*, 2 vols. [Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1978]) I: 22; Armando María y Campos, *Múgica: crónica biográfica* [Mexico, Cía. de Ediciones Populares, 1939], pp. 292, 295).

96. Samuel Ramos, *Profile of Man and Culture in Mexico*, transl. Peter G. Earle (1934, reprint, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1975), pp. 11, 27, 30–32, 40–41, 63–64, 87, 102, 119–120. Ramos’ “Egyptianism” obviously suggests comparisons with the imputation of “Orientalism” made by Western critics of Islamic society: see Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

97. Carlos Marín Foucher, “Iniciativa para crear el servicio militar obligatorio del indio,” June 1938, AGN/LC 545.3/147.

98. F. Rodríguez Cano to Departamento de Trabajo, 30 September 1935, AGN/LC 533.4/12.

99. Ramón P. De Negri, “La tragedia biológica y social de nuestros indígenas,” n.d. (1938?), AGN/LC 545.3/147.

100. Gamio, *Forjando patria*, pp. 18, 22, 107, 140–141, and idem, *Aspects*, p. 116; Cabrera, “El balance de la revolución,” p. 282. Francisco Bulnes’ theorized

racial hierarchy, which has been (rightly) seen as a prime example of Porfirian racial thought, stressed the determining factor of food: Francisco Bulnes, *El porvenir de las naciones hispano-americanas ante las recientes conquistas de Europa y Norteamérica* (Mexico: Imprenta de M. Nava, 1899), ch.1; Banton, "The Concept of Racism," p. 25, cites as "the first racist" Robert Knox, the Edinburgh anatomist who "held that each race was adapted to one habitat."

101. Banton, "The Concept of Racism," pp. 17, 31.

102. Rex, "The Concept of Race," pp. 39, 50.

103. Caso, *La comunidad indígena*, p. 93.

104. Gamio, *Forjando patria*, pp. 21, 95.

105. Ramos, *Profile*, pp. 30, 34, 37–40, 56, 119–120. Is it a grotesque misapplication of psychoanalytic theory to equate social collectivities, such as "Mexico," with individuals, thus to infer the existence of a collective unconscious, collective infantile traumas, etc.? I had assumed that such inferences were now generally dismissed by historians and psychoanalysts alike: "The last traces of Freud's notions about the 'racial' mind of inherited collective psychological dispositions that haunted his work have been weeded out by his successors as redundant, almost embarrassing reminders of nineteenth-century superstitions about a 'group soul':" Peter Gay, *Freud for Historians* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 146–147; see also David Hackett Fischer, *Historians' Fallacies: Toward a Logic of Historical Thought* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), pp. 192–195. Gay, however, sets out to overturn this consensus, developing—not at all convincingly—"Freud's argument that individual and social psychology are, for all practical purposes, identical," p. 159 and ch. 5, *passim*.

106. Marroquín, *Balance*, p. 10.

107. Bonfil Batalla, *Utopia*, p. 36; Morin, "Indien, indigenisme, indianité," p. 5 and *idem*, "Indianité et état," pp. 260, 263.

108. Roger Bartra, "El problema indígena y la ideología indigenista," *Revista Mexicana de Sociología* 36/3 (1974): 462.

109. Such psychological attributions are legitimately seen as deterministic even if they admit some—gradual, generational—transformation: Rex makes the point ("The Concept of Race," pp. 50–51) that "the distinction between deterministic and undeterministic belief systems is not absolute and . . . deterministic assumptions might well be found hidden in a theory of an undeterministic kind. Thus it may be said that a group of people are not yet ready in terms of education or economic advancement to assume equal rights, but if it is also held that the group concerned cannot be expected to advance economically or educationally during 25, 50, or 100 years, the belief operates deterministically." Collective psychological attributions would seem to be even less mutable—and therefore even more strictly deterministic. The empirical arguments against such attributions are many: Friedlander, *Being Indian*, p. 106, makes the telling point that the average illiterate, Nahuatl-speaking Hueyapeño "has never heard of Quetzalcoatl, Tlaloc or any other pre-hispanic god"; literacy and education are necessary prerequisites of such cultural

acquisitions.

