Race and Nation-Building: A Comparison of Canadian Métis and Mexican Mestizos

By Samantha Hill

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Department of _Political Science_

The University of British Columbia
Vancouver, Canada

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Abstract

This thesis compares the political positioning of Canadian Métis and Mexican mestizos. The central objective is to determine how the identities of these two groups have been affected by their countries' efforts to establish national identities. The initial assumption is that nationalizing projects, by nature, incorporate some groups, while marginalizing others.

The body of the paper contains two chapters, with one chapter devoted to tracing the historical development of each group. The Métis, presented in chapter two, exhibit group cohesiveness during the 1800s and, in fact, begin to consider themselves part of a separate nation as early as 1816. However, after the 1885 Rebellion, the group becomes disenfranchised by Canadian expansionists. They join the ranks of non-status Indians, whose similar plights have meant their coordination ever since. The expansion of the group's associations has been problematic since their 1982 mention in the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, as establishing their privileges requires their agreeing on a definition of themselves.

The mestizos, on the other hand, do not demonstrate the degree of cohesiveness that the Métis do. They are primarily identified by race and status, with no common history or political figures to bind them. In the 1920s, however, the group was used by the federal government to bridge the differences between European and indigenous peoples. As a result of this effort, the mestizo has become the personification of the national ideal, for a mestizo is neither European nor Indian, but Mexican. This has served to marginalize indigenous populations, many of whom consider the "cult of mestizo" the new form of colonialism in Mexico.

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I. Introduction

Since the birth of the nation-state, the endless task of "manufacturing" national identities has painted our flags, composed our anthems, and polished our languages of choice. But history has shown that national identity is more complicated than the flag, the anthem, or even the language(s) of choice. Its complexity has inspired copious volumes of social science literature, as centuries of war and incessant struggles among, between and within countries suggest its necessary study. In my thesis, I examine the political identities of racially mixed[1] groups in Canada and Mexico and seek to answer one fundamental question: how have the identities of Canadian Métis and Mexican mestizos fared in the development of their countries' nationalizing projects? In other words, I seek to determine the implications of nationalist projects on these two groups, starting from the position that governmental projects, aimed at determining and cementing an image of individual countries, incorporate some groups while marginalizing others.

The national agendas of both liberal and social movements have often assumed one ideal type of a nation-state in which all citizens would be members of the same racial or ethnic collectivity.[2] And while this vision has yet to come to fruition anywhere in the world, the distinction between the ideal nation-state and reality seems no more pronounced than in settler societies[3] such as Canada and Mexico. In these societies, where the archetype of the nation-state is simply incomprehensible, leaders have traditionally either promoted the assimilation of the divergent groups into a broader culture, or they have developed their politics in such a way as to

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[1] The description "racially mixed" is used with some reservations, as race is empty of any scientific value. This classification also underscores the reality of "racial mixture" before settlement took place in North America. However, although race is devoid of scientific value, it maintains important social and political purpose, as societies continue to divide themselves along the lines of phenotypic differences.

[2] See Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983).

[3] My understanding of "settler societies" comes from Daiva Statsiulis and Nira Yuval-Davis, eds, *Unsettling Settler Societies: Articulations of Gender, Race, Ethnicity and Class* (London: Sage Publications, 1995), 1-38. Settler societies are, basically, those societies in which large European settler populations established permanent settlements. These societies differ from those "colonies of exploitation," from which a small number of European men merely extracted resources.

exclude them. With this in mind, I have narrowed my study to an examination of the identities of groups whose origins start with settlement, and trace the path of the groups' developments throughout the evolution of their countries' identities.

Although Canada and Mexico both fall under the category of settler societies, they have developed in very different ways. As Mexico's nationalist agenda suggests, the attempt to embrace a "culture of hybridity"[4] instead of a "hybridity of cultures" may have faltered in its maginalization of traditional groups. Conversely, to embrace a "hybridity of cultures" as the Canadian example suggests, may have the effect of marginalizing mixed races. In the absence of any solid conclusions, I seek to illuminate the complexity of integration in North America, and demonstrate how the nature of settlement and nationalist policies in the two countries added to and, at times, compounded this complexity.

As has already been mentioned, the specific groups involved in my study are the Métis of Canada and the mestizos of Mexico. Both the Métis and mestizos occupy the awkward middle ground between two stable, traditional identities; they are the physical human forms evidencing in their phenotypic constructions, the collision of cultures, those of the European and the indigenous people of the Americas. The development of Métis and mestizo identity between two pre-established identities has often worked to make their own identities extremely volatile, as their positions in Canadian and Mexican societies appear to be in constant flux.

The experiences of the two groups involved in my study illuminate the problems of integration throughout North America, where the nature of settlement produced what one author on the subject, Magnus Moerner, calls a "pigmentocracy." In North America, where invading Europeans had no history upon which to base the division of classes, social status was

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[4] Maria Markus, "Cultural Pluralism and the Subversion of the 'Taken for Grated World'" in Rainer Baubock and John Randell, eds., *Blurred Boundaries* (Ashgate, Vermont: Aldershot, 1998), 256.

determined by skin color. And thus, race played a significant role in the validation of the order of things. The psychology of this order continues to show itself in patterns of social and political interaction between and among the groups formed. While the idea of racial mixture finds little scientific value today, when race itself is a nebulous concept, the Métis and mestizo experiences suggest that "race" still bears important social and political implications.

Métis and mestizos represent intriguing case studies in a time when political literature suggests an obsession with the politics of difference. Both groups are composed of "individuals...of irreducibly plural parts of many registers that change according to context, of identities that are always in the making, of internal contradictions that are not the exception but the rule."[5] An understanding of either group raises concerns about the continued significance of race in North America in the shaping of national identities. Their composition and their present situations suggest the effects of European imperialism and the strength of the ideas that came with it.

The body of this paper has two sections; one section is devoted to each group. Each section contains a summary of the origins of the group; a brief account of their historical experiences within their respective countries; and finally, a description of their current political statuses. Consequently, the task of defining Métis and mestizo identities not only involves a basic anthropological understanding of the groups, but also requires an account of their current legal standing in their native countries, as well as their representation in contemporary political rhetoric. Unfortunately, not much is known about the Mexican legal system, and inadequate sources compounded by a language barrier have meant the exclusion of a large amount of relevant material.

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[5] Charles R. Hale, "Mestizaje, Hybridity, and the Cultural Politics of Difference in Post-Revolutionary Central America," *Journal of Latin American Anthropology* 2(1) (1998): 34-61.

Most of the sources for this work have been second-hand, and some are quite dated. For while there are several current works that are tangential to this study, there is, overall, a demonstrable lack of material on the groups involved. Unfortunately, then, my understanding of the contemporary situation in Mexico may lack development. Also, several, older anthropological works were relied upon for the purposes of this paper, and some contained language that, in accordance with contemporary standards, could be considered offensive. Although my hope is that, in the course of this work, my reliance on this literature does not show itself in my own repetition of offensive language, I feel that incorporating some of the references helps to illuminate the absurdity of antiquated racial categories.

II. The Canadian Métis: From Nation to Race

Determining a definition of the Métis of Canada has proven to be an intriguing exercise in group classification; it is quite possibly an impossible task. After employing the assistance of innumerable sources, I have failed to come up with a working definition of the group, for there seems to be no consensus as to who they really are. Consequently, attempting to characterize their current situation often puts me in the awkward position of talking about several different groups at once, as an understanding of the Métis varies from one source to the next.

This problem appears to have arisen at the time Canadian federal and provincial policies lumped non-status and Métis aboriginal groups together, in order to better define governmental responsibilities to the Métis in relation to status Indians. In the early half of this century, for instance, "none of the provinces recognized obligations to the Métis distinct from those owed to non-indigenous citizens within their territorial boundaries."[6] Critics contend that the treatment of the Métis as an indistinguishable category of people "reflects the mistaken view that there are only two Aboriginal groups [in Canada]: Inuit and First Nations."[7]

On the other hand, contemporary Canadian legislation and adjudication presents a Métis group with rights and privileges that are not accessible to all Canadians. In fact, the Métis are mentioned in section 35 of the 1982 *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*,[8] rendering them an elevated status in negotiations to secure land claims and self-rule in Canada:

> First, recognition as an aboriginal people provides a solid constitutional base upon which negotiations for the recognition and compensation of rights can begin. Second, it incorporates a fiduciary relationship between the federal government and aboriginal peoples and so imports some restraint on the exercise of federal power.[9]

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[6] Catherine Bell, *Contemporary Métis Justice: The Settlement Way*, (Saskatoon, Saskatchewan: Houghton Boston Printers, 1999), 9.

[7] This quote is a bit problematic because some Métis call themselves First Nations. Ibid, 3.

[8] Section 35 reads, "**35.** (1) The existing aboriginal and treaty rights of the aboriginal peoples of Canada are hereby recognized and affirmed. (2) In this Act, "aboriginal peoples of Canada" includes the Indian, Inuit and Métis peoples of Canada." *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.*

[9] Catherine Bell, "Who Are the Métis in Section 35(2)?" *Alberta Law Review*, 29 (2) (1991): 351-381.

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Regardless of the group's improved status, there remain serious ambiguities concerning their identity. These ambiguities are compounded by the fact that section 35 does not define the term "Métis," nor does it say whether the "Métis" have existing aboriginal rights recognized in section 35(1). For now, possible definitions of the group include: all Canadian native people who are neither Inuit nor Indians but are recognized under the Federal Indian Act; all mixed-blood people, including children of modern-day intermarriages; and finally, all descendants of the Manitoba Red River Métis of the early 1800's. In addition to these definitions, the Métis Settlements Act states that a Métis person is "a person of (Canadian) aboriginal ancestry who identifies with Métis history and culture."[10] But with the category expanded, as it is, those individuals not able to identify, in some way, with "Métis" would probably constitute a smaller, more cohesive group.

The fact that the mention of the Métis in the *Charter* was not coupled with a legal definition inhibits the distribution of rights particular to the group, as distribution depends on an understanding of the beneficiaries' identities.[11] Acknowledging this reality, some Métis organizations have held gatherings, the object of which being the development of a legal definition of "Métis." The following statement, taken from a court case in which a group of Ontario Métis sought to establish their right to participate in an affirmative action program for Ontario's First Nations, expresses the outcome of these gatherings:

> The differing membership criteria among the applicants reflect the lack of consensus generally about the definition of the term Métis. From 1993-1995, the federal government, the Métis National Council and its affiliates and a number of provincial governments attempted to arrive at a proper definition of what it means to be Métis; this process was unsuccessful.[12]

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[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid.

