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Author(s): Jack D. Forbes

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The Use of Racial and Ethnic Terms in America: Management by Manipulation

by Jack D. Forbes

The continent of America, also known as the Middle Continent or the Western Hemisphere is subdivided into North America, Central America and South America.

Indigenous peoples have a bit of a problem, however, in that: (1) the United States and its dominant European-origin citizens have attempted to pre-empt the terms America and American; and (2) there has been a strong tendency, especially since the 1780s, to deny to Indigenous Americans the right to use the name of their own land. As a matter of fact, there is a strong tendency to also deny Native People the use of the name of any land within America, such as being Brazilian, Mexican, Canadian, and so on, unless the term "Indian" is also attached, as in "Brazilian Indian" (as "American Indian" is used instead of "American").

Some people believe that America as a name stems from the mountain range known as Amerique located in Nicaragua. Others believe that it stems from a word common to several American languages of the Caribbean and South America, namely Maraca (pronounced maracá, maráca, and mbaraca). This word, meaning rattle or gourd, is found as a place name in Venezuela (Maracapana, Maracay, Maracaibo), Trinidad (Maracas), Puerto Rico (Maracayu, etc.), Brazil (Maraca, Itamaraca) and elsewhere.

Many very early maps of the Caribbean region show an island located to the northwest of Venezuela (where Nicaragua is actually located) called "tamaraque" which has been interpreted as t. amaraque standing for tierra or terra (land) of Amaraque. All of this is before America first appeared as a name on the mainland roughly in the area of Venezuela.

Most of us have probably been taught that America as a name is derived from that of Amerigo Vespucci, a notorious liar and enslaver of Native people. Strangely enough, Vespucci's first name is more often recorded as

Albérico rather than Amerigo. It may well be that the name America is not derived from his name, but we know for sure that it was first applied to South America or Central America and not to the area of the United States.

From the early 1500s until the mid-1700s, the only people called Americans were American First Nations People. Similarly the people called Mexicans, Canadians, Brazilians, Peruvians, etc., were all our own Native People. In 1578, for example, George Best of Britain wrote about "those Americans and Indians" by which he referred to our Native American ancestors as Americans and the people of India and Indonesia as Indians. In 1650 a Dutch work referred to the Algonkians of the Manhattan area as "the Americans or Natives". In 1771 a Dutch dictionary noted that "the Americans are red in their skins" and so on. As late as 1845 another Dutch dictionary defined mestizos (metis) as being children of a "European" and an "American" parent.

English usage is very little different. John Wesley, in 1747, referred to First Nations People of Georgia as "the Americans." The Quaker traveler, William Bartram, after a lengthy tour among the Creeks, Cherokees, and Choctaws in the 1770s, refers to them as "the Americans." Samuel Johnson's Dictionary (1827 edition) has: "American [from America]. An aboriginal native of America; an inhabitant of America." The dictionary then quotes Milton ("Such of late/Columbus found the American/so girt/with feather'd cincture..."), and Addison from the Spectator ("The Americans believe that all creatures have souls, not only men and women, but brutes, vegetables, ... stones").

In 1875 Charles Maclaren in a British encyclopedia wrote of "the American race," "the color of the Americans," "the American natives" and "the Americans" by which he meant "the Americans of indigenous races." More recent-

ly (1986), the *Chronicle of Higher Education* noted that "Scientists Find Evidence of Earliest Americans" in northeastern Brazil (32,000 years old). Clearly these Earliest Americans" were not United Statesians!

Nonetheless, beginning in the 1740s–1780s British newspapers also began to refer to their British subjects on the Atlantic seaboard as Americans in the sense of Britons living in America or, as they often put it, in North America. After the United States became independent in the 1780s, its new citizens began to refer to themselves as Americans, trying perhaps to identify with the land and sever their connections with Europe.

It is not correct to refer to the United States as America. The USA is "of America," and that is different. Nonetheless, USA government propaganda and popular usage have promoted the use of "American" as belonging exclusively to the people of the United States, and especially to the European-derived people. Very often persons of African, Asian, and indigenous ancestry have been known as Negroes, Colored, Blacks, Indians, Savages, Redskins, or other "nicknames" or by hyphenated terms such as Chinese-Americans, etc. The word "American" has been used, in short, as a racial-ideological weapon designed to give priority to White persons and peripheral (and "foreign") status to non-Whites.¹

Of course, the Spaniards in 1492 and thereafter thought of America by the name India and a few maps refer to it as Nova India after its separation from the real India was realized. So long as America was thought of as India it was perhaps legitimate to refer to the native people as "Indians" but that became less proper once the name America became dominant in usage.

Later still "Indian" tended to become a negative caste-like term ("indio" in Spanish and Portuguese zones) or the equivalent of wild, savage, brutish, or alien enemy in most parts of America. Now the continued use of "Indian" for First Americans has become very problematic, because of a large migration from India.

A San Francisco newspaper ran an advertisement with big letters: "Wild Indian discovered in downtown San Francisco." I felt like calling up the advertiser, (the New Delhi restaurant) to complain about the ad's stereotype. But then it occurred to me that these were "real Indians" from India poking fun at "Indians."

In 1980 there were 361,544 Indians from India in the United States. By 1990 their numbers had mushroomed to 815,447, an increase of 126%, and these numbers do not include Pakistanis and Bangladeshis, both of whom

are also Indians by virtue of being derived from pre-1948 India. If this trend continues, the number of "real Indians" will catch up with the Bureau of the Census' figures for U.S.-derived "American Indians" sometime between 2000 and 2010. (By 1980 Asian Indians already outnumbered Native Americans in the northeastern U.S.) Large numbers of "Real Indians" are also migrating to Canada and have been present in Trinidad, Guyana and other parts of the Caribbean for years. Many of these Caribbean "Indians" are also moving north to the U.S. and Canada.

In any case, the "wild Indian" of the San Francisco ad was certainly not a Lakota, not a Delaware!

Who are the "real" Indians then? Ironically, the immigration of a million or so Asian Indians to North America comes at the precise time when some indigenous people are trying to deny "Indian" status to persons who are not recognized as such by a United States federally-recognized tribal or band government or who lack some document which identifies them as being "Indian."

But are any of us (who are of indigenous American descent) really Indians anyway? Should we fight over a name which is claimed by the more than 700,000,000 people of India, by their government, and by millions of Indians living overseas from South Africa to Britain?