110. Córdova, *La ideología*, pp. 80–81; Gamio, *Forjando patria*, p. 11. Gamio's views on Protestantism seem to have varied: cf. Brading, "Manuel Gamio," p. 86.

111. Vasconcelos, *Aspects*, pp. 11, 14, and *idem*, *Memorias, Ulises criollo, La tormenta* (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1982), p. 6.

112. Aguirre Beltrán, *Obra polémica*, pp. 46–47; Gamio, *Forjando patria*, p. 153.

113. Charles C. Cumberland, "The Sonoran Chinese and the Mexican Revolution," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 40 (1960): 191–211.

114. González Navarro, *La vida social*, pp. 166–172; Cabrera, "El balance de la revolución," p. 281; Evelyn Hu-Dehart, "Immigrants to a Developing Society: The Chinese in Northern Mexico, 1875–1932," *Journal of Arizona History* 21 (1980): 283.

115. Hu-Dehart, "Immigrants," p. 289; Knight, *Mexican Revolution*, I: 207–208.

116. Jesús Garza, Secretary, Comité de Salubridad Pública de San Pedro (Coahuila) Pro-Raza, to President Calles, 3 December 1924, AGN/PEC 104–CH–16.

117. Leo M. D. Jacques, "Have Quick More Money than Mandarins: The Chinese in Sonora," *Journal of Arizona History* 17 (1976): 205.

118. Van den Berghe, *Race and Racism*, pp. 29–30.

119. Hu-Dehart, "Immigrants," pp. 294–295; Jacques, "Chinese in Sonora," pp. 204, 207.

120. Personal communication from William French, on the basis of research done in Parral, Chihuahua.

121. Another relevant parallel suggests itself: the expropriation by nationalist regimes in East Africa of Asian traders and middlemen, who had prospered in symbiosis with colonial business interests, as the Chinese had in symbiosis with the big U.S. companies in Northern Mexico. In both cases, conscious nationalism justified an attack on an "alien" petite bourgeoisie, an attack that promised short-term political and economic advantages to the new nationalist elites (in both cases, too, the symbiotically linked corporate business interests both escaped racist obloquy and weathered economic nationalist pressures pretty well). The East African parallels would include the 1960s policy of Kenyanization and the 1970s expulsion of Asians from Uganda. Both redounded to the benefit of nationalist/populist regimes; neither affected the basic "dependency" of these economies vis-à-vis multinational capital. Short-term advantage, justified by racist theory, thus made possible a petty nationalization, which was probably economically counter-productive and which occurred in default of any more serious, structural nationalization. In some respects Mexican Sinophobia was, like German anti-Semitism, a "socialism of fools."

122. Alvarado, *La reconstrucción*, I: 148–149.

123. Hu-Dehart, "Immigrants," p. 292.

124. Adolfo Sirateire et al., Cucurpe, Sonora, to President Calles, 14 March 1925, AGN/PEC 104–CH–16, congratulating the president on the "energetic attitude he

has displayed in support of the anti-Chinese campaign”.

125. Hugh G. Campbell, *La derecha radical en México, 1929–1949* (Mexico: Sepsetentas, 1976), pp. 51–52, 68, 125, 127. Like its European counterparts, the Mexican secular radical Right of the 1930s combined anti-Semitism with antipathy to Communism and fervent nationalism; a nationalism that, in the Mexican case, claimed “revolutionary” origins (compare Italian fascism) and which built on the traditions of 1920s Sinophobia. More recently, too, Syrio-Lebanese groups have incurred racist attacks, for example, at Juchitán on the Isthmus of Tehuantepec.

126. Caso, *La comunidad indígena*, pp. 109, 155: “Mexican society rejects all racial discrimination”; Cabrera, “El balance de la revolución,” p. 281: “In Mexico race prejudices do not, fortunately, exist”; Van den Berghe, *Race and Racism*, p. 55: “The concept of race has become almost totally alien to Mexican culture.”