[12] *Lovelace v. Ontario*, 44 C.R.R. (2d): 291.

As has already been suggested, self-identifying Métis are not a homogenous group that lend themselves to easy definition.

This chapter explores the course of the Métis identity in Canada, and in its development, demonstrates how the political interpretation of Métis identity has contributed to the expansion of the definition of Métis into a catchall category devoid of true, cultural significance. The problem of Métis identity is inextricably linked to this misconception of race by Canadian political figures, who have, at times, denied the unique, cultural orientations of those people who identify with a Métis nation.

I present three different time periods, which are pivotal to the development and alteration of Métis identity. These include early settlement, western expansion, and finally, the repatriation period, during which the Métis acquired federal recognition in the Canadian constitution. I conclude the chapter with a description of the political status of the Métis in the context of contemporary Canadian society.

The Fur Trade and the First Métis

In the romanticized understanding of the North American frontier, people often envision a sprawling landscape full of trees, of untapped resources, and of unbounded opportunity. Indigenous people are rarely viewed apart from the nature that early North American settlers encountered after they made the journeys across the Atlantic. Indeed, the Indian is presented as little more than an obstacle, inhibiting the Europeans' rightful progress. Reflecting this attitude, most historical works on the development of Canada and the United States fail to include an account of indigenous experiences before contact with the Europeans.[13]

In *Strange Multiplicity*, James Tully reveals the ruthlessness with which Canada was settled, as indigenous peoples were denied rights that would have been extended to more

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[13] Mexican schools, on the other hand, provide extensive reviews of their indigenous forbears.

"civilized" inhabitants. According to Tully, European expansion required aggressors to submit to a process of mutual recognition, consent, and continuity, which, if followed, would have completely altered the Canadian state's relationship with its indigenous population. The continued alienation of Canadian groups is, in part, a result of the Europeans' abandonment of this convention in their conquest of the frontier.

For some groups of people, the frontier and its role in providing the meeting grounds for European and indigenous cultures played a pivotal part in their own formation. The Métis are one such group, and while contemporary political understanding tends to link the group with other Aboriginal groups in Canada, there would have been no Métis without the European. Accordingly, there are at least some limits to the flexibility of Métis identity.

From this very broad understanding of the formation of the Métis come more specific questions, concerning the nature of the relationship between the European and indigenous groups who became the forbears of contemporary Métis. For example, from what specific interaction between Europeans and indigenous peoples did the Métis emerge? The most plausible answer would have to be the fur industry that developed along the peripheries of European settlement. For in the early stages of settlement, the Indian's hunting skills satisfied the European quest for profit, culminating in an elaborate fur trade that sustained many a family in colonial New France.[14]

Métis is actually an old French word, which means "mixed." At its origin, the term referred specifically to those of both French and Indian descent in New France. The traditional pronunciation of the word by Métis speakers is Mischiss or Mitchif. Mitchif is still used to identify one of the Métis languages, which is a hybrid of Cree and French. Similarly, the English nineteenth century racial term "Half-Breed" denotes the offspring of Anglophone and Aboriginal

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[14] For a more extensive account of this interaction, see Howard Adams, *A Tortured People: The Politics of Colonization* (Penticton, B.C.: Theytus Books Ltd., 1995).

parentage.[15] Another term used to Half-Breeds was Country Born, referencing their occupation of lands outside the settlement area. These people tended to be more sedentary than the Métis, preferring land cultivation to fur trapping. They also tended to speak English, instead of Mitchif.

In light of this distinction, the understanding of Métis as a separate nation rather than a racial category emerges, as it suggests that the Métis identity hinged on cultural characteristics, and not solely on European ideas about racial mixtures. However, contemporary usage of the term Métis incorporates "Half-Breeds," suggesting not only the attempt to purge the English language of a derogatory racial category, but also the unification of the two groups after Canadian expansion required their ultimate collaboration. "Neither group fitted smoothly into either the European or the Native culture, although each had contacts with both."[16]

The Métis were not well respected among European society, and yet many Frenchmen abandoned European settler societies to join the group. The decision to do so was most common among those people of lowly birth, whose social status meant their subjugation to permanent servitude. They left for the social mobility that fur trading would offer them, and for the opportunity to break away from the imposing class structure, in order to change their destinies and determine their own ways of life. These Frenchmen were popularly known as coureur de bois, and their liaisons with Indian women resulted in the rise of a group of people the Algonquin tribes called, "wissakodewinmi," the English translation of which is burnt stick.[17] Accordingly, in French the term "bois-brûlé" (burnt wood) was used to describe the Métis.[18] And by the early

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[15] Paul L.A.H. Chartrand, "Aboriginal Rights: The Dispossession of the Métis," *Osgoode Hall Law Journal*, 29(3):457-482.

[16] John Herd Thompson, *Forging the Prairie West* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1996), 28.

[17] Antoine S. Lussier and D. Bruce Sealey, *The Other Natives: 1700-1885.* (Winnipeg, Manitoba: Manitoba Métis Federation Press, 1978), 2.

[18] Donald Purich, *The Métis*, (Toronto: James Lorimer and Company, 1988), 18.

1700s, a sizable population of those identified as such made their home in New France, on the outskirts of French settler communities.

Initially, the response of the government of New France was quite negative, as policies prohibiting trade with the Métis forced the group to look elsewhere in its attempt to establish a clientele. In 1696 the governor of New France passed a law forbidding all Frenchmen from travelling into Indian territory "and absolutely suppressed all licenses and permissions to trade with the Indians."[19] Soon, the traders entered into exchanges with Dutch and English merchants, creating a lucrative business for themselves.

Acknowledging the threat of the Métis relationship with the English, the French settlers reversed their ban and encouraged the group to abandon their associations with outside traders. This only worked to push the Métis farther away from the French settlement, as securing their business meant distancing themselves from French settlers and, simultaneously, infiltrating Indian communities. Soon, the hunt and the trade pushed the Métis into the interior of the territory that was to become western Canada. This move progressed with the development of two rival fur trading companies, the North-West Company of Montreal and England's Hudson's Bay Company, whose intense competition reflected the antipathies that maintained the traditional divide between the French and English.[20]

By the early 1800s, trading routes had spread all the way to the Pacific, covering the vast, open prairies of the Canadian West, and challenging the impeding Rockies along the western edge of the continent. Shared routes and intersections in their explorations of the West allowed

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[19] H. Innis, *The Fur Trade in Canada*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1964), 67. The use of the word "initially" in this sentence may be a bit misleading, as it was initially the intent of Frenchmen to merge with the Indians in order to forge a new race in the North American territory. In fact, "Samuel de Champlain was instructed by the French Crown in 1612 to 'call the Indians, have them instructed, provoke, and move them to the knowledge and service of God band by the light of the Catholic faith and religion'...Louis XIV instituted a King's Gift, a sum of money, to encourage mixed marriages." Purich, *The Métis*, 17.

[20] George F. G. Stanley, *The Birth of Western Canada: A History of the Riel Rebellions* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 3-6.

for the mingling of Half-Breeds and Métis, whose common dependence on furs often deflated cultural differences in language, religion, and technique, and united the groups in their journeys. The Half-Breeds generally worked for the Hudson's Bay Company, and were composed, largely, of people of both Scottish and Indian descent, while the Métis, predominantly French and Indian, remained loyal to Montreal's North-West Company.

In 1816, the Métis loyalty to the North-West Company gave rise to a cohesiveness that was reflected in their calling themselves the "new nation."[21] This sense of nationhood was provoked by the North-West Company, which, facing the impending dominance of the Hudson's Bay Company, resolved to build a defence for its business, complete with a Métis militia. And so out of the Montreal company's anxieties was wrought the Métis nation.

The North-West Company's concerns were grounded in a decision that preceded their present troubles by more than a century. The Hudson's Bay Company was ceded the territory of western Canada in 1670, when Charles II unwittingly released a landmass the size of Europe to its protection. Aware of these negotiations, the North-West Company, operating illegally in Hudson's Bay territory, intended to use the Métis indigenous heritage to suggest its right to continued usage of the land. In the course of that same year, the North West Company devised the Métis flag. This flag represented a people who now had appointed military leaders, and along with them, a directive to fight off British intruders. The result was a series of struggles between the Métis and British settlers which climaxed in a Métis victory at Seven Oaks in 1816, but was depicted by white settlers as a demoralizing display of human brutality, taking 22 men's lives for the cost of one Métis death.

In the end, the victory secured a mere five years of the North-West Company's independence, and in 1821 Hudson's Bay merged with the Montreal company, subordinating its

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[21] George Woodcock, *Gabriel Dumont: The Métis Chief and His Lost World*, (Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1975), 29.

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interest and demanding the retribution of its Métis rebels. This meant the temporary displacement of the Métis, a large part of whom settled along the Red River, and whose sense of nation grew as the expansion of English Canada suggested the uncomfortable encroachment of their independence.

After the Hudson's Bay takeover, the survival of Métis independence required their advancement into the interior, maintaining their way of life through their evasion of the English company's advancements. History proves that the adventurous Métis "never accepted HBC rule docilely."[22] Their disregard for the company showed itself in the development of a profitable exchange with settlers in the United States. The Métis, with the assistance of their notorious Red River carts, carried cartloads of furs and buffalo robes to their southern neighbors. "During the 1840s, the demand for buffalo robes in the US expanded and Red River hunters eagerly supplied them, freighting robes 750 kilometers for sale in the Minnesota Territory."[23] Having already defied the boundary between European and Native cultures, the Métis now embarked on a trade relationship that challenged the boundaries of state.

The Métis were able to sustain their lifestyle in spite of legal conventions that placed their exchanges with the United States outside the boundaries of the law. But, "such government as there was [in that era] depended on the consent of the governed," and so when a jury acting on behalf of the Hudson's Bay Company sentenced a Métis for "illegal trading" in the United States, "300 armed Métis surrounding the courthouse persuaded recorder Adam Thom that a sentence of no sentence would be prudent."[24]

This lawlessness did not last. In 1869, two years after the British North America Act had created the Canadian Confederation, the Hudson's Bay Company handed over responsibility of

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[22] Thompson, *Forging the Prairie*, 30.

[23] Ibid, 30-31.

[24] Ibid.

its claims to the West to the Dominion government. The transfer was made without any involvement of those who already lived in the area, resulting in inevitable disputes between the new settlers of the West and the Métis. The decisions made in regard to expansion were careless, demonstrating the central government's underestimation of the Métis and their attachment to the territory the new government had been ceded.