The name "Indian" is derived from "India" which in turn comes from "Indos," an ancient Greek and Roman name for the area now known as Pakistan and India. "Indos" comes from "Indus," the name of the mighty river of western India (now Pakistan).

When Columbus sailed westward from Spain in 1492 it was his intention to reach India and especially that eastern part of India which he called "India extra gangem" or India east of the Ganges River. This vast region included Southeast Asia, the East Indies, China and Japan. So when Columbus reached the Bahamas he began to call our relatives "indios" in Spanish and "indos" in Latin. This name became "Indiani" in Italian and "Indian" in English.

But the Spaniards for several centuries believed that "India" or "the Indies" included the entire area from the mid-Atlantic westward to old India and the Arabian Sea. Thus Filipinos, Hawaiians, Polynesians, Chinese and Japanese were all "indios" to the Spaniards and to the Portuguese as well. The Inuit peoples of the north were every bit as much "Indians" as were any other peoples of Nova India (New India) or West India, alternative names for America.

Many European writers simply called our ancestors "Americans" as well as *indigenas* (indigenous people), *nat-*

urales (natural people) and *autoctonos* (autochthonous people), as well as using obnoxious names such as savages, tawnies, redskins, etc. More recently white writers have tried to baptize us with names such as “American Indians” and with such concoctions as “Amerindians” and “Amerinds.”

“Amerindian” is popular with British writers who deal with the eastern Caribbean and Guyana, because of the large numbers of Asian Indians living there. “Amerind” to my mind is an especially ugly acronym. Following this precedent we should, of course, refer to Eurams (European-Americans), Spanams (Spanish-Americans), Angcans (Anglo-Canadians), etc.

The problem with all of the combinations of “American” and “Indian” is that an increasing proportion of the Asian Indians living in the Americas are now born here and are, therefore, also entitled to use some combination of the two names. The “real Indian” community in the U.S. seems to be using “Indian,” “Indo-American” and “Indian American,” the latter in the tradition of Italian American, German American, and so on.

Indigenous Americans have been trying to come up with better names for themselves for a long time, as when the people who use peyote in religious ceremonies incorporated as the Native American Church early in this century. More recently terms such as “aboriginal,” “indigenous” and “native” are being increasingly used, along with new and somewhat cumbersome names such as “First Nations People” and “Sovereign American Nations People.” Also common now are “First Americans,” “Early Americans” and, of course, Native Americans. Many South American native people are also using *Abya Yala*, a Cuna name for America. Thus *Abya Yala* People can also be heard at indigenous gatherings.

Faced with the continuing immigration from Asia, and faced with the need to become masters of their own identity by overthrowing the nomenclature of colonialism, the original peoples of the Americas will ultimately find an answer to this problem. In the meantime, however, we are in a confusing period where Original Americans are using a variety of names while still being called *indios*, *indigenas*, Amerindians, and Indians by others. Of course, Native Americans also use their own particular national names (such as Cree, Lakota, Quiché, etc) as well as language family names (such as Maya or Mayan, Pomo, Yokuts, Algonkian, etc). Many of these names are not their own “real” names but are nicknames or foreign names (e.g., Delaware instead of Lenápe).

Unfortunately the Native People, along with other groups, have often been known by caste names or racial names based upon their position in racial grading systems developed under colonialism. Although European persons were sometimes known by racial names, (such as “white” or “blanco,”) such names usually denoted a high status and were generally self-imposed.

Tragically, the imposition of racial names upon Native Americans and Africans has resulted in a loss of personal autonomy and self-determination. In part, this is because the imposition of such names was almost always part of a process of envelopment, inferiorization and proletarianization under the aegis of exploitative colonial systems. As I state in an article:

It is precisely the loss of nationality and the assumption of a caste position which marks the successfully proletarianized, colonialized, enveloped person.²

What are the caste terms which have been applied to Original American peoples? There are many, the most important being negro-black-swart, loro, mulatto, mestizo-metis-mustee, ladino, zambo-sambo, pardo, colored, cafuso, caboclo, mamaluco (mameluco), half-breed, half-blood and half-caste. Let us review a few of these, briefly, so as to understand the breadth and scope of usage.

In 1719, South Carolina decided who should be an “Indian” for tax purposes since American slaves were taxed at a lesser rate than African slaves. The act stated:

And for preventing all doubts and scruples that may arise what ought to be rated on mustees, mulattoes, etc. all such slaves as are not entirely Indian shall be accounted as negro.³

This is an extremely significant passage because it clearly asserts that “mustees” and “mulattoes” were persons of part American ancestry. My own judgment (to be discussed later) is that a mustee was primarily part-African and American and that a mulatto was usually part-European and American. The act is also significant because it asserts that part-Americans with or without African ancestry could be counted as Negroes, thus having an implication for all later slave censuses.

The term “negro” was to be used in South Carolina for Native Americans of mixed race, but in many other regions “negro” and its equivalent (black, swart, Moor,

etc) was used for unmixed Americans, especially if their status was that of a slave. "Tawny Moor" was a variation on this, in English colonial usage. The critical point is, of course, that in the slave system many Native Americans and Africans (and Asian Indians as well) lost their national identities under such sobriquets as Negro. In turn, the term was usually derogatory, relating as it did both to a slave status and a non-White color.

During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, "negro" was a term used almost exclusively for darker people of African descent except in the United States where it came to be used for virtually all persons of even remote African ancestry. Naturally many of the "negroes" of both kinds were of Native American ancestry as well.

The Spanish and Portuguese introduced many color terms to the rest of the world as a result of their contacts with Africa, India and America. Initially color terms such as *loro* and *pardo* were used to refer to persons whose color was intermediate between "black" and "white," primarily to identify runaway slaves in Iberia itself. A sequence developed in which the Iberians first began with very general color terms (*loro*, *pardo*, *baco*, etc.); second, when they coined many more color terms (*membrillo cocido*, *moreno*, etc.); thirdly, when they invented or adopted terms for various mixed bloods as mixed-bloods (*mamaluco*, *mestizo*, *mulatto*, *zambo*, etc.); fourth, when they attempted by means of such terms to individually categorize most types of mixed-bloods; and, fifth, when it all became so very complicated that they fell back upon very general terms such as *pardo* or made ones like *mestizo* very nebulous. All of this is very significant because there is, of course, a considerable difference between the descriptive use of *loro* and the later prescriptive use of *mestizo* or *mulatto*. *Loros* were never subject to specific legal limits on their behavior, as *loros* in Spain. The same was true for most other color-descriptive terms.

