

# STEREOTYPES

## INTRODUCTION AND STEREOTYPES

Ann M. Wildermuth  
Tulane University

**SUGGESTED TIME:** 1 classroom period

**EQUIPMENT NEEDED:** Slide projector, copier

**APPLICABILITY:** World History, World Culture, Sociology, Civics, World Geography

**OBJECTIVE:** Students will understand the concepts of stereotypes and ethnocentrism. After discussing their perceptions of Latin Americans and their environment, students will be encouraged to become familiar with the diversity of Latin America and thereby recognize stereotypes.

**NOTE TO THE INSTRUCTOR:** The Latin American content of this unit is contained almost entirely in the discussion questions and activities. The Subject Overview deals principally with the concepts of stereotyping and ethnocentrism and their consequences for individuals and society.

### LEVEL: HIGH SCHOOL

Source: *Latin America—Land of Diversity*. Roger Thayer Stone  
Center for Latin American Studies,  
Tulane University (New Orleans)  
and The Tinker Foundation, Inc.

## INTRODUCTION AND STEREOTYPES

"All high school cheerleaders are silly and giggle too much, and most of them are stupid."

"Students who are on the honor roll wear thick glasses and never do anything but read."

"Football players are 'dumb jocks' who have big egos and only get through school because their coaches and friends help them."

These are examples of stereotypes that you may have heard before. Chances are that you don't believe in them because you personally know cheerleaders or football players who are extremely intelligent, and honor students who have perfect eyesight and participate in many other activities (They may even be cheerleaders or play on the football team!) But pretend for a moment that you've never gone to an American high school or met any cheerleaders, football players, or honor students. You would still probably hear people say things like the quotes above. You would see television shows and movies that portrayed cheerleaders, football players, and honor students in much the same way as they are described in the quotes, and you might even hear jokes about "dumb jocks" and "bookworms." What kind of conclusions would you form about people who belong to these groups? If you suddenly had to work with the members of a cheerleading squad or a football team on an important project, would you know how to treat them?

Stereotypes become harmful when they are used to place limits on individuals. For example, mathematics teachers who believe that "girls aren't as good with numbers as boys are" might give less support and help to the girls in their classes, and might even react negatively to a female student who challenged the stereotype by excelling in math. Stereotypes can also make people dislike someone they have never met, just because they belong to a group whose stereotyped image is negative.

Individuals are not the only victims of stereotyping. These oversimplified opinions often get in the way of international relations. For example, North American businesspeople who have an image of Latin Americans as lazy and informal might be reluctant to open business ventures in a Latin American country. The stereotype they have adopted without really thinking about it prevents them from participating in one of the world's fastest-growing markets. In the past several years, U.S. diplomats found that their stereotypes of Soviet politicians as incompetent and

inflexible left the U.S. unprepared for a different kind of Soviet leader. Reforms in the Soviet bloc have progressed very swiftly, largely because of the policies of reform leaders. However, many U.S. diplomats, still clinging to their standardized images of what Soviet politicians "should" do rather than accepting the reality of what they are actually doing, find themselves able only to react to changes, not to predict them. Similarly, politicians who believe that all Latin American governments are corrupt and backwards sometimes refuse to properly recognize foreign officials or even entire governments, making dealings with the nations they represent extremely difficult. They may miss out on chances to work with some of the most brilliant political figures in the world today to solve problems that affect all nations.

Like stereotyping, ethnocentrism can be a cause of misunderstandings and prejudices between people who are not members of the same culture. An ethnocentric person believes that the way his or her society does things is the only "right" way. One example is the difficulty which North Americans and Northern Europeans often encounter when working or travelling in a country which observes the tradition of siesta, a rest period in the middle of the day. In reality, the siesta is a very sensible adaptation to life in a region which has very hot weather. It allows people to rest during the hottest part of the day, then return to work as the afternoon cools. Many offices stay open as late as eight or nine o'clock in the evening. However, outsiders often become frustrated when they find an office or bank closed at three o'clock in the afternoon, and see this tradition as a sign of laziness.