The Métis and the Expansion of Canada

If the Métis called themselves a distinctive "nation", they did not base the claim on population or on formal political arrangements. They made it because they felt themselves a distinct people who had a role to play in their world and who took a pride in that role, considering no life better than that of the adept hunter and guide and –when the necessity arose—prairie warrior.

George Woodcock, in *Gabriel Dumont*

In 1885 the Métis played the role of prairie warrior once again, as expansionists' ambitions threatened the permanent displacement of Métis homes. Fifteen years earlier, in 1870, the Dominion of Canada established the Province of Manitoba. Therein lay the Red River Settlement, the main community of the province, recognized for its predominantly Métis population. At the time Manitoba was created, there were approximately 10 thousand Métis in the area, and "although Red River Settlement had been governed by the commercial British monopolist, the Hudson's Bay Company, it was nevertheless, in 1870, very much a Métis community."[25]

The Métis leaders had thought their negotiations with the central government to be adequate in securing their territory, and hence, way of life. They based their security on their participation in a series of negotiations with the Canadian government; the outcome of these negotiations found expression in the 1870 *Manitoba Act*. After the Dominion acquired the Hudson's Bay Company's land, the Métis made several demands on the new government, which included their acquisition of provincial rather than territorial status, bilingual government

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[25] Chartrand, "Aboriginal Rights," 459.

institutions, confessional schools, and local control of public lands. "These demands were granted in a formal way in the [resulting act], except that a land grant to mixed-blood people was substituted for provincial control of the public domain."[26]

However, as the Métis lost their majority in Manitoba, the *Manitoba Act* and its promises were abandoned. The only compensation Métis received came years later, in the form of "scrips." Recent court cases have sought to rescue the Métis from the bloated category of people who took scrips from the Dominion real estate agents shortly after the establishment of the Province of Manitoba had almost completely disenfranchised them:

> Any Aboriginal man who could show some non-Aboriginal ancestry was given the option of taking Métis scrip instead of "treaty status." Many individuals were tempted by the prospect of a quick cash settlement to leave the ranks of "treaty Indians" on the reserves and to join the growing ranks of landless Métis.[27]

This phenomenon gave rise to a large pool of dispossessed non-status Indians and Métis people whose similar plights have meant their coordinated efforts ever since.[28]

The "scrips" mentioned above were given as tokens of the expansionists' civility ten years after the Métis were disenfranchised. In the end, however, the scrip system served as an insulting reminder of the deceptiveness that characterized central Canada's treatment of the Métis, who knew nothing of the legal ramifications involved in the issuance of scrips. The word "scrip" comes from "description," as in "Tickets shall be prepared; each to contain thereon a description of the lands intended to satisfy the particular claim for which it may happen to be drawn."[29] However, most Métis were not advised about the land to which the scrips entitled them, and instead of going through the procedures necessary to acquire their land, most people

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[26] Thomas Flannagan, *Riel and the Rebellion 1885 Reconsidered* (Saskatoon, Saskatchewan: Western Produce Prairie Books, 1983), 3.

[27] Chartrand, "Aboriginal Rights," 482.

[28] One organization indicative of this unification is the Association of Métis and Non-status Indians of Saskatchewan. There are several other examples of the groups' coordination, which do not require a mention here.

[29] Harry W. Daniels, *The Forgotten People: Métis and Non-Status Indian Land Claims*, (Ottawa: Native Council of Canada, 1979), 62.

who were issued scrips, exchanged their coupons for money. Having virtually bought the Métis claims, speculators then sold Métis land to new settlers, creating quite a profit margin for themselves. Dominion judges, too, have since been implicated for their involvement in this elaborate, moneymaking scheme.

Typifying the attitude that threatened the cultural and economic ruin of the Métis, one author writes,

> In their contact with Ontarians, [Métis] suffered the effects of their weakness of will and of their traditions of living, which, by attaching them to nomadism, had prevented them from appreciating the true value of the land and from adapting gradually to the economy that was destined hence forward to impose itself on the plains of the west.[30]

As the settlement of Manitoba progressed, Protestant Anglophones began to outnumber the French-speaking, Catholic Métis, and "before the decade was up, the Métis, and indeed many of the English half-breeds, had begun to feel like strangers in their native land."[31] Canadian expansion pushed Métis further into the prairies, until agitation culminated in their demand for vindication. Their distrust of white settlers led many of them into St. Laurent, a settlement in present-day Saskatchewan. It was in St. Laurent that one group of Métis, inspired by the fury of leader Louis Riel, decided to take up arms to defend the land whose many paths had directed their hunts and whose abundance had sustained them for decades.

What followed are events that, today, fill the chapters of countless texts on Canadian history, and therefore, require no elaborate reproduction here. Suffice it to say that Louis Riel led his people in rebellions that, perhaps in the Prairie of today seem quite minimal, but in their proper context, were of great proportion. The defeat of the Métis rebels meant their extended subjugation to a system of limited land distribution, which retarded their sense of autonomy and

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[30] Marcel Giraud, *The Meits in the Canadian West*, vol. 1 and 2, trans. George Woodcock (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1986), 380.

[31] Thompson, *Forging the Prairie*, 30.

treated them as if they were no more than prospective buyers of the expansive real estate that became western Canada. The callousness with which the MacDonald government handled the events, culminating in the execution of famed Métis leader Louis Riel, inhibited any chance of a healthy federal/Métis relationship:

> It is difficult to understand how politicians astute enough to create the Canadian confederation could bungle western expansion so completely; their disregard for the human rights of the residents of Rupert's Land [the former territory of the Hudson's Bay Company] was merciless, but their nonchalance regarding the military capacity of the Métis was irresponsible.[32]

"A Métis is nothing. He hasn't got a country."

Since the failure of the Riel rebellion, the development of the Canadian nation has coincided with an increasingly nebulous understanding of the Métis. In fact, contemporary reference to the group often requires discussants to distinguish between the Métis and "small 'm'" métis. While the former connotes those people directly linked to the Red River Settlement and those which evolved from it, the latter suggests a more encompassing group, resulting from dated understandings of racial mixing, almost validating the absurdity of colonial ideas about the nature of race. For while colonial disdain for racial mixing may have accounted for the initial isolation of Métis communities, their development suggests a group whose identity was the result of self-determination. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the group's uniqueness was sustained more by their own institutions, languages, and dress than by European settlers' disregard for "mixed-bloods."

A series of negotiations to establish the validity of Métis nationhood and to secure historic land claims suggest the attempt on behalf of Métis, as well as the Canadian government, to establish a place for the Métis in contemporary Canadian society. For it seems the Métis, whose traditional occupation of cultural and geographical borderlands has placed them outside

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[32] Ibid, 38.

the construction of the Canadian nation, remain in the periphery of the national community. The compartmentalization of identities in Canada has created an impenetrable amalgamation of solids among which the Métis and the "métis," simply do not fit, encouraging one member to lament, "A Métis is nothing. He hasn't got a country."[33]

The Problem of Métis Integration

In an effort to challenge the rise of Francophone nationalism, the Canadian government, under the auspices of Pierre Trudeau, declared a commitment to multiculturalism, which has since allowed for characterizations of the country that include the terms "cultural mosaic" and "patchwork." Often, Canadian political scientists use this as a point of distinction, separating them, in theory, from the unrelenting assimilationists to the south:

> The United States and Canada are both federal states; yet the American union, as John Ranney wrote, "was based on a remarkably high degree of cultural, social, and political community." Much the same point might be expressed by saying that "the United States was a federation of states which were defined politically not ethnically; Canada was a federation of peoples, organized into different provinces."[34]

Unlike those developed in Canada, the historical integrationist policies of the United States were modeled in accordance with the "melting pot", in which an assemblage of cultures would meld and, in turn, create a new nation. "For American scholars, Canadian pluralism is not a model to be emulated."[35] In fact the cultural mosaic Canadians contend to be the result of their country's adherence to diversity merely serves to remind Americans of the "dangers of balkanization because it allows groups to struggle for special treatment and fails to develop common bonds among citizens."[36]

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[33] Chartrand, "Aboriginal Rights," 482.

[34] Samuel Laselva, *The Moral Foundations of Canadian Federalism* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1996), 162-163.

[35] Ibid, 162.

[36] Ibid.

Theorists suggest that the development of this particularly Canadian ideology is resultant of the country's initial settlement, which was predicated upon a commitment to the cultural independence of the French and English. Supporting this idea, F.L. Morton writes,

> The concept of group rights is hardly new in Canadian law and politics. It can be traced back to the terms under which Canada's two founding nations, the English and the French, agreed to union, or rather, confederation.[37]

In the context of the *Act of Union*, which bound Upper and Lower Canada, the French fear of British cultural imperialism was demonstrated in their demand for enough autonomy to secure their cultural autonomy. Before the Catholic Church would allow for the subjugation of its people to British rule, in fact, clergymen issued a list of commitments, among which was their promise of a "passionate defence of the integrity of the French-Canadian race."[38] And to some degree, the Church was accommodated. But when the expansionists settled the West, this same courtesy was not extended to the people whose prior dependence on the prairie had served to establish their own sense of nationhood.

The people who settled western Canada were composed of multiple cultural groups, and surviving the frontier required a willingness to sacrifice their diversity to make their project work. Even today, western politicians illustrate an unwillingness to negotiate with the Quebecois demands that center on the protection of French uniqueness, as many a western settler abandoned her mother tongue to contribute to the development of the West.

After the French-Canadians' Quiet Revolution began in the 1950s, the Canadian government looked inward, seeking to revitalize the commitment to diversity that had established the confederation in the first place. An expression of this commitment appeared years later in the country's *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, which challenged the country to provide

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[37] Cited in Neil Nevitte and Allan Kornberg, eds., *Minorities and the Canadian State*, (Oakville, Ontario: Mosaic Press, 1985), 77.

[38] Andre Siegfried, *The Race Question in Canada*, (London: Nash Publishers, 1901),48.

security for the collection of identities that constituted Canada's variegated social landscape. This security came in the form of entrenched multiculturalism, which has since been criticized as an over-simplification of the nature of Canadian identities. Will Kymlicka, for instance, argues that Canada's commitment to multiculturalism has the simultaneous effect of denigrating the political significance of "nations" and inflating the politics of ethnicity.[39] For multiculturalism combines multinationalism with polyethnicity, and seems to suggest that the interest of French Canadians can be accommodated in the same way those of immigrants are.

