

## **Anglo Thought and Anti-Mexican Sentiment**

It is difficult to pinpoint the exact origin of the negative stereotypes that Anglo-Americans have forced upon their Mexican-American counterparts. It seems likely that this conflict stems from that which originated at the Mexican/American border centuries ago. But these pervasive stereotypes are not secluded solely to the land at the border between Mexico and the United States. Nor is it witnessed only upon incident between the United States and Hispanic countries. Rather, the stereotypes to which Anglo Americans have held so tightly, pervade nearly every aspect of modern society, and as such, these stereotypes act as fuel to a fire that rages between Anglo and Mexican Americans even today. Here, we will attempt to come to a better understanding of current Anglo perceptions of Mexicans and Mexican culture, by first exploring the genesis of the racially charged and biased notions that seem to dictate the relationship. We will then trace the history of the perpetuation of these stereotypes in hope of disintegrating and eradicating such biased thought for the better of a more unified society.

In order to understand the origin of Anti-Hispanic sentiment in the Anglo world, we must first understand the idea that historians and scholars call "The Black Legend". This is possibly best explained by Juderias, who tells us that the Black

Legend is "the legend of an inquisitorial, ignorant, and fanatic Spain, incapable of taking its place among cultivated peoples either now or in the past," (194). By this count, such pervasive thought would date back to the sixteenth century, and to a time when Spain was a world leader. Certainly, this seems to be when most scholars believe that such attitudes toward Spain began to evolve. It is possible that Anglo hatred for Spanish rule began at this time, due in part to the relative affluence and privilege of Spaniards. Powell tells us that Spain was "the first global power to assume what came to be called 'the white man's burden' and, simultaneously, to defend Christendom against the powerful thrusts of a Eurasian infidel," (Preface). With such responsibility, Spain was certain to make enemies of those who did not agree with the country's foreign policy. Thus, when Spain had depleted much of its resources trying to maintain its place as a world leader, this power was eventually receded to "France and England, successors at the summit," (Preface). The hatred and envy toward Spain which had by that time been brewing for centuries manifested itself in propaganda. As Powell points out, Spain and Spaniards were "the first to feel the impact of the printing press as a propaganda weapon." This propaganda, he goes on to explain, later "became entrenched as history," (Preface).

Unfortunately, such propaganda led to the actual self-criticisms of the Spaniards. In many cases, they would come to hate their own heritage as much as other cultures despised them. These self-criticisms perhaps led to a greater universality of bigotry, as the Spaniards themselves spread false opinions of their culture and their people in their travels to other places in Europe. Bartholome De Las Casas is often attributed for the spread of anti-Hispanic sentiment through England. His self criticism is apparent in "A Very Brief Relation of the Destruction of the Indies, 1552." In this, he speaks out against Spanish colonization in America in 1492. As he explains that to the Native Americans, the Spaniards came "like most cruel Tygres, Wolves and Lions, enrag'd with a sharp and tedious hunger," (75). This paints a picture of an ignorant and bestial Spain that colonized the Americas without second thought to those who had come before. Certainly, we are taught this image of the colonizing Spain, even today; we are told that the Native Americans were "quiet lambs, endued with such blessed qualities," before the Spanish arrived and destroyed this peace.

So, we know how the stereotypes began, and how they spread across continents. Beginning with printed propaganda, and spread, perhaps to a great extent, through the self-criticisms of the Spanish. This seems to be the best theory towards the genesis of the pervasive negativity of Anglo-Americans toward

Mexican and Hispanic thought and culture. More importantly, however, Powell's hypothesis to the cause of this hatred acts as a warning for Western countries now facing the same situation. It seems apparent that the privilege of the Americas currently is relative to that of Spain in the sixteenth century. With such power, comes great responsibility. Hopefully in understanding the errors of the past, future generations can avoid repeating them.

While this theory seems to cover the origins of Anti-Mexican sentiment, it doesn't go far to explain why these stereotypes have prevailed over centuries and across borders. This may be an even more difficult question to answer. Certainly society has learned by now, the consequences of the denigration and subjugation of one culture to another, and yet it practices freely the forming and perpetuation of the stereotypes that lead to little else but such denigration and subjugation. Completely without consequence, it seems Anglo-American society has placed labels of negative connotation upon members of its Mexican counterpart. Unflattering terms such as "lazy", "ignorant", "superstitious", "cheating", "thieving" and "cowardly" have consistently been used to describe individual Hispanics as well as the culture as a whole.

The most logical explanation would be provided, in part by Powell, who relates the conflict between Anglo and Mexican

Americans to the differences in their work ethic and socio-religious background.

The Hispanic ethic is mostly a socialist one; that the ethic inherent in Catholic faith is best represented by that of communism and socialism. In Western society, communism is not only looked down upon, but essentially feared for its implications and threats to a comfortable Catholic lifestyle. These thoughts, "wrapped sometimes in the panicky feeling that Communists are ten feet tall in Latin America," lead to the brutal stereotypes and bigotry that have seemingly become all-too common in the Western world (Powell, 4).

In contrast, we understand that the Protestant ethic is one backed much more easily by the tenets of capitalism. This is not to say that Protestants are all Capitalists, and thus, by their very nature, coldhearted or cruel. Rather it is to explain that Protestantism was borne of a desire to escape the collective social order of the past, as much as it was a quest for religious freedom. The two, it was soon realized, are essentially inseparable because a communist society cannot permit religious freedom while at the same time, disallowing other such freedoms.

Weber directly attributes this social stratification to religious doctrine. He points out that "On superficial analysis...one might be tempted to express the [socio-religious]

difference by saying that the other-worldliness of Catholicism...must have brought up its adherents to a greater indifference to the good things of this world," (40). By this superficial account, we can certainly see why the cultures might act the way they do. Such an explanation would fit the judicial whims of the party on either side of the argument. For Protestants, it can be used as a criticism of the ascetic ideals of Catholicism; for Catholics, it adds fuel to the argument that "materialism results through the secularization of all ideals through Protestantism," (40). In this conflict, real or imagined, we can easily see how the stereotypes are perpetuated on each side of the divide.

Weber goes on to explain how the occupations of adherents to each of these religious affiliations seem to differ, and how the economic development of the culture is reflected therein. "In the past [the Catholics] have, unlike the Protestants, undergone no particularly prominent economic development in the times when they were persecuted...On the other hand, it is a fact that the Protestants...have shown a special tendency to develop economic rationalism which cannot be observed to the same extent among Catholics," (39-40). This is certainly not to say that the stereotypes placed upon the Catholic Mexican-Americans by their Anglo counterparts are in any way founded. This argument explains a difference between the two routes of

socio-religious thought, rather than attempting to create a hierarchy between the two. That is, one ideology is not considered any "better" or "worse" than the other. Rather, in this manner we can account for egalitarian differences between the two.





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