It is not unusual to form stereotypes about groups of people with whom we have very little contact. Almost all of us hold some stereotypes, even though we may not be aware of them. Similarly, a small amount of ethnocentrism can help inspire national pride and patriotism. However, it is important to try to see beyond these limited views and attempt to learn about the reality of other peoples and other nations. This social studies course is designed to help you develop at least a partial understanding of the history, politics, cultures, and contemporary issues of Latin America, one of the regions of the world which is most rapidly increasing in importance to the United States. As you study the other units in this course, keep thinking about your own perceptions of Latin America, and try to compare any stereotypes you may have heard with the realities you will learn about.

## SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIALS

Sanchez, Joseph. "The Spanish Black Legend: Origins of Anti-Hispanic Stereotypes." Encounters vol. 1 (Winter 1989): 16-21.

30 slides and accompanying descriptions.

## DISCUSSION TOPICS

1. What kind of groups are most often the target of stereotypes?
2. How and why do you think stereotypes get started?
3. Have you ever felt that you were the victim of stereotyping? What happened? How did it make you feel?
4. What are some stereotypes of Latin America? Do you agree with them? How do you think they started?
5. What do you think are the causes of ethnocentrism? Is ethnocentrism entirely negative? What problems can it cause?
6. It is frequently said that people in the United States are more ethnocentric than people in other countries. The fact that North Americans often are not required to study international relations, world history, and foreign languages is frequently considered as proof of ethnocentrism. Do you think it's true that people in the U.S. are ethnocentric?
7. What could be done to make the United States (or any country) less ethnocentric?
8. What is the opposite of ethnocentrism?

## ACTIVITIES

1. Have students read the subject overview and review key concepts/vocabulary as homework the night before class. In class, review the article with the students, utilizing the slides and discussion topics included in the packet.
2. On the board, write some of the titles of the units from this course. Have students brainstorm words which they feel pertain to the selected units. List the words on the board. (For example, for geography, students might have images of tropical forests and volcanoes.) Then ask for volunteers to design a bulletin board display incorporating

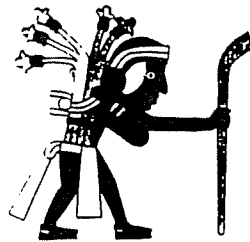
these words or corresponding visual images. The display should be divided into two sections, one entitled "stereotypes" and the other entitled "reality." Each of the brainstormed words should be printed on a removable piece of paper. As each unit of the social studies course is completed, students should vote on which of the words they brainstormed should be placed on the "reality" side of the board and which belong to the "stereotypes" category. They may also decide to add new words to either side. The display should stay up throughout the course to generate discussion and to give students a visual record of the changes in their perceptions.

3. Show and discuss the cartoon slides (numbers 21-25 based on It's the Image that Counts: Cartoon Master for Latin American Study) which reinforce stereotypical perception. Expand on the theme by showing slides of Latin American perceptions of U.S. citizens (numbers 26-30) to demonstrate the human habit of misunderstanding cultural identity.
4. Have students identify the sources for their current perceptions, such as television programs, movies, music, advertisements, etc. Some examples might include Speedy Gonzalez, the Frito Bandido, Chiquita Banana, Juan Valdez the Colombian Coffee Man, Miami Vice, salsa music, and films such as "La Bamba," phrases like "Mexican standoff," "Latin lover," "Banana republic," etc.
5. Show slides 1-10, which show images from Latin America which correspond to stereotypes the students may have heard. Then show and discuss slides 11-20 which demonstrate the cultural diversity of Latin America. How do these slides alter stereotypical perception of Latin America? How do the people in the slides resemble North Americans? Which set of slides do the students think are more representative of Latin America?
6. As an assignment, have students watch the network television news and read a local newspaper for one week, paying special attention to items on Latin America. Have them write down (or cut out) any remarks or quotes that seem to be based on stereotypes or ethnocentrism, and items which are contrary to the usual stereotypes. At the end of the week, students should share their findings. What kind of news items were reported? Were they reported in a fair and unbiased way? Are some networks or newspapers more biased than others? What topics regarding Latin America are presented? What other important events and traits are not reported? Why? You may wish to continue this activity throughout the duration of your course on Latin America.

# The Spanish Black Legend: Origins of Anti-Hispanic Stereotypes

Joseph P. Sánchez

De Bry illustration, 1624 Massacre of  
priests. © Library of Congress



Joseph P. Sánchez is the director of the National Park Service's Spanish Colonial Research Center at the University of New Mexico.