Canada's indigenous population found that the changes occurring in Canada could be helpful in securing heightened political clout for themselves. Responding to their interests, the Minister of the Department of Indian Affairs, Jean Chretien piloted a series of discussions with indigenous groups that ended with the federal government's infamous 1969 White Paper on Indian policy. It was an answer to Trudeau's commitment to a "modern and just society," with which, in his opinion, the trappings of special rights were incongruous.[40] Reacting to the Canadian government's relationship with the Aboriginals, he once remarked,

> It's inconceivable, I think, that in a given society, one section of the society have a treaty with the other section of the society. We must be all equal under the laws and we must not sign treaties amongst ourselves, and many of these treaties, indeed, would have less and less significance in the future anyhow.[41]

In the accordance with the prime minister's own stance, the White Paper, contained the

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[39] Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).
[40] Sally Weaver, *Making Canadian Indian Policy: The Hidden Agenda, 1968-70,* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), 179.

[41] Ibid.

following summation of its objectives:

> All the conditions of the Indians are the product of history and have nothing to do with their abilities and capacities. Indian relations with other Canadians began with special treatment by government and society, and special treatment has been the rule since Europeans first settled in Canada. Special treatment has made of the Indian a community disadvantaged and apart. Obviously the course of history must be changed.[42]

However, for some Canadians, the most acceptable "way of being a Canadian" is "by their belonging to a constituent element of Canada," and if this requires their special treatment, then so be it. This is certainly the case for most French Canadians and "something analogous holds for aboriginal communities." In order to make Canada a place for all its parts, therefore, the country must recognize and accommodate its "deep diversity." In Canada, by extension, "a plurality of ways of belonging [should] be acknowledged and accepted."

The Métis problem, in the context of their government's recognition and accommodation of traditional groups, is that in the course of Canadian history, constant redefinition has had the effect of diminishing a sense of belonging within the group itself. The group was expanded after federal recognition of the Métis failed to distinguish them from non-status Indians of mixed race, who left reserves to take advantage of the government handouts described earlier.[43] This has since served as a mechanism to bond the otherwise independent groups, who suffered similar discriminations as the expansion of Canada continued. They now share membership in organizations designed to re-establish their privileges as Aboriginals. However, this association has not served to diminish the many differences among them. Their inability to establish a common identity has made it difficult to integrate into the Canadian "patchwork." The essence of the group does not suggest their characterization as a "patch" among others; rather, they are themselves a patchwork, an assortment of multiple identities whose common treatment, alone, accounts for their current cohesiveness.

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[42] Daniel N. Paul, *We Were Not the Savages: A Micmac Perspective on the Collision of European and Aboriginal Civilizations* (Halifax, Nova Scotia: Nimbus Publishing, 1993), 307.

[43] See "scrips," on page 19.

Hence the problem of Métis integration. While the roots of the group reveal a people of national character, who, in fact, bore the first flag native to the Canadian state, the Métis are, now, a complex unit of individuals who identify with the category of "Métis" or "métis" in a multitude of ways:

> Recently the term "Métis" has been gerneralized to refer to all Canadians of Indian and European ancestry. In part this has occurred because of the predominance of studies on Red River Métis. In part it has been a conscious adoption by contemporary people of admixed ancestry in the interests of establishing and validating a separate social and political identity.[44]

The problem is, thus, constructing a workable, legal definition of themselves that would aid in the acquisition of their rightful claims on the Canadian government. Compounding the lack of definition is the reality that the expansion of the group has meant the obscurity of their guarantees.

As Canada has developed, differences among its diverse polity have served to compartmentalize it, and yet the government of the country has gone on, serving these separate identities by purporting its own neutrality. However, the service of these groups requires a recognition of what can be done to service them, and if the Métis identity remains as enigmatic and complex as it is now, the group's capacity to access its entitlements will remain limited.[45]

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[44] Peters, Evelyn, et al, "The Ontario Métis: Some Aspects of a Métis Identity," Canadian Ethnic Studies 23 (1): 71-83.

[45] The Métis have experienced recent triumphs in spite of their "semantic difficulties,' as land claims have been granted to the Métis of Alberta. Nonetheless, distribution must be a legal nightmare, as the lack of membership rolls like those of First Nations, continues to make the beneficiaries hard to identify.

III. Mexico's Mestizo: The Route from Racial Category to Political Device

On August 13, 1521, Tlatelolco, heroically defended by Cuauhtemoc, fell into the power of Hernan Cortes. It was neither a triumph nor a defeat, but the painful birth of the Mestizo people who are the Mexico of today.[46]

This chapter traces the origins and development of the mestizo people of Mexico. Like a multitude of other racial categories developed in New Spain, the mestizo category occupied the middle position between two traditional groups, namely the Spanish and the Indians. Consequently, I make sporadic references to Indians to place the mestizo identity in its proper context. I also provide an understanding of the European, particularly Spanish, inhabitants of Mexico to help identify mestizos, as they continue to demonstrate cultural influences from both sides of their lineage. I give no serious attention to a more subjective understanding of the mestizo identity, for the identity of the mestizo seems more a European imposition than the result of an exercise in self-determination.

Like the Indians, mestizos have been defined as if they constituted a cohesive unit, despite striking differences in lifestyles and cultural orientations. Before colonization indigenous communities rarely converged, if ever. Recognizable boundaries between Mexico's Indian populations, between the Maya and the Aztec, for instance, were not merely arbitrary demarcations, but the lines between two distinct groups with separate languages and institutions. "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 contradiction to the dominant Spaniard/European."[47] Indeed, "the attribution of Indian identity began...with the

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[46] This quotation was taken from the Plaza of Three Cultures, which rests atop the ruins of the Aztec capital, in Mexico City. Tlatelolco was the capital, and the name referenced is that of the Aztec chief at the time the empire was lost. Colin M. MacLachlan and Jaime E Rodriguez O. *The Forging of the Cosmic Race: A Reinterpretation of Colonial Mexico*. (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1980), xv.

[47] Alan Knight, " Racism, Revolution, and Indigenismo: Mexico, 1910-1940," ed. Richard Graham, in *The Idea of Race in Latin American, 1870-1940* (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1990), 75.

Conquest, 'it was the European who created the Indian.'"[48] And certainly there would have been no mestizo had there been no European, as the category only emerged after Conquest.

One of the most significant differences in the identity of Mexican mestizos and Canadian Métis is implied by their representation in text. The mestizo name is not capitalized, suggesting its identification as a racial category rather than a nationality. The racial group lacks the assignment of great leaders like Métis hero, Louis Riel, whose memory now serves to validate Métis grievances. Instead, the mestizo ideology is linked with prominent intellectuals like José Vasconcelos and Manuel Gamio, both of whom served to romanticize the Métis image in an effort to establish Mexican nationalism during and after the Mexican Revolution of the twentieth century.

Also unlike the Métis, whose common dependence on fur trapping manifested in distinguishable traditions, the mestizos have no defining customs that would serve to separate them from other Mexican subgroups. And while, as members of the Mexican community, they may identify with figures like revolutionary leader Emiliano Zapata, they do not do so apart from the indigenous folk, who also share an affinity with the man.

In what follows, I provide a brief account of the origins and the development of the mestizo people of modern day Mexico. The chapter traces the evolution of "mestizo" from racial category to integrative concept, utilizing information on the development of the Mexican caste system, and later, the origins of Mexican nationalism. The events that seemed to have affected the mestizo identity the most coincide with the development of Mexican nationalism and include Mexican Independence and the subsequent Reforma period and the 1910 Mexican Revolution and its aftermath. A description of how the mestizo identity fits into the country's contemporary political atmosphere concludes the chapter.

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[48] Ibid.

The First Mestizos

In the sixteenth century, before the Council of Trent prohibited common law marriages and required all subjects to wed within the Catholic Church, Spanish Conquistadors made there way into present day Mexico. Being unaware of the Council's proclamation and living far enough away from the walls of the church to establish immunity, the conquistadors took indigenous women for their common law wives. The children of these unions were the first of Mexico's mestizo "race."

La Malinche, an Aztec woman and captive of the conquistadors who served as interpreter, is said to be the mother of the mestizos.[49] She bore the child of Hernan Cortes, who led the Spanish conquistadors into Mexico and directed the defeat of the Aztecs. She is a prominent female figure in Mexican literature, representing, at once, the betrayal of her native community, and at other times, the celebrated embodiment of Mexico's twentieth century national ideal. "The figure has several names which correspond to the three eras of the Mexican nation: Malintzin, representing the pre-Hispanic past; Marina in the colonial period; and Malinche in the nationalist era."[50] But whatever her name or her characterization, she is a fitting symbol of the mestizo experience, as her identity, like that of the mestizos, is always in flux, subject to and altered by external characterizations.

Development of Mestizo Category

As has already been implied, the mestizo sense of identity is extremely volatile, making it, at times, difficult to decipher. Israel, who wrote on the group's experiences in the seventeenth century, writes, "Although it was not long before mestizo children abounded, mestizos did not at

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[49]Although La Malinche is the "first mother of Mexican nationality," she did not bear the first mestizo. In fact, a Mayan woman bore the children of Spanish sailor Gonzala Guerrero before Cortes ever made it into Mexico. When Cortes discovered Guerrero in souther Mexico, the man refused to leave his new home, and remained among the Maya long after Spanish settlement was established in other areas of Mexico. See Sandra Messinger Cypress, *La Malinche in Mexican Literature: From History to Myth* (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1991).

first form part of any third community or element distinguishable from Indian society and Spanish society."[51] In fact, the category of "mestizo" did not emerge until the 1530s when the children of Indian and Spanish unions were no longer accepted by Spanish society.[52] "When the term 'mestizo' began to appear…, it referred to marginal individuals—persons of Spanish-Indian descent who were not full members of either group."[53]

The fate of a mestizo's identity hinged, for the most part, on the nature of the relationship between male Spaniards and their indigenous partners. Those children of "reputable" birth were to become descendants of all the social promises of their fathers' world, while those children resultant of more "casual liaisons" remained with their mothers:[54]

> In the first generations some mestizo children were legitimate or were recognized by their fathers, but the vast majority were not…Without family support and often culturally and legally alienated from both indigenous or European society, illegitimate mestizos became known for criminality and violence against settled society, and were themselves subjected to violence by both European and Indian communities.[55]

This characterization of the mestizos as a group unto themselves differs, somewhat, from the characterization provided by Israel's work, which suggests that, while some mestizos acquired all the characteristics attributable to the upper echelons of the colonial society, most remained among the dregs of the Mexican caste system, living alongside their indigenous relatives. These people "learned no Spanish, knew nothing of their fathers, and tended to

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[50] Natividad Gutierrez, *Nationalist Myths and Ethnic Identities: Indigenous Intellectuals and the Mexican State* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 150.