The colonial designation of persons as *mestizos*, *mulattos*, and later, *pardos* was an entirely different matter. The use of these terms in the Americas was designed to identify and to limit, to control and, by and large, to exclude.

In general, I think we can say that the appearance and evolution of the term *mestizo* in both the Spanish and Portuguese empires reflect the kind of caste-like and racist social orders which evolved in the colonies. Terms such as *loro* and *pardo* were too general to meet the needs of caste societies.

That ultimately *pardo* survived and came to be widely used is a reflection of the extensive and complex mis-

cegenation in the colonies and the need for a general term which could embrace all of the different kinds of mixed-bloods and "people of color" whose ancestry could almost never be accurately described. *Loro*, for reasons which are not clear, died out as a color term and did not fulfill this function. *Mestizo* itself, especially in Mexico, *ladino* in parts of Central America, and perhaps *cholo* in Peru, came to be used, eventually, as almost the equivalent of *pardo*.⁴

The term *mulatto* had its origins in the Arabized romance language of Iberia, between about 1317 and 1500. I believe it evolved from either *muwallad* (convert to Islam, or today, mixed blood) or *maula* (servant, having a feudal relationship) or from both, into Portuguese *malado* and Castilian *muellad* or *mualad*. In any case, *mulatto* was carried to the Americas in colonial legislation which sought to restrict the rights of certain persons, in this case persons mostly of American and African intermixture. Explicit definitions of the term *mulatto* in Spanish writings are as follows:

- 1568: *Royal order defines a mulato as a child of negro and india.*
- 1574: *Viceroy Enriquez of Mexico states that mulatos are not sons of Spaniards.*
- 1574: *Lopez de Velasco states that mulatos are children of negros and indias and, much less commonly, of Spaniards and negras.*
- 1583: *Cabello Balboa uses mulato for American-Africans in Ecuador.*
- 1592: *Royal order states that mulatos (Venezuela) are "hijos de indias."*
- 1599: *Mixed African-American Chieftains from Esmeraldas called mulatos.*

From the character of these definitions we can say that *mulatto* seems to have meant half-Black African and, ordinarily, half American but with the half-African part being apparently essential. We must add to this, "or one who looks half-African."

Interestingly, John Minsheu's English-Spanish dictionary (1599, 1626) states for *mulato*, *mulatta*: "The son (or daughter) of a blackmoore and one of another nation."

In 1602 Garcilaso de la Vega, the half-Inca scholar, after traveling widely (in Europe as well as America) and after interviewing old Spanish soldiers wrote:

"In all of the West Indies, those of us who are born of a Spanish father and an Indian mother

are called mestizos, just as in Spain those who are born of a Negro father and an Indian mother or vice versa are called mulatos.”

In 1613, after many decades of research and travel in Peru, Huaman Poma, (a Quechua Indian), wrote:

When mulattoes—a mixture of negro and Indian—produce quadroon children, these children lose all physical trace of their negro origin except for the ear, which still gives them away by its shape and size.

One of the first two large groups of caste-persons to be created in the Spanish and Portuguese empires were the *mulattos*, a result of the preponderance of males among the incoming Africans (2 to 1 over females ordinarily) and the loss of American males due to warfare and harsh exploitation, leaving in many areas a surplus of women. Many of the descendants of these American-African alliances were “free” (because the mothers were not slaves) and this was also a motivation for African males to seek such a relationship (guaranteeing free children). The free people of color in the Spanish Portuguese empires generally stem from this class, as it subsequently mixed with mestizos. On the other hand, many Americans were held as slaves throughout the colonial period and their progeny remained within the increasingly Africanized slave population.

In South America (Columbia-Venezuela through Peru) a special type of mulatto appeared, the *Zambaigo*. *Zaimbaigos* or *zambos* (sambos in the British-Caribbean later) were American-African mixed bloods born largely of free American mothers and raised somewhat beyond Spanish control (often in free villages). The Spaniards regarded them as an especially dangerous variety of person, perhaps because of a tendency towards armed resistance. In Mexico and farther north other terms were used such as *mulato pardo* (literally gray mulato), *lobo* (wolf), and *de color quebrado*, among others. In 1563 the Spanish Crown prohibited “negros, mulatos o mestizos” from living in American communities but

en quanto á los Mestizos, y Zambaigos, que son hijos de Indias, nacidos entre ellos, y han de heredar sus casas, y haciendas, porque parece cosa dura separarlos de sus padres, se podra dispensar.

Thus *zambaigos* and mestizos who were sons of American mothers, born among Americans and entitled to inherit property, were exempted from the prohibition, because it would be cruel to separate them from their parents.

In general then, the Spanish authorities tried to keep Africans, mulattos and mestizos away from American communities, even though they were almost always half-American, only making an exception for those actually born into a community. This can be seen as an important step in the development of castes, depriving the mixed-bloods born in the Spanish-controlled mines, plantations and cities from being able to settle in the parent’s or grandparent’s community. Retention of language and cultural elements might be interrupted and transformation into a *ladino* (assimilated person) speeded up.

In the nineteenth-century, “Sambo” was used on Trinidad as a term for African-American mixtures (with *mustee* being used for European-American mixed-bloods).

The Spanish-Portuguese term *mulatto* passed into many other languages, usually being used to refer to half-African persons. However, in English and French it was also used for American-European mixtures. In English, *mulatto* became the only term used for a mixed person until *mustee* and *half-breed* appeared in the mid eighteenth-century. Thus, it is not surprising that both American-European and American-African persons were known as *mulattos*, (at least until 1785 for the former).

In 1705, Virginia prohibited any “negro, mulatto, or Indian” from holding any public office. The act further stated:

“...and for clearing all manner of doubts which hereafter may happen to arise upon the construction of this act, or any other act, who shall be accounted a mulatto: Be [etc.], that the child of an Indian, and the child, grandchild, or great grandchild of a negro shall be deemed, accounted, held, and taken to be a mulatto.”