In 1604, during the Golden Age of Spain, the great Spanish writer Francisco de Quevedo y Villegas wrote *España Defendida*. In it, he called attention to a malaise that pervaded Spanish-English diplomatic relations. Quevedo pointed out that anti-Spanish propaganda and misconceptions were deeply rooted in the lore of Protestant Europe.

More than three hundred years later, in 1912, another Spanish intellectual, Julian Juderías, observed that anti-Spanish misconceptions had continued to develop unabated long after their usefulness as propaganda had been served. Juderías argued that anti-Spanish, indeed, anti-Hispanic distortions in both Europe and the Americas constituted a *leyenda negra*—a black legend. Sixty years after Juderías had coined the phrase "Black Legend," academicians in the United States responding to the Civil Rights movement and *El Movimiento Chicano* sought to understand historical anti-Hispanic attitudes which had continued to effect public policies at home and foreign relations with Spain and Latin America. They concluded that the Black Legend had resulted in beliefs that Hispanics were inherently evil. The centuries-old anti-Spanish propaganda had developed a folkloristic nature of its own with far-reaching effects and had created a false stereotype of Hispanics.

The main premise upon which the Black Legend rested was the fear, envy, and dislike—or even hatred—of Spain by those nation-states that clashed with Spanish power shortly after Christopher Columbus's New World discoveries. Spain and Portugal, by dint of their discoveries and explorations, won exclusive approval for their claims to the Americas from Pope Alexander VI. Other Western European nations did not agree. King Francis I of France quipped, "I deign to see Adam's will to see how he divided the earth." Despite the belligerent efforts of England and France, the Spanish sphere of influence grew to an empire that stretched from North



Africa west across the Americas to the Phillipines. By the end of the 1700s, Spain's North Pacific claims were anchored by a chain of settlements in California that began in San Francisco Bay. The interior portion of the claim was effectively held by outposts at Tucson, Arizona; Santa Fe, New Mexico; and San Antonio on the Texas frontier. East of these outposts, St. Louis and New Orleans along the Mississippi River began a series of Spanish towns that stretched to St. Augustine, Florida, by way of Mobile, Alabama; and Pensacola and Tallahassee, Florida. From there to the southern tip of South America, Spanish missions, presidios, and towns dotted the imperial Spanish map. The widespread Spanish colonialism became a source of gossip for the propagandists who despised Spain's grip on the New World.

While Spain's claim to the New World had become a source of contention among the have-not nations, another historical trend fueled the flames of anti-Spanish propaganda. In 1515 the Protestant Reformation erupted. Spain and Portugal remained staunchly loyal to Catholicism and claimed to be the conservators of the One True Faith. Before the Reformation had run its

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report was proof that Catholic Spain was bigoted. Catholic Spaniards, they wrote, had exterminated and brutalized Native Americans. Artist Theodore de Bry heightened reaction to the report by sketching pictures depicting Spaniards torturing and killing Native Americans at will and at random.

Unwittingly, Las Casas had given the propagandists verbal ammunition to describe Spaniards as depraved and cowardly people who had committed crimes against defenseless natives. How the Spaniards must have wished the English, Dutch, French, and Germans had had a Bartolomé de Las Casas among them to write of their colonial enterprises in North America!

Spawned in the international rivalry of the sixteenth century, *la leyenda negra* grew from anti-Spanish propaganda disseminated by Spain's rivals in the Dutch Lowlands, England, France, and the Germanies. Fueled by the Protestant Reformation, the propaganda underwent an anti-Catholic phase in which Spain stood accused of bigotry, especially after Bartolomé de Las Casas's *Relación* was acquired by Spain's rivals. It was predicated on simplistic and faulty analysis of historical information—the falsehood that, historically, Hispanics were uniquely cruel, bigoted, tyrannical, lazy, violent, treacherous, and depraved. Almost religious in character, the alleged depravity of Hispanics hinted at some unforgivable Original Sin that preyed upon the legitimacy of Hispanic culture throughout the world.

Thus the anti-Spanish propaganda of the past created the body of misconceptions known as the Black Legend and formed the basis of anti-Hispanic stereotypes.