[51] J. Israel, *Race, Class, and Politics in Colonial Mexico* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 64.

[52] R. Douglas Cope, *Limits of Racial Domination: Plebian Society in Colonial Mexico City, 1600-1720* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994) 49-68.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Illegitimate children constituted the bulk of the mestizo race, and hence, they remained with their mothers, creating what has been titled the "mestizo family model," in which the mother acts as head of the family, without the presence of a stable father figure. Ibid.

[55] Ward Stavig, "Conflict, Violence and Resistance," eds. Louisa Schell Hoberman and Susan Migden Socolow, *The Countryside in Colonial Latin America* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996) 217-218.

become a barely distinguishable part of the Indian community."[56] Indeed, it seems, according to

Israel, that "early mestizos, even when bilingual and in spite of their complex psychology, were

generally classified socially as either 'Spaniards' or 'Indians'."[57] They formed no third group.

Although the suggestion of an alienated, third group is not supported by Israel's

comments, Moerner, in his *Race Mixture*, suggests that the early mestizos were "marginal men,

rootless, unstable, uneasy misfits." He describes them as a group with neither indigenous nor

Spanish identification, writing that their marginality was resultant of their rejection by both lines

of their parentage and, later, by their own refusal "to join the parental stock considered

'inferior.'"[58]

These different characterizations of the mestizo identity are most likely resultant of the

diversification of the perceptions of the mestizo throughout the history of New Spain and modern

Mexico. As has been mentioned, mestizos were originally not considered part of a separate race,

but were either accepted into European or indigenous societies. But this is often the reality when

groups are small:

> It is a simple sociological fact that persons of mixed origin tend to be absorbed by either
> parental group when they are few in number. When they are numerous, though, they are
> likely to form a group of their own.[59]

In the 1530s, the Catholic Church mandated that all "sons of Spaniards" in Mexico be

gathered up, and that they be educated in the Catholic Church.[60] This meant the extraction of

mestizos from indigenous communities, and for the time being, the improvement of their

lifestyles and social statuses. However, their improved status did not prove lasting. Less than

ten years after the church's proclamation, disdain for racially mixed groups had emerged and

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[56] Israel, Race, Class and Politics, 61.

[57] Ibid.

[58] Magnus Moerner, *Race Mixture in the History of Latin America* (Boston, Massachusetts: Little, Brown and Company, 1967), 6.
[59] Ibid, 29.

caused the ousting of the mestizos from Spanish society. The mestizos were then forced to grow up "slowly around the fringes of the 'Spanish' republic and in the shadow of the black community."[61] In fact, "royal legislation often classified mestizos with Afro-Mexicans: prohibitory regulations typically spoke of 'mestizos, blacks, and mulattoes."[62] Compounding the degradation of mestizo status was the group's association with illegitimacy. Indeed, as the sixteenth century progressed, the terms "mestizo" and "illegitimate" became practically synonymous.

The Mestizo and the Caste System

The cause of the original influx in the racially mixed population was "to be found in the lack of white women at the time of the first expeditions and the months of abstention during passage,"[63] but eventually, Spanish women began to arrive, and the

Christian concept of racial purity came with them. This concept was,

> ...tied to Christian ancestry and maintenance of a lineal pedigree by means of sexual honor. Women born in Spain played a significant role in preserving these core Spanish values and thus became synonymous with social status.[64]

The end result of this Christian idea was the development of a Mexican caste system that was organized around the notion of race, and produced what Moerner calls a "pigmentocracy." In such a system, a person's status was to be found in her phenotypic construction, as individuals were placed on a scale and aligned according to skin color. It was an elaborate scale, which proved most favorable to those of European descent who came directly from Spain. These

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[60] Cope, *The Limits*, 15.

[61] The black community is a reference to the African slaves who were taken into Mexico to compensate for a shortage of Indian labor and new laws that prohibited Indian slavery. Israel, *Race, Class, and Politics*, 63.

[62] Cope, *The Limits*, 19.

[63] Moerner, *Race Mixture*, 22.

[64] Natividad Gutierrez, *Nationalist Myths and Ethnic Identities: Indigenous Intellectuals and the Mexican State*, (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 150.

people were called "peninsulares," or men of the peninsula; they had journeyed to Mexico to rule,[65] and rule they did. The men of this category held all the highest positions within state and the church, and maintained these positions throughout the colonial period, except during those brief periods following indigenous uprisings, when members of the indigenous community assumed the white men's posts until they were again put down[66]. Consequently, "the Spaniards preferred to marry Spanish women, above all, because of their desire to provide their descendants with a good lineage."[67]

In accordance with this caste system, the chronic ruling patterns of the Mexican state were established, with the "white" race occupying the upper echelons of the political system. Below the peninsulares were the "criollos,"[68] known as "Creoles" in the United States. These people were the descendants of Europeans, but they were born in the Americas. In Mexico, they maintained the racial caste system their ancestors left behind, even after acquiring independence from Spain.

The Mexican caste system depended on a strict dichotomy, attributing rank and status to the Spaniard in opposition to the Indian. Race mixture threatened the ordering of the system, and in 1536 as in 1563, mestizos were once again extracted from indigenous populations to discourage their continued development. Later, a policy that was devised in the 1570s and was officially implemented in the 1600s required the separation of Indian and

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[65] John Warnock, *The Other Mexico: The North America Triangle Completed* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1995), 16.

[66] Thomas Benjamin, *A Rich Land, a Poor People: Politics and Society in Modern Chiapas* (Albuquerque, N.M.: University of New Mexico Press, 1989), 20-21, offers an interesting account of one of these rebellions, a famous one, in fact, called the "Caste War" in Mexico. In this "war" the landed elite in Chiapas put down an indigenous uprising in order to end Indian separatism and regain control of the state's highlands.

[67] Moerner, *Race Mixture*, p.27. Relative to this is the matrilineality of the Mexican family system, whereby family membership, inheritance, and certain rights were passed from mothers to daughters.

[68] Ibid, 16.

Spanish communities, directing that they live in complete isolation of one another. The

motivation for this order was found in:

> the rapid decline of the Indian population, the systematic gathering of the remaining Indians into large mission villages, and the increasing disorders in the country side attributed to vagrants and mixed-bloods.[69]

Ironically, "in Spanish America, the Indians applauded the policy of separation or segregation.

Thus the victims of segregation in this case were rather the mestizos and other non-Indians."[70]

Nevertheless, and despite the efforts of the church, the system of production upon which

the European settlers relied inhibited the strict separation of the two populations. Many

Spaniards depended on the distribution of encomiendas, or royal grants that gave the recipients

permission to use Indian labor of specified villages.[71] As free vassals of the Crown, the

indigenous people of Spanish America were required to pay tribute throughout the colonial era

and into the nineteenth century. In accordance with this system, indigenous people provided

labor on what were, basically, large plantations. Not surprisingly, many encomenderos, or grant

recipients, chose female Indians for their laborers, and such servants served as concubines more

often than not.[72] Mestizos started outnumbering Spaniards in New Spain as early as 1650,[73] and,

"according to the conventions of eighteenth-century Mexico, the majority of settlers fell into the

caste status of mixed ancestry, as indicated in documents such as the late colonial parish polls."[74]

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[69] Ibid, 46.

[70] Ibid, 47.

[71] Louisa Schelle Hoberman and Susan Migden Socolw, eds. *The Countryside in Colonial Latin America* (Albuquerque, New Mexico: University of New Mexico Press, 1996), 280.

[72] Moerner, *Race Mixture*, 24.

[73] Gary B. Nash, "The Hidden History of Mestizo America," *The Journal of American History*, Dec. 1995: 951.

[74] Robert H. Jackson, *Race, Caste and Status: Indians in Colonial Spanish America* (Albuquerque, New Mexico: University of New Mexico Press, 1998), 110.

Mexican Independence and the Revitalization of the Mestizo

Mexican Independence from Spain came in the early part of the 19th Century, and yet, in the end, the war for independence left the country practically unchanged, as the social ordering from the colonial period carried over into the structuring of the new nation-state. In fact, even after the establishing of independence from Spain, the monarchical system of rule persisted in Mexico. What took place, in the end, was not a revolution, but a name change.

Recognizing that the style of leadership and the basic organization of the country was not going to change, leaders of the new Mexican state were faced with the problem of separating from Spain in more than the political sphere. Mexico had to establish its own separate identity in order to validate its independence from Spain. When the United States separated from England, the country did so under terms that would establish a new governmental order. This order was constructed out of a foundation of liberal principles that separated the American nation from the more conservative English colonials. In Mexico, where there were no profound principles upon which to base their separation from Spain, grounds for independence had to be manufactured. Therefore, politicians busied themselves with methods to do just that, and what resulted was a deceptively noble representation of Mexico's indigenous heritage. For it was believed that "destigmatization of the pre-Hispanic Indians was the necessary first step toward integrating into Mexican nationhood the Amerindian and mestizo figures who were appearing on the political scene." This change in characterization did little to ameliorate the condition of the Indian, though it did relieve the anxiety of Latin American politicians, one of whom, Estaban Echeverria, lamented, "The arms of Spain no longer oppress us, but her traditions continue to overwhelm us."[75]

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[75] Cypress, *La Malinche in Mexican Literature*, 41.

In spite of the new characterization of the Indian, history demonstrated to the mestizos the advantage of appealing to their European heritage, culminating in their "refusal of any social intercourse with indigenous communities, even when they [were] close neighbors."[76] In the years prior to the revolution in 1910, unable to enjoy "the security of the criollo in being the legitimate heirs of their fathers nor the paternal protection that the white Spaniard was obliged to offer the Indian,"[77] mestizos began to develop a sense of Mexican nationalism. Indeed, it was in their attempt to determine their own identity that the mestizos "came to champion the idea of a national community."[78] However, this vision failed to encompass the identity of the indigenous community, which "continued to be set apart economically as well as culturally, as [indigenous people] received the lowest wages in the city and countryside."[79]

The Reforma and the Revitalization of the Indian

In 1864, Emperor Maximillan of the Hapsburg dynasty took to the throne in Mexico, and although his Austrian lineage made him conspicuous among the citizenry of his new home, he occupied himself with the task of defining Mexican nationality. It was his ambition to unite the people of his territory under a common flag and sentiment, and to do so, a "suitable past" upon which to reflect and gather strength was needed. "All invented traditions, so far as possible, use history as a legitimator of action and cement of group cohesion."[80] However, the emperor's quest for unification took place in the context of an extremely divided country, as his leadership came at the expense of that of a native, and more popular leader, Benito Juarez.