In other words, an American-European mixed-blood was defined as a *mulatto*, along with all part-Africans to the 1/8 degree. This statute apparently remained unmodified until 1785 when it was enacted that all persons with “one-fourth or more Negro blood shall ...be deemed a *mulatto*.” This remained the legal definition until 1866 when it was modified:

Every person having one-fourth or more Negro blood shall be deemed a colored person, and every person not a colored person having one-fourth or more Indian blood shall be deemed an Indian.

This use of “colored person” must be considered in relation to an 1860 statute using “mulatto” for persons of one-fourth African descent and making “negro” and “mulatto” equivalent in all statutes.

It would appear, then, that from 1705 until 1866 the only legal definition applying to mixed Native Americans (excepting those having one-fourth or more African ancestry) was that of the former years. Thus we might at first glance construe that a mixed American-European was legally a mulatto if of one-half or more American blood until that statute of 1866 making such persons “Indians”. All American-African mixed-bloods remained mulattoes throughout the period, unless having less than 1/8 African ancestry (1705–1785) or less than 1/4 African ancestry (1785–1910). After 1910 Virginia reclassified large numbers of persons by extending the “colored” category to include people with minute amounts of African ancestry.

For a time at least, French also utilized the term *mulâtre* to refer to European-American persons in the Biloxi-Louisiana region. Nonetheless, *metis* became the more common term in Canada for such individuals.⁵

In the Spanish colonies the term *mestizo* began to be used in royal proclamations in 1533. At first, *mestizo* was the equivalent of *híbrida*, (both cultural and genetic), but in America it seems to have been used primarily for American-European persons, although later in Mexico the term could also embrace American-European African persons. In Brazil, on the other hand, *mestizo* seems to have always remained a general term for all classes of mixed persons.

Ladino, now widely used in Guatemala and Chiapas as an equivalent of *mestizo*, was in the early colonial period always an adjective meaning “Spanish-speaking” or “assimilated” as opposed to *bozal*, meaning unassimilated. Thus one often sees references to “negros ladinos” and doubtless the ladinos of Guatemala and Chiapas originated not in race mixture primarily but in assimilation to Hispanic culture. Tragically, the ladinos of today consider themselves superior, apparently, to their Maya and Pipil relatives. In the Andean region *cholo* is used in a somewhat analogous way, but is more of a negative term it seems.

In Brazil a vast array of racial terms appear, the majority of which can embrace persons of part-American ancestry, such as *cafuzo* (cara fusco, American-African), *cabra* (American-African), *caboré* (American-African), *mamaluco* (American-European), *curiboca* (American-European), *mulatto* (any mixture of a medium brown color, but usually part-African), *caboclo* (Native Brazilian or a person living like an indigenous or rural person), etc. One also sees such combinations as *mulato atapuado* (Tupuya mulatto, i.e., part American).

The term “mustee” was used in the British colonies of the Caribbean and the southern United States. Based on the evidence, we can say that mustee was a term used for part-American persons (usually slaves) who were either mixed with European or African or both. In South Carolina, where the term was most common, mustee seems to have come to refer to a person of yellow-brown or darker color who exhibited either American or part-African features, while mulatto seems to have been used for lighter, part-European looking mixed bloods of American background. On the island of Trinidad, mustee seems to have referred to an American-European person.

Persons of Native American descent have also been classified broadly as “people of color” in North America and as *pardos*, *loros*, and other general terms in Latin America. In North Carolina, for example, free colored persons were often of American ancestry, as opposed to African. Several scholars have noted that the Indians of North Carolina were often classified as “people of color.” Court cases make this quite clear also. In 1821 one John Locklier was called “a coloured man,” while the name Locklier is confined to the Indians of Robeson County and surrounding areas. In 1841–43 one William P. Waters claimed that he was not a “man of color” because “he was descended from Portuguese, and not from Negro or Indian ancestors...” In 1853, a Locklier was judged to be a free person of color incapable of carrying arms. In 1857, a William Chavers (also a Lumbee or Robeson County Indian name) was charged “as a free person of color” with carrying a shotgun. Chavers was able to win his case eventually

because he is charged as “a free person of color” whereas ... the act ... makes it penal for any “free negro” to carry arms... Free persons of color may be ... persons colored by Indian blood. The indictment cannot be sustained.

The Supreme Court held specifically that “free negro” and “free person” of color” were not legally identical terms.

The 1800, 1810, 1820, and 1830 United States censuses use the “free person of color” category for most non-whites, including Indians. Thus the Native families of Robeson County, North Carolina, and all Virginia counties are always classified as “colored” persons. Carter Woodson’s *THE FREE NEGRO HEADS OF FAMILIES IN THE UNITED STATES IN 1830*...being an indexing of the “free colored” (not “free negro”) population, includes many thousands of Indians. For example, the entire Cherokee Indian population of Carroll County, Georgia, was included as colored persons, with names such as Rattlesnake, Ekoah, Watta, Tah-ne-cul-le-hee, Wasotta, Keecha, Widow Swimmer, Pumkinpile, Charles Vann, etc. One also finds people like Stephen Jumper in Rockingham County, North Carolina, Charles Moose in the same county, and “Indian Bill” of Westchester County, New York, classified as people of color, along with the general Indian population in county after county.

Needless to state, countless persons of Native American ancestry lost their specific national identities by being reclassified as *mestizos*, *mulattos*, *pardos* or colored persons. Of course, indigenous nations often were able to absorb mixed persons as well as foreigners, but there was always a strong tendency in colonial situations for the colonial power to attempt to prevent the strengthening of potentially rebellious conquered nations. Thus, mixed persons were often reclassified and separated from their maternal (or paternal) nationality and languages. This process was greatly aided by the slave system and by the proletarianization of marginal but technically “free” workers.

Many Americans were enslaved, not only by the Spaniards and Portuguese but also by the Dutch, French and British. In the young United States, Native Americans could still be held as slaves in spite of the new constitution with its Bill of Rights. For example, we read of a slave who ran away in 1790 in Virginia from Southampton:

*a lad about 18 or 19 years of age called Ben Whitehead, being of the Indian breed and almost white, has coarse straight hair of a dark brown colour and black eyes... is a carpenter... and he can read.*⁶

The Americans who became slaves, whether in Brazil or Virginia, Surinam or Louisiana, Sonora or Cuba, were likely to lose their nationality over time and most certainly

their children would probably be known by a caste designation. The majority of their descendants today are probably considered to be *negros*, African Americans, Mexicans, Brazilians, *pardos*, etc., depending upon the context and country.⁷

What is truly remarkable, and a testimony to the effectiveness of Spanish racial propaganda, is the fact that many Latin American states have today, as their national ideology, the idea of being “mestizo” or at least that becoming “mestizo” is a national cultural ideal and that all indigenous groups must eventually give way. The Native people, it is said, must give up their languages and traditional identities in favor of becoming *ladinos*, *cholos*, or (more properly speaking) *mestizos*.