During the next four centuries, the Black Legend was kept alive, especially whenever conflict arose between the English and Spanish-speaking worlds. In the 1800s, four events revived and perpetuated Black Legend stereotypes: the Texas Revolt (1836), the Mexican War (1846-1848), the California Gold Rush with its attendant westward movement (1849-1856), and the Spanish-American War (1898). Each was characterized by conflict and an anti-Hispanic campaign during which publishers of books and newspapers drew on the misconceptions of *la leyenda negra* for inspiration.

The fall of the Alamo in 1836 during the Texas Revolt is significant in the history of the Black Legend because the anti-Spanish attitudes of the basically European Black Legend were transferred to the American Westward tradition as Anglo-Americans expanded into Mexican Territory. The propagandists merely juggled the slogans "Remember the Armada" and "Remember the Alamo" to suit the times. The "cowardly, untrustworthy Mexicans" were the object of many Texans' ballads. One

of them, "The Ballad of Ben Milam," commemorated Milam, the first Texas hero, who in real life was considered a ne'er-do-well by his Anglo and Mexican contemporaries. This ballad, like others of the period, was filled with anti-Mexican sentiment:

They're the spawn of hell  
We heard him tell  
They will knife and lie and cheat  
At the board of none  
Of that swarthy horde  
Would I deign to sit and meet  
They held it not  
That I bled and fought  
When Spain was their ruthless foe  
O, who will follow Old Ben Milam  
To San Antonio

Although Milam died before the fateful fall of the Alamo, the propagandist would have him die there with the hapless 180 Texans (some of whom were Mexicans) in order to enhance his stature as a Texas hero. In time the Alamo, once a Spanish mission on a perilous Texas frontier, became an anti-Mexican shrine.

Ten years after the Texas Revolt, the Mexican-American War expanded Black Legend sentiments in order to justify Anglo-American aggression. Manifest Destiny expounded the belief that God had blessed and preordained U.S. expansion and, parenthetically, that He would punish Mexico for her depravity. To some of the victors, Protestantism had triumphed over Catholicism. Of the several schools of thought concerning the belief that Mexicans were inferior as a race, one held that only through U.S. intervention could Mexicans be regenerated as a people; another argued to the contrary. Such discussions were not only printed in newspapers throughout the United States, but were debated in the U.S. Congress as well. The result of such efforts to discredit Mexico and justify war was the widespread belief that the God-forsaken Mexicans were unworthy of keeping the valuable resources and land they had inherited from Spain. Fact gave way to lore and the propagandists prevailed.

After the discovery of gold in California in 1848, "gold rushers" overran the land from Texas to California using Mexican villages as places for safety and rest. Some never reached the California goldfields and settled in or near Mexican towns. Generally, they viewed the Mexicans as inferior and as conquered people.

In the years after the gold rush but before the Spanish-American War, the Black Legend took on new meaning. As in Texas, anti-Mexican practices, similar to those inspired by the Jim Crow laws which would discriminate



92-20  
against free blacks after the Civil War, occurred throughout the Southwest. Law enforcers in the ceded Mexican Territory, sometimes modeled after the Texas Rangers, justified murdering innocent Mexicans by relying on the time-honored beliefs that Mexicans were treacherous, cowardly and instinctively had a "cruel streak" which, in turn, must be dealt with cruelly. Almost dispossessed of land and rights, Mexican-Americans used every means to defend themselves, including the court system. But the stereotypes, which had influenced newspaper accounts, American literature, published diaries and palaver, had almost irretrievably damaged any Mexican-American hope for justice. Indeed, Mexican-Americans began to see themselves as others saw them—"foreigners in a foreign land." During the 1800s, the Black Legend spread quickly

through publications which popularized the stereotypic character of Hispanics in general. For example, one reporter for the Missouri Republican (April 29, 1847) wrote that New Mexico was "a country with but few exceptions inhabited by ignorant, dishonest, treacherous men; and by women who believe scarcely what virtue is beyond the name."

In another account, Joel L. Poinsett, U.S. Consul to Mexico in 1822, quoted an anonymous visitor who viewed Mexicans as lazy and immoral, and whose "occupation seems to consist, principally, in removing fleas and lice from each other, drinking pulque, smoking cigars when they can and sleeping." Poinsett's secretary, Edward Thornton Taylor wrote that Mexicans were "ignorant, vicious, thieving and incapable of governing as republicans."