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[76]Kathy Powell, "Neoliberalism and Nationalism," Rob Aitken, et al, eds., *Dismantling the Mexican State?* London: Macmillan Press, 1996) 47.

[77] Frederick C. Turner, *The Dynamic of Mexican Nationalism* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1968), 73.

[78] Ibid.

[79] Ibid., 75.

[80] Eric Hobsbawn, "Introduction: Inventing Traditions," in Eric Hobsbawn and Terrence Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 1, 12.

Juarez had assumed the presidency in 1861. A Zapotec from Oaxaca, he became the first indigenous president of Mexico after a series of coups rendered to him the country's highest executive position. His legacy was "the curtailment of the powers of the church, the end of monarchy, the discrediting of the political conservatives, and the dream of free elections"[81] Historical texts have named his movement the Reforma. Juarez' part in the abolition of the monarchy was an extension of what had begun as Mexican independence from Spain at the dawning of the century,[82] and was deemed, in the end, a "coup by the rich." For, as has already been suggested, Spanish imperialism was replaced by internal colonialism, manifesting in the rebirth of monarchical, repressive rule.

Juarez put an end to this style of rule, but was unable to maintain his office. Three years after he championed the presidency, he lost his position and the republic he helped establish when France's Napoleon named Maximillan emperor of Mexico. Refusing to succumb to the rebirth of the monarchy, Juarez mounted a campaign against Maximillan and returned to the presidency in 1867. This time, however, he no longer exhibited the values of a true republican. The stresses of war debt and a divisive polity corrupted the man, who engaged himself in manipulating elections, intimidating congress, and imposing political candidates in the [country's] states.[83] Juarez died in the midst of his second, inconsecutive term of office in 1872; he was replaced by Porfirio Diaz, a man whose 35-year term of office ended with the onset of the Mexican Revolution in 1910.

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[81] Warnock, *The Other Mexico*, 21.

[82] Formal independence from Spain occurred in 1820.

[83] Ibid, 21.

So unable to appreciate the promise that Juarez's leadership had meant for them, indigenous people maintained their traditional social position, not only because of preconceived notions of racial supremacy, but also because of an easily exploited work ethic:

> Only the Indians of central and southern Mexico and the settled Indian colonies in the north, molded by centuries of sedentary existence, could be relied on for cheap, easily disciplined work-gangs that would submit to virtually any conditions or drudgery.[84]

The indigenous people of Mexico secured their place in the bottom tier of Mexican society, and, as such, "they failed as a group to participate in any formal political processes."[85] "As an observer of the Mexican Congress commented in 1885, nine-tenths of the Mexican congressmen were pure white and the remaining tenth had 'no more color than fashion demands of a stylish brunette.'"[86]

But however bleak the situation of the Indian remained, mestizos were gaining a healthy sense of identity from membership in the emerging national community. The nineteenth century produced an astonishing increase in the number of people considered mestizo, as the group leapt from an estimated 27 percent of the population in 1824, to 53 percent of the population on the eve of the 1910 Revolution.[87] Indeed, Mexico was becoming a mestizo Mexico. And while the number of mestizos increased, so too did their power, as the group strove to eradicate the use of race and inheritance as criteria for the acquisition of status.[88]

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[84] J.I. Israel, *Race, Class, and Politics*, 25.

[85] Frederick C. Turner, *Dynamic of Mexican Nationalism*, (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1968), 75. Turner, *The Dynamic of Mexican Nationalism*, 75.

[86] The quote, appearing in Turner's *The Dynamic of Mexican Nationalism*, 75, was originally taken from T.S. Van Dyke, "Mexican Politics," *Harper's*, vol. 71, no. 425 (October, 1885): 762.

[87] Turner, *The Dynamic of Mexican Nationalism*, 72.

[88] Ibid, 74.

The Mestizo and the Mexican Revolution of 1910

The Mexican Revolution in the early part of the twentieth century was, in part, a response to the repressive nature of the colonial political system that continued to pervade Mexican politics after independence. Indians experienced no significant social or economic improvements, in spite of political promises that suggested to the indigenous populations that times would, indeed, change for the better. The only thing that changed, in the end, was the way the story of Mexico was told.[89] In a sense, this merely contributed to the revolutionary sentiment, as the glorification of the Indian in speech was not reciprocated in action.

The revolution was aligned in such a way as to suggest a war between those of indigenous descent and those of European descent, inadvertently reflecting the social order of Mexican society. Actually, the Mexican Revolution is regarded as the first class war of the twentieth century, preceding even the Russian Revolution. It is remembered for revolutionary leaders such as Zapata, who demanded the overthrow of Diaz and his dictatorial regime, in order to establish greater social equity in Mexico, and rescue the country's economy from the anachronistic order that kept people bound to poverty. The revolutionaries sought to recover the lands of the dispossessed, or at least to distribute the land from expropriated haciendas to those in need. The significance of the revolution for the indigenous community was the repossession of the lands that Diaz had confiscated during his reign. In addition to their objectives in land acquisition, revolutionaries were determined to see that the veterans of the struggle dominate the resulting regime.[90]

The Mexican Revolution meant the convergence of Indian and mestizo groups who shared an antipathy for the social order that traditionally favored criollos. Zapata, in fact, was a

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[89] In the context of political rhetoric, the conquest of Mexico was portrayed as a villainous act, and an offense to the indigenous heritage of the country. See Gurierrez, *Nationalist Myths*, 137-149.

[90] John Womack, Jr., *Zapata and the Mexican Revolution*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1969).

mestizo, and yet he remains a figure of great esteem among indigenous communities in Mexico. Contemporary gestures, such as the use of his name in the identification of indigenous, rebel forces, illustrate the indigenous peoples' continued respect for Zapata and his service in the revolution.[91]

However, in spite of Indian/mestizo collaboration, at the conclusion of the Mexican Revolution, leaders were left, once again, with the problem of uniting a divided country. This time, the mestizo would emerge as the embodiment of the national ideal. For the mestizo suggested a Mexico in which the fusion of races could become a source of national pride. Centuries of race mixture had manifested in Mexicans who "were patently not of common origin, and [yet] the rise of nationalism among them [demonstrated] just how unnecessary a common racial base [was]."[92] . In fact, one of the political objectives of the post-revolutionary regime was to redefine Mexican nationalism in such a way as to undermine the racial hierarchy the Spaniards had left behind. Taking this position, Pastor Rouaix, a man of Spanish descent, who advocated the integration of the new political system in Mexico, stated:

> As Mexicans we must strive so that in our Motherland differences disappear in order to unite us…we work, therefore, in this book of union and of love between the members of the great Mexican family, so that the eighty percent of our fellow citizens, working class Indians and mestizos may unite themselves and identify themselves with us.[93]

Indeed, a new nationalist sentiment was developing in Mexico, and it was a sentiment that the mestizo seemed to embody. Demonstrating his appreciation for the new nationalism,

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[91] This is a reference to the rebel forces of Chiapas, who called themselves Zapatistas in honor of Zapata's memory.

[92] Turner, *Mexican Nationalism*, 74-75.

[93] Ibid, 174.

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Manuel Gamio, Mexican anthropologist and revolutionary, writes:

> In the great forge of America, 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.[94]

Gamio served as an advisor to successive presidents of post-revolutionary Mexico. His vision inspired the political rhetoric of presidents Calles and Cardenas, who served in the 1920s and 1930s. One of the most inspiring literary works in the context of the new Mexican nationalism was José Vosconcelos' *La Raza Cosmica* (*The Cosmic Race*) which deemed the Mexican race, a universal one, taking all that was good from its many components, including the Indians, Europeans, Africans, and Orientals:

> The Americas, once the site of the legendary civilization of Atlantis, were destined, Vasconcelos suggested, to generate a visionary civilization distinguished by aestheticism and universalism. The United States had lost out to Latin America in this respect, he maintained, because Anglo-Saxons "committed the sin of destroying those [other] races, whereas we assimilated them, which gives us new rights and new hopes regarding a mission unprecedented in History."[95]

In order to fully demonstrate the devotion to the mestizo, one of the state's objectives was to integrate the Indian, by celebrating the indigenous heritage of the true Mexican race. Accordingly, a new appreciation of the Indian, labeled "indigenismo" permeated the post-revolutionary political rhetoric, as politicians sought to "delegitimize [old] elites, to prize the Indians away from their lamentable deference, and to bind them to the new revolutionary state."[96] The result of this cause was the idea on the behalf of the state that racism had been purged from the national character. Mestizo became less a racial category, and more a means of

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[94] Alan Knight, "Racism, Revolution, and Indigenismo: Mexico 1910-1949," in Richard Graham (ed.), *The Idea of Race in Latin America, 1870-1940*, (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1990), 83.

[95] Nicola Miller, *In the Shadows of the State: Intellectuals and the Quest for National Identity in Twentieth-Century Spanish America* (London: Verso, 1999), 142.

[96] Ibid.

identifying a class status, attainable to all. In other words, an Indian could be mestizo with the proper education, attire, accent, finances, and so on.

Mestizaje and the Continued Subjugation of the Indian

Although my comparison is limited to Canada and Mexico, a comparison with the United States seems instructive at this stage. For the idea of melding cultures in order to unite them is not particular to Mexico. In the United States, the idea of a "mestizo nation" was certainly present in the rhetoric of prominent political figures. In fact, Thomas Jefferson, addressing a group of western Indian chiefs once said, "You will unite yourselves with us and we shall be Americans; you will mix with us by marriage; your blood will run in our veins, and will spread with us over this great island."[97]

To some extent, Jefferson's vision was actually made manifest, for there is hardly a Southerner that doesn't claim at least some percentage of Cherokee blood. In North Carolina, in fact, there are actually bumper stickers that boast, "I am *not* Cherokee." Nonetheless, America is not a mestizo America. Even the melting pot image that flourished in the Progressive Era was nothing more than the call for the Americanization of European immigrants and had nothing to do with racial-mixing.[98]

Today, one of America's surviving mixed-raced communities, the Lumbees of Pembroke, North Carolina, occupy what Fergus Bordewich calls "an anthropological no-man's land located behind the conventional boundaries of race and political organization that traditionally define Indian's identity."[99] The group, like most federally-recognized tribes in the United States, is of

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[97] Gary Nash, "The Hidden History of Mestizo America," *The Journal of American History*, (Dec. 1990): 941.