127. Aguirre Beltrán, prologue to Caso, *La comunidad indígena*, p. 39.

128. Brading, *Prophecy and Myth*, p. 71.

129. A 1946 government review of the *indigenista* educational policies of the 1930s and 1940s concluded that “the educational centers [thus established] . . . sustain an effort that is entirely inadequate in the face of the magnitude of the task they face”: *México: seis años de actividad nacional* (Mexico: Secretaría de Gobernación, 1946), p. 174. De la Peña, “Orden social,” p. 313, concurs.

130. “The departure of heads of families in search of work in the [Chiapas] coffee zone gives a great impulse to the incorporation of the Indian into a civilised state”: F. Rodríguez Cabo to Departamento de Trabajo, 30 September 1935, AGN/LC 533.4/12. Studies of migration to the United States frequently make the same point.

131. Seasonal migration has served to channel resources to highland Indian communities in Chiapas or Peru, thus helping to perpetuate both the communities and their “Indian” culture. More recently, the extensive migration of Mixtec workers from Oaxaca to the northern border has resulted in the formation, on the frontier, of a consciously Mixtec community: Michael Kearney, “Mixtec Political Consciousness: From Passive to Active Resistance,” paper given at the workshop on “Rural Revolt, the Mexican State and the United States: Historical and Contemporary Views,” Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, University of California, San Diego, February 1986. See also Margarita Nolasco, “Los Indios de México,” in Glantz, ed., *Heterodoxia recuperada*, pp. 349–350.

132. Bartra, “El problema indígena,” pp. 476–478; Bonfil Batalla, *Utopía y revolución*, pp. 42–43.

133. Redfield, *Folk Culture*, pp. 66–67; see also Rodolfo Stavenhagen, *Las clases sociales en las sociedades agrarias* (Mexico: Siglo Veintiuno, 1971), p. 238.

134. The comments of a cacique in the Valle del Mezquital, quoted in Bartra, “El problema indígena,” p. 462.

135. Stavenhagen, “México: minorías étnicas,” p. 23. Even before the present spectacular building was erected in the 1960s, its forerunner, the Museo Nacional de Arqueología, Historia y Etnografía, was deemed—by *indigenistas*—to be “the most genuinely national institution of the Republic,” a material symbol of ethnic

values and national identity: memorandum of the Organization of the Indians of the Republic to Cárdenas, January 1938, AGN/LC 545.3/147.

136. Friedlander, *Being Indian*, pp. 159–161.

137. Bartra, “El problema indígena,” pp. 467, 475.

138. Friedrich, *Princes*, p. 146: “A fundamental issue continued to be whether to ally oneself along the lines of Tarascan Indian ancestry, or in terms of some sort of non-ethnic class.”

139. Friedlander, *Being Indian*, p. 71.

140. Friedrich, *Princes*, p. 185.

141. Friedlander, *Being Indian*, p. 30 (though the date of this statement is not clear).

142. Oscar Lewis, *Five Families: Mexican Case Studies in the Culture of Poverty* (London: Souvenir Press, 1976), p. 68.

143. Friedlander, *Being Indian*, pp. 77–79; Vasconcelos, *Aspects*, p. 38.

144. Friedrich, *Princes*, pp. 121, 186.

145. Friedlander, *Being Indian*, pp. xv, 76.

146. P. Beaucage, “Comunidades indígenas de la sierra norte de Puebla,” *Revista Mexicana de Sociología* 36 (1974): 144. Other similar examples could be given.

147. Redfield, *Folk Culture*, p. 75; see also Friedlander, *Being Indian*, pp. 72, 148. Barta, “El problema indígena,” pp. 461–467.

149. Friedlander, *Being Indian*, p. xvii.

150. Robert Redfield, *Tepoztlán, a Mexican Village* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1946), p. 68.