Detail of "Massacre of Pines"



Other published accounts expressed similar ethnocentric views written for an English-speaking audience. The accounts, taken in their totality, were nothing short of name-calling. Moreover, the printed generalization supported the oral tradition as if newspapers, diaries, and short stories were evidence for Hispanic depravity. At the end of the 1800s, one event consolidated the anti-Hispanic attitudes and tied them directly to the Black Legend typology which by then was more than three hundred years old. That event was the "splendid little war" of 1898 between the United States and Spain. Besides the propaganda of yellow journalism, a deluxe edition of Bartolomé de Las Casas's Brief Account of the Destruction of the Indies, illustrated for the first time with sketches by Theodore de Bry, was published in New York in 1898. The war cry "Remember the Maine" became synonymous with "Remember the Alamo." It is not surprising that Julián Juderías in the following decade undertook his study of the centuries-old war of propaganda and gave it a name—*la leyenda negra*.

If the nineteenth century revived the Black Legend as a tool for discrediting the Hispanic world, the twentieth century has, in its own way, perpetuated the myth. Nineteenth-century historians such as Francis Parkman, George Bancroft, John Lothrop Motley, and William H. Prescott are widely published with little explanation about their role in the historiography of the Black Legend. Philip Wayne Powell, in *Tree of Hate* (1971), studied the writings of the above-mentioned nineteenth-century historians. Of them he wrote, "They fashioned upon earlier foundations, the concepts of Spain that remain with us today. The four historians are simply the best known and most influential; they dominated American historical writing for fifty years." What did these historians have in common? According to Powell, they wrote as Protestant Nordic preachers. They were all anti-Catholic. They were thoroughly imbued with an uncritical concept of Nordic superiority over the Latin. And they portrayed Nordics as heroes and Latins, especially Spaniards, as villains. Fitted into the sparkling prose of their writing styles, what they wrote of Spanish history seemed factual and innocuous. In *Pioneers of France in the New World*, Francis Parkman wrote eloquently but falsely, for example:

"The monk, the inquisitor and Jesuit were lords of Spain—for they formed the dark and narrow mind of

that tyrannical recluse. They had formed the minds of her people, quenched in blood every spark of rising heresy, and given over a noble nation to a bigotry blind as the doom of fate. Linked with pride, ambition, avarice, every passion of a rich, strong nature, potent for good and ill, it made

the Spaniard of the day a scourge as ever fell on man. Spain was the citadel of darkness."

Thus the "God, Glory, and Gold" school of history was born.

In more recent years, historians, popular writers, and textbook authors have unwittingly or intentionally lent their prestige to the legend. Walter Prescott Webb, one of the most distinguished historians Texas has produced, wrote a definitive study, at least from an Anglo-American point of view, entitled *The Texas Rangers*. This is what he, as an authority of Texas history, wrote of the Mexican:

"Without disparagement, it may be said that there is a cruel streak in the Mexican nature, or so the history of Texas would lead one to believe. This cruelty may be a heritage from the Spanish of the Inquisition; it may, and doubtless should, be attributed partly to the Indian blood. . . . The Mexican warrior. . . was, on the whole, inferior to the Comanche and wholly unequal to the Texan. The whine of the leaden slugs stirred in him an irresistible impulse to travel with rather than against the music. He won more victories over the Texans by parley than by force of arms. For making promises—and for breaking them—he had no peer.

In his most distinguished work, *The Great Plains*, Professor Webb contributed more to the Black Legend's longevity. The Spanish "failure" on the Great Plains is attributed partly to the Spanish character on the frontiers of Texas and New Mexico. Webb wrote that the cause was miscegenation with the Mexican Indian "whose blood, when compared with that of the Plains Indian, was as ditch water." Without question, the Black Legend sentiment survives within the very backbone of our educational system—the monograph and the textbook. In today's popular media, elements of the legend are obvious in newsprint, television programs, and Hollywood depiction of Hispanics. In four centuries, the Black Legend made the jump from a few quill-written copies to the automated and computerized production of literature, and an electronic medium which projects moving images in support of yesterday's propaganda. Ignorance perpetuates *la leyenda negra*.