[98] My position on this was formed by Gary Nash's article (see note 50), but according to Will Kymlicka, the "melting pot" was, indeed, a reference to the biological fusing of ethnic groups. See *Multicultural Citizenship* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 197, n.3.

[99] Fergus Bordewich, *Killing the White Man's Indian: Reinventing Native Americans at the End of the Twentieth Century*, (New York: Anchor Books, 1996).

mixed descent, but to the point that the group's negotiations with the government to receive federal recognition of their treaty rights verges on absurdity. One Lumbee is recounted as saying,

> "The Indians out West can't accept us because we ain't got feathers and beads. It really gets to me. You can't expect anything from non-Indian society, but you'd expect Indians to empathize, to understand what you're going through."[100]

Like the Lumbees, the mestizos, as a group, "ain't got feathers and beads." What they have, instead, is a country with which they can identify. Years of weaving European and indigenous people into the national fabric resulted in the mestizo, whose status and phenotype places her between the Indian and the criollo. And in the end, it seemed that the Indians and criollos were decimated, politically, by their own offspring. Unlike the Lumbees, the Mexican mestizos constitute the bulk of their national community, and they have done so for over a century, suggesting by virtue of their population figures alone, the breadth of their political strength.

The Mexican Revolution that began in 1910 provided the mestizos with the opportunity to define themselves in the emerging world of industrial development. Mestizos were, as a group, neither bound to the land like their indigenous forbears, nor were they nearly as reliant on it for status, as their European ancestors tended to be. So when the Revolution made them the epicenter of all things Mexican, Mexico responded by abandoning its attachment to the type of old-world, feudal order that dominated the pre-revolutionary scene. Yet in the background, the Indian and the criollo still remained, and they showed themselves in the intense inequalities that defined the social structures of such states as Chiapas and Oaxaca, where Mexico's largest concentration of Indians continue to reside.

The most probable explanation for the lack of significant reforms in Chiapas after the Mexican Revolution is its peripheral location in the southwestern portion of the country, where

the old elite "recruited army gangs to carry out guerrilla missions against the revolutionaries."[101] These armies eventually defeated the revolutionaries in the state, and the new government of the 1920s was made to accommodate their representatives, "leaving power in the hands of the landowners."[102]

While pressure from the peasantry eventually manifested in the Chiapan state's cooperation with the national government's labor and agrarian reform policies in the 1930s and, eventually, Indian protection policies, these reforms failed to reach the isolated plantations and ranches of the south and the east of the state. In fact, in these areas, "Indians continued to labor in debt peonage for more than a decade after the practice was outlawed and where reformers faced entrenched and recalcitrant ranchers."[103] A similar situation existed in the American South, where federal policies ensuring the political rights of African Americans were not acknowledged until the former slaves finally educated themselves about their rights.

The 1917 Constitution, supported by the revolutionaries, and still in use today, called for a massive reconstruction of Mexican society. The constitution incorporated a number of promises that were of great importance to the Indians of the country:

> Article 3 [for instance] provided for free, compulsory, primary education not based on any religious doctrine. Article 27 set forth agrarian reforms and asserted that the nation is the primary owner of all the land and its riches; individual ownership of land was not destroyed, but it was now to be subjected to the public good. Article 123 gave a special place and constitutional guarantees to labor; as with property, the strength of the state was enhanced by giving it power to control the activities and labor and industry so as to make the state virtually a part of all contracts, disputes, and regulations.[104]

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[100] Ibid.

[101] George Collier, *Basta! Land and the Zapatista Rebellion in Chiapas* (Oakland, California: Food First Books, 1999) 28.

[102] Ibid, 29.

[103] Ibid.

[104] Robert Blackney and Clifford Paynton, *Revolution and the Revolutionary Ideal* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Schenkman Publishing Company, 1976), 179.

But while "official ideology [proclaimed the Indians'] worth, even superiority, socio-political circumstances repeatedly [displayed] the reality of prejudice."[105] The political rhetoric that followed the Revolution suggested an ignorance of the despotic conditions of the Indian, and yet the government's association with the Revolution and the promises of the 1917 Constitution inhibited any significant unrest among the indigenous population. However, in 1992, after years of demanding that the government align itself with its own principles and extend the promises of the constitution, Chiapan peasants suffered a deep offence when the government decided to repeal Article 27, and thereby eliminate its responsibilities in land redistribution.

In 1994, when a trade agreement with the United States and Canada promised the increased privatization of land, the Chiapans rebelled. They rebelled against a country whose ideology held them in great esteem, but whose political decisions suggested their complete disregard. They rebelled against the proclamation of democracy in a country where votes were tallied according to the preferences of the ruling party. They rebelled against the "progress" and "change" that the neoliberal regime in Mexico suggested was to blame for the dismemberment of the constitution they believed in:

> The rebels declared that their proposition was to re-establish the Constitution, not subvert it. They arranged themselves within the law, not outside it...In any case, in its most general terms the rebellion did not go beyond the margins of a "welfare state," with a democratically elected regime and an independent and reliable system of justice.[106]

In fact, according to one account:

> The [very] thing that radicalized [the Indians] were the changes to Article 27; that was the door that was shut on the Indian people's ability to survive in a legal and peaceful manner. That was the reason they decided to take up arms, so that they could be heard, because they were tired of paying such a high blood tax.[107]

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[105] Knight, "Racism, Revolution, and Indigenismo," 101.

[106] Adolfo Gilly, "Chiapas and the Rebellion of the Enchanted World," in *Rural Revolt in Mexico: U.S. Intervention and the Domain of Subaltern Politics* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1998), 310.

[107] This statement was made by rebel leader, Subcommandero Marcos, who was himself a mestizo, but was completely accepted by the indigenous group who served under him. Marcos served to bind the otherwise divergent group of Indians, who shared no common language or religious orientation. See Neil Harvey, *The Chiapas Rebellion: Struggle for Land and Democracy* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), 70-71, 258.

Perhaps it would be foolish to suggest that the Zapatistas' rebellion was resultant of a governmental ideology that enhanced the mestizo at the expense of the Indian. But the situation does seem to demonstrate the marginalization of the Indian, as they suggest by way of the rebellion and successive acts of violence in the area, that the institutionalized governmental structure fails to accommodate them adequately. Rebellions in the same area throughout the colonial period suggests that, although the modern states' mestizaje ideology has not functioned to make things worse, it probably has not made them any better either.

All across Mexico, indigenous people are rescuing their identities from the tepidity of mestizaje. In Mexico City, in fact, the Mexica have devoted themselves to purging all Spanish influences from their culture and dance.

"The Mexica are effectively espousing a rejection of the whole mestizo enterprise:"[108]

> For many, what gives [the Mexica movement] its present empowerment is the belief that it provides an image or discourse for the future that appears not to be politically subversive but which, in reality, could be. [For] "the socio-cultural potential of such movements may turn out to be not less but more political than action directly oriented towards existing power structures."[109]

Mestizo as Object of Context

The mestizo's experience gives credence to C. Wagley's idea that "status positions are contextual and based as much on socio-cultural attributes as on phenotypic characteristics; depending on time, place, and circumstance." Phenotypicly ambivalent, mestizo identity seems particularly subject to context. And the Mexican Revolution of 1910 and its aftermath provided for a context in which the mestizo identity could flourish. But celebrating the mestizo did not, unfortunately, have the effect of creating a better Mexico for the Indian, as contemporary conditions suggest a group that remains separate from broader Mexican society.

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[108] Susanna Rostas, "Performing 'Mexicanidad': Popular 'Indigenismo' in Mexican City, Valentina Napolitano and Xochitl Leyva Solano, eds., *Encuentros Antropológicos: Power, Identity and Mobility in Mexican Society* (London: University of London, Institute of Latin American Studies, 1998), 68.

Some authors estimate that mestizos now constitute 95 percent of Mexico's inhabitants; some suggest that the indigenous people still account for over 20 percent of the current population. Whatever the verdict, the diversity of the figures is a statement unto itself. For the definition of mestizo seems to change with the political climate, reflecting in its evolution, the evolution of the Mexican state. At the same time, an understanding of the mestizo reveals the country's understanding of race and how this understanding contributes to the unification or compartmentalization of the national community.

While the growth of the mestizo population has perpetuated the governmental effort to recreate and glorify the Indian of Mexican history, the Indian of today experiences no notable difference in treatment. Turner suggests that, in colonial Mexico, the Indian provided the criollo with a sense of identity, and just as the criollo needed the Indian to maintain the position atop the Mexican caste system, so, too, does the mestizo require the Indian to maintain place. After all, in order to join the mestizo rank, Mexicans must demonstrate distance from the Indian, and even in a time when "mestizo" is deemed less a racial category and more a reference to class, popular culture maintains a tendency to collapse cultural difference into biological essence. "This, in turn, tends to convert the cultural distance between Indian and Mestizo into rigid boundaries, and thereby perpetuate a justifying myth of the dominant cultural elite."[110] Thus, "Indio" (Indian) remains a derogatory characterization in Mexico.

The problem of Mexican integration, then, seems to reside in the country's inability to shake the implications of the old caste system that established order in the colonial system. This order, as has been demonstrated, relied upon a hegemonic divide that was justified according to separate understandings of race. And while it was believed that the political significance of race

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[109] Ibid.
[110] Charles R. Hale, "Mestizos, Indians and Identity Politics" *Critique of Anthropology* 14(1): 10.

could be abolished through mestizaje, this has not been the case in Mexico, where indigenous populations have remained along the periphery of the national culture.

The unyielding endeavor of the mestizo to establish some distance from indigenous roots reveals itself in the following biographical account of a Peruvian presidential candidate. Although the account is not of a Mexican politician, it demonstrates, well, the continued ordering of Latin American society, and addresses, with a particular poignancy, the subject of this essay. In a New York Times article as recent as April 5, 2000, an account of the Peruvian presidential candidate, Alejandro Toledo, reads:

> Mr. Toledo has strong Indian physical traits, making him popular with Indians and those of mixed race, who are known as mestizos or, in Peruvian slang, "cholos." And at 54 he has accomplished the cholo dream of achieving an education, rising from poverty and marrying a woman of higher social status.[111]

Mestizaje, the idea that mestizo Mexico is a post colonial, mixed race population, is a cosmology that continues to form and inform the modern Mexican state. Mestizos are neither European nor Indian; they are Mexican. And though mestizaje is supposedly non-racial, racism continues in Mexico, and the Indian identity is stigmatized as a result. For the continued influence of the hegemonic order that determined social positions during the colonial period continues to show itself in Mexico's mestizo identity, adversarial to the identity "Indian." "This national stigmatization of Indian identity means that the indigenous population in Mexico has remained 'invisible' in Mexican political discourse for many years."