The Mexican elite, for example, asserts the superiority of the *mestizo* over the *indígena* and as the very essence of the post-1821 Mexican society. This is, of course, a shocking testimony to the effectiveness of Spanish colonial indoctrination. It is as if the French must always be considered as *metis* because of their Gallo-Roman-Frankish mixture, or the English must be considered as mulattoes because of their British-Anglo-Saxon-Norman-French mixture. The Spaniards, of course, are far more *mestizo* than are the Mexicans since the Mexicans of today are perhaps as much as 80% indigenous genetically and their culture and language includes a vast native element. The Spaniards, on the other hand, possess Iberian Carthaginian-Greek-Roman-Germanic-Arab-Berber-Jewish-African and other ancestry and a culture and language almost wholly borrowed (except for the Basques).

Who then are the real *mestizos*? Why must Mexicans, Costa Ricans, Venezuelans, Colombians, Peruvians, etcetera, eternally deny their indigenous continuity in favor of mixture while Spaniards, Turks, Italians, Britons and other very, very mixed peoples possess a unified sense of themselves?⁸

In the mid-1970s, the Nixon-Ford regime in the United States succeeded in having a bureaucratic rule promulgated which requires that “American Indians” shall only be counted in any statistical survey or census if they are derived from North America. South America and Mesoamerica are to be given over entirely to the term “hispanic” (or its census equivalent “Spanish Origin”), except that Brazilians, Guyanans, etc. are excluded. The term “hispanic” is to also include all peninsular Spaniards and any persons derived from any former Spanish colony in the Pacific or Africa (e.g., Guam, the Filipino Republic,

Spanish Sahara, etc.). This concoction was designed, apparently, to create an artificial political bloc for Republican Party purposes as well as to obscure the relationship of race to poverty in the United States (by mixing Europeans and Pacific peoples with Cubans, Sephardic Jews, African-Americans and indigenous persons derived from Mexico southwards).

“Hispanic” apparently appeals to some upwardly-mobile Latin Americans since it would seem to allow them to escape into a “Spanish” (white) status instead of being thought of as brown Mexicans. It is also a step towards assimilation into Anglo-American identity since no actual “hispanic” nationality exists (outside of Spain).⁹

Many Mexicans and other Latin Americans in the United States have rejected “hispanic” and instead favor the use of “latino.” But, of course, Latino is a very ambiguous name which refers essentially to a former Italian language and to a community of languages. What “Latino” may be, functionally, is another escape from being “mestizo” or, more accurately, *indio*. “Latino” implies, subjectively, a light brown skin color and semi-European facial features. In a sense, then, Latino is functionally a form of *ladino*, i.e., a denial of autochthonous identity.

In any case, throughout the Americas “race” became a fundamental concept applied by the colonizers to non-European populations, replacing gradually the idea of nationality. Free Native nations were able to absorb or assimilate persons of African, European or mixed ancestry, but when brought under direct colonial administration this became difficult if not impossible. For example, in the United States the enrollment of Native People from the 1880s onward almost always required the recording of the “degree of Indian blood.” Thus an elaborate system commenced, keeping track of each variant fraction of Native ancestry. A new racial caste of persons of one-fourth or more indigenous ancestry was soon created (but the one quarter indigenous ancestry could only be from tribes officially recognized by the U.S. authorities). Caste determined whether a person was competent (a mixed-blood of 1/4 quantum) or incompetent (a so-called “fullblood”), etc.

Today this system is being replaced in the United States by one based upon tribal membership as determined by the tribal governments, however, many tribes still have a blood-quantum requirement of from 1/4 to 1/8 or even 1/16 indigenous ancestry. Ironically, many Mexicans and Guatemalans living in the U.S. are not being recognized as “Indians” even though they are of relatively unmixed ancestry and speak their indigenous languages.

In any case, the shift from race or caste to some sort of bureaucratic management criteria (official recognition) still leaves Native People without the use of their traditional ethnic/kinship systems. Such traditional systems may emphasize the father’s ancestry line only (rare, I believe), the maternal line primarily, a totemic or “mythical” proto-ancestor, clan membership, or ancestry based upon a spiritual link with a particular land or place. Religion or other aspects of shared culture may also be emphasized.

Among many traditional Native American cultures, persons are descended in the female line from a “first ancestor,” usually a being with an animal or plant name. If, for example, one is a member of the “turtle” matrilineal lineage one might find this situation: 500 generations ago the first “turtle” woman lived, and in each subsequent generation her female descendants had to marry men who were non-turtles, i.e., with other lineages in their female lines. A modern-day “turtle” person, then, might well be, in quantitative terms, 1/500 turtle and 499/500 non-“turtle,” and yet, at the same time, be completely and totally a turtle person.

The significance of “place” is also, or can be, very significant. Among Indians, it is said, the place of birth was of extreme significance in a spiritual and evocative sense. Thus Americans born in a Spanish mission setting in California might be existentially very different from their biological parents born elsewhere. The relocation of groups of people, in short, can lead to a new definition of self-identity for future children, provided that the social system allows for it, or even in spite of the social system (as with California-born Japanese-Americans perhaps). Most Dineh (Navajo) clans have names adapted from a particular place in Navajo country or nearby.

There are also peoples who believe that ancestral or other souls take root in the human egg and that a human being may be a reincarnation of some previous person. This of course, vitally affects definitions of self-identity and ethnicity. But, of course, such perspectives, are frowned upon in Western thinking as being “unscientific” as well as “non-Christian.” Nonetheless, since identity is an existential phenomenon and ethnicity a social concept, we must not be tied to “biological” or bureaucratic criteria alone.

There are, of course, many other ways of reckoning ethnicity, not the least interesting of which is the process of “naturalization” (i.e. “nativization”) whereby virtually all states can absorb aliens and bestow citizenship. But “naturalization” harks back to the days, it seems to me, when “adoption” into an alien group was not only possi-

ble but involved a spiritual-existential change of profound significance. To be “adopted” into an Indian nation or community meant to become a native with them and to shed previous identities. Perhaps it meant the same thing in other societies as well.

It is also necessary to reflect upon the fact that the modern classificatory mind has evolved the notion of absolute identities, a notion which has caused so much pain in recent times. By this I refer to the notion that a person must be either “French” or “German”, either “Swiss” or “Italian,” either “Indian” or “non Indian,” etc. The modern state has made an exclusive claim to our loyalties but this claim has also been furthered by a kind of either-or, this or that, logic fostered by Christian and other messianic religious denominations and by a kind of “black” or “white” tendency to oversimplify human experience.

For Native Americans, of course, things have not always been this way. Scholarship and especially popular writing has created the impression that one must be either a Comanche or a Kiowa, etc., but even the term “Comanche” is a foreign word, applied by outsiders to a group of people with five geographical divisions who blended into the related Shoshone (before becoming separated) and who mixed frequently with other so-called tribes as close friends, camp mates, and marriage partners.

To understand Native American identity one must, I think, begin with the extended family, a kinship unit of the utmost importance. In fact, the family is the key element in all native social, economic, and political life. Very often these families are not localized, but by means of clan relationships extend outward, sometimes to groups speaking totally different languages, and sometimes even to “enemy” groups.

For many Native Americans, then, identity begins with a family identity. Often this is expressed in a bilateral way although matrilineal or patrilineal descent may be emphasized. The family in the larger sense may often embrace within its folds persons who belong to different “tribes,” or, after 1500, belong to different races.

But native people also “belong” to many other groupings including “societies,” (men’s organizations, for example, and in modern times these include pow-wow drum groups, “clubs” et cetera), religious groups (including ceremony-giving associations, the Native American Church, “sun-dancers”, etc.), and groups of “friends” (who have adopted each other, sometimes in a ceremonial way). Moreover, of course, native people belong to local communities (villages, camps, outfits, hunting bands, etc.),

larger communities (towns, pueblos, bands, “triblets”), and nations or confederations of bands and/or communities. Each of these levels provides a type of identity and all are important. But we cannot stop with the “nation” because native people also had alliances comprised of closely-linked groups speaking different languages (such as the Quechan and the Hamakhava of the Colorado River, or the Maricopa and the O’odham of the Gila River, the Verde Valley Yavapai and the Verde Valley Apache, and so on). Many of these alliances have been bonded together by mythic traditions or by longtime sharing of ceremonies, gifts, marriage partners, clans, etc. Thus, although usually unnamed, such bondings are very real and provide a sense of belonging. Bilingualism is usually a characteristic of such bonded groups.

“Identity,” then, is really a series of concentric circles, with many layers of importance. No single level can adequately describe or encompass identity. Moreover, in the case of native clans, they run outward through all of the concentric circles and even extend into “alien” groups.

Today all of this has been modified somewhat, principally by the pressures of colonialism. “Membership” is now often determined by white people’s rules or by the pressures created by land and resource shortages. Still, however, Indians have multiple identities.

For example, a hypothetical person who is half-Zuni and half-Sioux might not be able to be a full member at Zuni Pueblo, especially if he was raised elsewhere or if the Zuni ancestry came through his father (although in some pueblos the matrilineal reckoning is being replaced by patrilineal emphasis insofar as membership is concerned). Zuni relatives will recognize him as a part of the family but if he was never ceremonially incorporated and if he does not speak Zuni he may not be considered a “real” Zuni at Zuni Pueblo. In Denver, where he lives, however, he will be recognized by other Native Americans as an Indian and be fully accepted as a Zuni, a Sioux, or a Zuni-Sioux (whichever he chooses to emphasize).

Thus such a person may belong to a Zuni family, may be legally a Zuni (from the white government’s viewpoint), may be a non-Zuni, may be a Zuni-Sioux, may be a Sioux, may be an “Indian” all at the same time.

Such examples are numerous and sometimes involve persons descended from four or five “tribes” who may also be part-French, part-Filipino, part-Hawaiian, and so on. And to further complicate matters, such persons may also identify as citizens of the United States (or Mexico, etc.)

It is easy to see, then, that one could have a mixed

American African family whose kinship ties run in both directions. Thus one could have a Nanticoke person in New Jersey married to a Mohegan from Connecticut, both of whom actually possess variable proportions of different tribal and racial backgrounds (e.g. Nanticoke, Pocomoke, Wicomico, black African and white on the Nanticoke side and Mohegan, Pequot, Narragansett, black African and white on the Mohegan side). Still further the two families include relatives who are living in Philadelphia, Camden, Boston, Princeton, etc., who have intermarried with other "Indians" or with "blacks."

Some of the "cousins" will likely be in the "blackH community, some are active "Indians," while still others may lead a dual life, sometimes being one thing, sometimes another. They may, for example, attend a "black" church where they do not publicly announce any Indian identity, and yet they may be Indian when visiting relatives or attending a pow-wow function. These multiple associations may not be easy, of course.

The above analysis may, however, sound very strange to one accustomed to the usual U. S. government (or even anthropological) notions about "tribes" and "nations." I think it likely, however, that many of our "tribes" were created by colonial authorities in order to have suitable political entities with which to negotiate for land cession purposes or to have a suitable entity available for conquest. Having militarily defeated a large "tribe," the colonial power could claim jurisdiction over all of the territory ascribed to that unit, or at least could force a large land cession from it. More recently, the need for contracts for oil and mineral exploration has spurred the creation of land-owning large tribes, such as the Hopi and Navajo nations.

But what if the Hopi are actually divided into several independent "pueblos" (community-republics), each of which is sovereign and land-owning? But now, of course, the U. S. government has created a Hopi Tribal Council to speak for all of the communities and to have the right to engage in land struggle with the neighboring Navajo.

Similarly, the U. S. has ascribed land-owning authority to the Navajo Nation, but what if the traditional Navajo local "outfits" or groups (including local "clans" or bands) had the actual control over land use? What if the Navajo were only a very loose confederation of fundamentally independent local groups?

Perhaps one of the greatest political achievements of Native North Americans was the ability to develop confederations of friendly local republics without losing the

essential sovereignty of the local group. This was the essential characteristic of all of the great confederacies such as those of the Powhatan, the Iroquois, the Lenape-Delaware, the Creek-Muscogee, the Cherokee, the Choctaw, the Lakota-Dakota-Nakota (Sioux), etc. But that form of political genius is unacceptable to the colonial state which requires centralization, bureaucratic control, and quick and unambiguous lines of responsibility and decision-making.