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[111] Clifford Krauss, "A Peru 'Phenomenon': Rags to Presidential Bid," *New York Times*, April 5, 2000: A3.

IV. Conclusion

My initial objective for this project was to determine why the Canadian Métis sought recognition as Aboriginals, when in Mexico, the mestizo was often accused of trying to act "as white as possible." I have since learned that the reasons for their differences correspond to the development of their countries' national characters, which, in their separate structures and operations, express their endorsements of certain types of citizens. The characterization of the ideal citizen varies from country to country. In Mexico, the ideal citizen has become the mestizo. In Canada, on the other hand, the identification of this ideal is a bit more difficult, as political rhetoric suggests the country's commitment to diversity. Therefore, to suggest an ideal type would probably be politically detrimental. Nonetheless, both governments have pursued integration policies that seem to have had profound effects on the groups in this study, and so my objective changed, somewhat, to identifying what these effects have been.

The Métis and Mestizos and Effect of State Autonomy

The Canadian state, like all states, enjoys relative autonomy in that the autonomy of the state is relative to the diversification of interests that exists within its social base. As society becomes increasingly fragmented, the state responds by becoming more autonomous. The different interest groups then seek the guidance of the state to work beyond their conflicting agendas and vie for state power by making demands for recognition. The state becomes a "target" as "social movements and public interest groups try to use both bureaucratic agencies and the courts" for the acquisition of power and position:[112]

> Hence the ultimate and ironic paradox of autonomy: the more autonomous the state is, the more frequent will be the attempts to capture portions of it and use it in "non-autonomous" ways for special interest.[113]

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[112] Leslie Pal, *Interests of State: The Politics of Language, Multiculturalism, and Feminism in Canada* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993), 56.

[113] Ibid, 40.

In accordance with this theory of state, groups in Canada have become increasingly adversarial, as the validation of their increased political power requires that they do not identify with broader Canadian society. The more compartmentalized the group, the better it fairs in the acquisition of special rights. As such, the Canadian system, quite unintentionally, has perpetuated divisiveness among its polity by inadvertently encouraging their retreat to isolation.

In Mexico, the central government has sustained its autonomy by suggesting its rule over a homogenous polity, which, despite its many influences or perhaps because of its many influences, is best depicted by the mestizo. The mestizo has evolved from a person of mixed ancestry to a political tool of human form, which serves as the personification of Mexico. And although mestizos lack the cohesiveness that would come with their identification with figures such as the Métis leader Louis Riel, contemporary Mexican political rhetoric bestows on them a "national" status, which has, in turn, marginalized indigenous groups.

Therefore, the Mexican revolutionary party, the PRI, has encouraged the integration of its sprawling, complex constituency, in order to make responding to it a possibility for a single-party state. Recent uprisings within the indigenous communities, however, and the recent election of an opposition candidate for the presidency suggest the declination of this PRI construction. It appears that the fractures in Mexican identity can no longer be bridged by an all-encompassing state ideology that defines the Mexican population as if it were a cohesive unit.

The contrast of the two integrationist policies discussed reflects the difference in the nature of Canadian and Mexican politics. This difference finds expression in the two countries' political cultures, and it makes their comparison seem, at times, implausible, if not completely unfounded. Canada is a functioning democracy, demonstrating in its operation, a respected for individual rights. Its liberal principles, though present in Mexican political doctrines, are not echoed in the structure of Mexican politics, which has allowed the country to sustain single-party rule for the last 70 years. Though this strand of rule was broken with the last election, Mexico's

transition to democracy is too immediate to suggest its comparison with Canada. Nonetheless, Canada and Mexico are both settler societies, and although the development of the two states, both socially and politically, has produced two extremely different national characters, they started from remarkably similar positions.

Government Contracts: Their Relevance for Métis and Mestizos

Some argue that the modern concept of constitutionalism only allows sovereignty and recognition to those whose distinctiveness is recognized by existing contracts, and that the recognition of distinctiveness is subject to and constrained by these contracts.[114] But as was the case in the development of western Canada, the validity and recognition of these contracts can change with a change in the character of the majority over whom the contract is placed. And so the Anglophone settlers were able to rescind the language and land rights guaranteed to the Métis under the *Manitoba Act of 1870* as soon as they formed the majority.

Perhaps the only way to avoid injustices such as those suffered by the Métis is to entrench guarantees in the contracts negotiated, such as those found in the *Bill of Rights* of the American constitution and in the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* of the 1982 Canadian constitution. However, without an appreciation or respect for the "rule of law" the significance of these guarantees is not so great. According to A.V. Dicey, "the rule of law" demands not only "that...no man is above the law, but that whatever be his rank or condition, he is subject to the ordinary law of the realm and amenable to the jurisdiction of the ordinary tribunals."[115] It is in the context of the healthy operation of the rule of law, that Dicey believes that, "the idea of legal equality, or of the universal subjection of all classes to one law administered by the ordinary courts, [is] pushed to its utmost limit."

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[114] See James Tully, *Strange Multiplicity: Constitutionalism in an Age of Diversity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

[115] A.V. Dicey, *Introduction to the Study of the Law of the Constitution* (London: Macmillan, 1956), 193.

Also protecting the contracts are the procedures designed to allow for the amending of them. The tyranny of the majority can be suppressed by requiring certain procedures to be followed if changes in the guarantees are to be made. The greater the desire for protection of these guarantees, the more complex this procedure becomes. Of course, a willingness to follow these procedures necessitates the rule of law. The conformance to the rule of law can be acquired through the establishment of democracy, in which citizens have the option of ousting political leaders who refuse to submit to the it. Nonetheless, the proper functioning of such a system requires the citizens' acculturation to the values necessary to sustain it.

In Mexico, where the concentration of presidential power is such that articles of the constitution can be repealed with a stroke of the president's pen, it is difficult to believe that the rule of law takes precedence over executive power. As in the past, the Mexican Constitution has not proved helpful in restraining the government, in spite of the entrenchment of social rights, such as land reform, labor rights and the like. In fact, it is perhaps these very demands on the government that undermine the constitution, for "who has ever sued the state for lacking access to health care or a proper house?"[116] With so many promises included in the constitution that are not respected, it is less surprising that basic civil rights continue to be violated.[117] In Mexico, it seems the "rule of law" is left to the ruler's discretion, and is, therefore, virtually nonexistent. Consequently, any recognition of special rights for indigenous people, even when entrenched, would depend on the executive's compliance. But the strength of the Mexican executive has depended, in addition to deceptive political tactics, on an all-encompassing characterization of the polity; and therefore, accommodation of separate identities that do not necessarily coincide with governmental objectives is unheard of.

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[116] Ibid., 45.

[117] Ibid., 46.

In the body of this paper, I discussed the descent of the Métis identity, from nation to race, as the understanding of nation was linked, at the time the West was settled, with the maintenance of state. When the Métis lost their claim to the West, they were lumped into a category that included all those disenfranchised, western people of mixed European and indigenous ancestry. The western expansionists did not recognize the fact that the Métis had their own separate political symbols, particular traditions, and identifiable institutions.

The strength of the current Métis demands on the Canadian government to retrieve part of their original land claims, however, comes in the context of the country's current commitment to group self-determination. For it has been conceded in Canada, that allowing for self-determination, in some instances, requires the allocation of special group rights. In addition to this commitment, some legal theorists argue that agreements such as the original *Manitoba Act* defined the terms under which the Canadian state acquired authority over Métis, and any abridging of these contracts allows for the group's legal recourse.[118] Therefore, the Métis now have the option of securing lost claims. Their problem rests, however, in defining themselves, for although there exists identifiable Métis traits, the western settlers' association with the Métis has operated on a different, broader understanding. Therefore, answering for the past may involve giving Métis status to those people who do not necessarily descend from the Red River Settlement, but who have suffered similar, discriminatory treatment.

The mestizos have experienced somewhat of a reverse in political position. At its initiation, the mestizo category was a racial category, referencing those of mixed European and indigenous ancestry. As Mexico has evolved, however, the mestizo identity has undergone significant changes, and today, the mestizo has acquired a nationalizing character. Indeed, the mestizo of today is the Mexican, and a Mexican is, invariably, a mestizo.

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[118] Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship*, 117.

The resulting problem is not necessarily a mestizo problem, but a problem for other groups of people who may not necessarily identify with their government's mestizo ideal. Although mestizaje, as Mexico's integrative process is termed, began as an effort to unite the country's ethnic groups by celebrating the mixed offspring of traditionally antagonistic groups, it has faltered recently, as it is deemed by some to be the new form of colonialism that threatens the Indian. Scholars agree that mestizaje presented to Indians as indigenismo, disparaged the Indian, while holding up the mestizo as the ideal national type. And while indigenismo was successfully used to sever Mexico's ties with Spain, it did little to ameliorate the condition of indigenous groups.

Hybridity of Cultures or Culture of Hybridity?

In Canada, where a "hybridity of cultures" has shaped the political development of the country since its formation, the Métis have gone from being left out of this original design, to redefining themselves in order to become a part of it. Indeed, Canada is a place of many parts, and the challenge that the Métis face is rescuing from their history, the cohesiveness necessary to take advantage of their country's promises. Canada tends to be a rights-based society, allowing privilege in its constitution to certain groups. Establishing the rights of these groups means, not only being able to recognize those groups, but understanding their objectives as well. The problem for the Métis, the connotations of which vary from community to community, is a legal problem, as their entitlement depends on how they define themselves, and if there is no consensus, there may be no entitlement. In a rights-based society, in which distribution of privileges depends on legal definitions, identifying with a group of mixed ancestry is problematic.

The mestizos, on the other hand, are the personification of their country's purported "culture of hybridity," and though they demonstrate no collective unity, their association with the Mexican nation suggests the use of their experiences to manipulate the homogenization of

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Mexican culture. Indeed, in Mexico, hanging on to a separate, more compartmentalized identity is problematic. Accordingly, the indigenous tendency to maintain their distinctiveness in Mexico has meant their political and economic isolation, if not despair.

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