Thus Native American identity has been badly shattered and then rebuilt, as it were, along new (and often false) lines. Now we are stuck with a variety of imposed concepts, from the very idea of being "Indian" to being "descendants of the Mayas" (rather than "real" Mayas) to being members of tribes or nations whose very existence depends upon the recognition of the bureaucratic agencies of the U. S., Canadian, and other governments.

Similarly, Americans of African origin have had their original nationalities almost completely destroyed. They were then sculpted by colonialism as negros or Negroes ("slaves") and then ground out as castes with an incredible variety of terms being used. Moreover, a system of denigration resulted in the internalization, very often, of negative self-images and of the actualization of a color-shaped status hierarchy which has survived slavery and direct European colonialism. To a significant degree African-Americans control themselves, as it were, because internally they operate with caste and class relations while sometimes (in the U. S. particularly) presenting outsiders with the appearance of being a united ethnic community.

Facing such dilemmas some African-Americans have opted out of America (such as the Rastafarians of Jamaica and other groups desiring a return to Africa), while others have sought to create new African nations (within the territory of the United States for example), while still others have sought to achieve "equality" as Brazilians, Cubans, Trinidadians, Jamaicans, North Americans, et cetera. Easy answers are not forthcoming, but it is worth stressing that Africans were the first settlers of North America (after the indigenous Americans), long preceding Europeans (from the 1520s to 1565, in South Carolina) as well as the first nonindigenous settlers of the mainland of Latin America (being in Panama when Balboa arrived, 1513).

African-Americans are also of partial indigenous American ancestry. Thus from several points of view they should feel very much at home in America and should be accorded the respect of being early arrivals (not to men-

tion possible ancient African or Afro Polynesian contacts with Mesoamerica).

Racism, which still *thrives* in North and South America, must be seen as a major limitation placed upon the full participation of persons of African and American physical features in the state-based nationalities of the continent, not to mention the complications of economic status and cultural differences. Race, in effect, is a powerful determinant of existential nationality (as opposed to mere citizenship) in the Americas.

There is a great deal of confusion today about whether groups such as African-Americans constitute an "ethnicity" or a "nationality." The two terms essentially meant the same thing until a few decades ago (*ethniki* being the Greek word for national). But now it would appear that ethnicity refers to "groupness" while nationality refers to "groupness demanding a territory and a sovereign or autonomous self-determination." The Navajo-Dineh are, then, both an ethnicity and a nationality. They possess territory and they aspire to self-rule; they seek collective sovereignty.

On the other hand, Polish-Americans have "groupness" but they probably lack any territory (except for a few neighborhoods shared with other Slavic and non-Slavic groups) and certainly do not aspire to collective sovereignty. They already possess a sovereign state, Poland, to which they can return if they wish to live as a Pole exclusively with other Poles in a Polish homeland. It is absolutely crucial that any people who wish to aspire to nationhood must, these days, avoid allowing themselves to be referred to as an "ethnic group" (or as a "population"). They must insist on the use of the term "a people" or "a nation." What this means is that governments (and certain scholars as well) have found that they can downgrade the claims of some of their subjects if the latter can be classified as "ethnics." The dominant population is, of course, never "ethnic." Only "minorities" are "ethnic" and, therefore, shall we say, abnormal. More crucially they will always remain mere enclaves without any hope of territory or self-determination.

Perhaps this is why the "Black Muslims" in the United States call their group the "Nation of Islam" rather than the "Islamic Ethnic Group" and why they also seem to avoid merger with orthodox Muslims (who are heterogeneous as to nationality or ethnicity).

In any case, the struggle over nationality versus ethnicity is crucial for Native Americans everywhere. In every American state some indigenous peoples, after being

"brainwashed" as "peasants" and by "patriotic" state (and army) propaganda, come to think of themselves merely as a caste (indios or campesinos) who just happen to speak Quechua, or Aymara, or Mixtec, or Nahuatl, and if they could only learn to speak Spanish, or move to the city, or attend a university, they could stop being an "Indian" and become a full Peruvian, Bolivian, Mexican, or Canadian. In other words, the concept of nationhood or an indigenous nationality does not exist for them. They are simply "un grupo étnica."

In point of fact, however, we must here challenge the idea that nationhood must be achieved solely by creating an independent "tribal" or indigenous state apparatus modeled after European states. Quite the contrary, American nations could well be structured in an entirely different way, a decentralist, confederationist, localist, completely democratic way. (Of course, such a nation might find it hard to exist in the midst of centralized aggressive states such as currently dominate the world.)

There is an old story about a Pawnee warrior who was on a horse-stealing expedition against the Comanche, many hundreds of miles away from home. While on the raid he was able to observe a young Comanche girl in her tipi at night, and he fell in love with her. He returned with horses to Pawnee country but ultimately felt impelled to go back by himself to that same Comanche village. To make a long story short, he crawled into her tipi at night and when the family awoke they found an enemy sitting quietly in their midst. He told them why he was there and eventually they accepted him and he married the love of his life. For many years he lived as a Comanche and only was able to return to the Pawnee country for a visit after peace had been made. He took his Comanche father-in-law along on the visit.

This story illustrates how ridiculous it is to think of Native American nations as ant-like social hives where wild warriors acted out anti-foreign phobias and insisted upon absolute social loyalty. Yet that is the derogatory way in which the term "tribalism" is often used, to refer to some sort of hyper-nationalism of an especially "primitive" sort.

The fact of the matter is, as I have already stressed, that Native Americans were united *across* inter-communal boundaries by networks of ceremony-sharing, kinship ties, friendships, trade, clan relationships and many other cultural features. Most Native Americans appear to have been bilingual or multilingual and the use of the sign language from Texas northwards throughout the Great Plains and the use of trade jargons in many areas (such as the

Chinook Jargon of the North Pacific Coast or the Mobilian Jargon of the Alabama-Mississippi region) contributed to a sense of shared life across even language lines.

Unity also existed across hostile inter-communal boundaries because kinship often existed across such lines (due to the frequent capture of women as marriage partners as well as because of captive children being raised to be full members of their adopted community) and many customs might mitigate hostility (such as being on a vision-quest or pilgrimage, being a religious "holy" person, etc.).

Warfare was not a business of the state, among most Native Americans, and therefore some families might not be hostile towards a group or village which was the object of enmity by others. Apparently one was not expected to fight one's own kin or one's own clan relations, even if they were associated with a hostile group. In North America at least, leaders did not ordinarily possess coercive control over anyone else and could not force anyone to go to war.

I believe that most nationalities today are actually of similar character to the above except that they have been molded into their present shape (or have been created) by state bureaucracies, state propaganda, and state rewards (which accompany citizenship, et cetera).

Certainly most boundaries are quite artificial and have been subject, in any case, to a great deal of movement in recorded history. Are the Limburger-speaking people to be considered to be Germans, Dutch, or Belgians? Almost everywhere we find the same confusion in border zones, a confusion which often extends over large areas as well. I have advocated that we find ways to create cross-boundary limited authority sub-states to accommodate "peoples" divided by international boundaries such as Limburgers, Alsatians, Frisians, Basques, Samis, and numerous others. Why can't, for example, Limburgers control their own universities and schools and local affairs, while perhaps leaving foreign affairs and defense to Belgium, Germany, and Nederland? Of course, in a unified Europe, it may be that eventually Limburgers could have their own state within the European Union, but the cross-boundary substate offers an intermediate position applicable in other parts of the world as well.¹⁰

Allow me to conclude by returning to my interpretation of the Native American concept of identity as a series of concentric circles extending from one's own family outward to all human beings and beyond.

From this perspective we must transform our con-

cept of "society" from a noun to a verb, "associating," a dynamic rather than a static condition. We do not possess fixed "societies" but rather we associate, we interact, in slowly changing (or rapidly changing) ways but always as a part of a process.

It is important to stress that Native American "associatings" always include the animals, plants, waters, the earth with its mountains and valleys, the sky, clouds, thunder, and so on. In short, all of the phenomena called "nature" by Europeans are part of us, are related to us, and form part of our identity. We are literally all children of Mother Earth, brothers and sisters, relatives. Many, many centuries ago White Buffalo Woman visited the Lakota people, and gave them a special pipe. She said:

"With this pipe you will be bound to all your relatives: Your Grandfather and Father [the Great Spirit], your Grandmother and Mother the Earth... and also you must always remember that the two-leggeds and the other people who stand upon this earth are sacred and should be treated as such."

There is also an old Lenápe prayer which refers to "our grandfathers, the trees" and "our Grandfather, fire" and a Zuni prayer which states:

*When our earth mother is replete with living waters,
When spring comes,
The source of our flesh,
All the different kinds of corn,
We shall lay to rest in the ground
with the earth mother's living waters ...*

Over and over again the Native People give out this message of kinship and oneness with other forms of life.¹¹

If the earth is to survive as a viable home for humans and non-humans it would seem that we will need to adopt the world-view of indigenous peoples in order, at least, to include "all of our relations" as a part of the nation with which we identify. We live in an "earth ocean," a sea of air which we must come to understand as a kind of aquarium stretched around the surface of the earth, and an aquarium common to all of us. If part of us pollutes it, then eventually we all have to suffer the consequences.¹²

The dominant concepts of absolute states and

absolute, fixed nationalities embracing only human beings and a possessed territory must give way to a different way of seeing the world.

Jack D. Forbes is a professor in and Chair of the Native American Studies Department at the University of California–Davis.

Footnotes

- ¹ See J.D. Forbes, "The Historian and the Indian," *THE AMERICAS: Academy of American Franciscan History*, XIX(4) April 1963; J.D. Forbes, "Frontiers in American History," *JOURNAL OF THE WEST*, (1) July 1962, 63–73 and "The Indian in the West," *ARIZONA AND THE WEST*, (3) Autumn 1959.
- ² J.D. Forbes, "Envelopment, Proletarianization and Inferiorization: Aspects of Colonialism's Impact Upon Native Americans and Other People of Color in Eastern North America," *JOURNAL OF ETHNIC STUDIES* 18(4), 95–122.
- ³ J.D. Forbes, *BLACK AFRICANS AND NATIVE AMERICANS* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988) 87. The subsequent discussion is based partly on this work. This book has been reprinted in a revised edition as *AFRICANS AND NATIVE AMERICANS*. (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1993).
- ⁴ J.D. Forbes, "The Manipulation of Race, Caste and Identity: Classifying Afroamericans, Native Americans, and Red-Black People," *JOURNAL OF ETHNIC STUDIES* 17(4) Winter 1990, 1–5.
- ⁵ Forbes, *BLACK AFRICANS AND NATIVE AMERICANS*, 177–178.
- ⁶ Forbes, *BLACK AFRICANS AND NATIVE AMERICANS*, 208.
- ⁷ See Forbes, "Envelopment..." *JOURNAL OF ETHNIC STUDIES* 18(4), for a fuller discussion of envelopment and proletarianization.
- ⁸ See Jack D. Forbes, "The Mestizo Concept" in *AZTECAS DEL NORTE: THE CHICANOS OF AZTLAN*. (Greenwich, CT.: Fawcett, 1973), 178–204. Also published as "El Concepto Mestizo Metis," *NOVEDADES DE BAJA CALIFORNIA* (Mexicali), 1(29) Nov. 20, 1982 and on to 1 (41).
- ⁹ See Jack D. Forbes, "The Hispanic Spin—Party Politics and Governmental Manipulation of Ethnic Identity," *LATIN AMERICAN PERSPECTIVES* 19(4) Fall 1992, 59–78.
- ¹⁰ See Jack D. Forbes, "Limited Authority Cross-Boundary Substates," *PLURAL SOCIETIES*, Spring 1985, reprinted in J. Brecher *ET AL*, *GLOBAL VISIONS: BEYOND THE NEW WORLD ORDER* (Boston: South End Press, 1993).
- ¹¹ Jack D. Forbes, *COLUMBUS AND OTHER CANNIBALS: THE WETIKO DISEASE OF EXPLOITATION. IMPERIALISM AND TERRORISM* (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 1992) 28, 30.
- ¹² See various poems by J.D. Forbes, including "Beneath the Waves," "Kinship is the Basic Principle of Philosophy," "The Universe is Our Holy Book," "In the Presence of Oxygen and Mother Earth," and "In the Dunes."