

The Role of Spain in Contemporary Race Theory

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It is hard not to wonder how much of the recent enthusiasm for cultural studies is generated by its profound associations with England and the ideas of Englishness.

—Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*

The background for my essay is no less than four hundred and fifty years of what is popularly called “the Black Legend,” that is, European writings that since the 1550s have cast Spain as the cruel, arrogant, irrational southern neighbor of the continent. It is well to remember that Erasmus refused to travel to Spain because, according to him, there were “too many Jews there” and that Spenser’s judgement on Spanish bloodlines in *A View of the Present State of Ireland* was that “of all nations under heaven I suppose the Spaniard is the most mingled, most uncertain and most bastardly.” The extent to which these and other constructions of a Spanish other led inexorably to the Enlightenment’s exclusion of Spain from the realm of the civilized and even to the U.S. hostile takeover of Spain’s empire at the end of the last century is not my focus here, yet Spanish colonialism’s role in contemporary race theory is necessarily predicated upon all of these earlier moments and the discursive networks that nourished them.

Because the Spanish New World experience was the more dramatic one—early contact with complex indigenous societies, defeat of rival empires, access to precious metals—and therefore better suited to novelistic treatment, it has traditionally received a “privileged” notoriety compared to the English experience.¹ By notoriety I mean a negative celebrity produced by a focus on the early decades of Spanish conquest and the massive destruction of indigenous societies in America. Those aspects of Spanish colonialism that get thrust into the foreground are in most cases the most stereotypical ones, the most violent and depraved ones, the ones, in short, outlined early on by Spanish humanist writers themselves in their critique of the colonial project. There is little doubt that Anglophone scholarship on colonialism and race has yet to escape the discursive heritage of Las Casas and his English translators. For English-speaking scho-

lars, Spanish colonialism serves a double function—because Spain is the most fanatical representative of European expansionism, Spain is the least “European” of Europe’s nations, or, in Spenser’s words, “the most uncertain and most bastardly.” Following this logic through, English, Dutch, and French colonial behavior, we are taught, could not have been anything like the Spanish.

Yet we know that the principal players in the belated English colonial project looked to the Spanish experience for guidance. Despite their use of Las Casas in order to construct a barbarian Spain for European consumption, those writers who laid the groundwork for the English invasion of Ireland and North America conveniently bracketed his tolerant views of indigenous peoples and instead drew directly from Spain’s most anti-Indian texts such as those by Fernández de Oviedo and López de Gómara. Richard Eden and Thomas Hacket, to name only two of the most influential ideologues, supplied the colonizers with precedents drawn from the Spanish experience, for the Spanish in America, Hacket claimed, had “invented good lawes and statutes for the brideling of the barbarous and wicked, and for the maintayning and defending of the just” (Canny 586). We can be fairly sure that many colonizers—Sidney and Spenser, for example—were acquainted with Spanish texts and took them to be models for colonizing “inferior” peoples such as the Irish and the Amerindians. One of the most striking features of early modern racialized discourse is its relatively limited vocabulary. English representations of the Gaelic Irish, for example, echo descriptions of Gypsies found in medieval Spanish texts: “Thei regards no othe, thei blaspheme, thei murder, commit whoredome, hold no wedlocke, ravish, steal and commit all abomination without scruple of conscience” (Canny 584). In seventeenth-century English writing, the Spanish repression and final expulsion in 1609 of the *moriscos* would provide an additional model for the on-going colonization of Ireland.

The historical silence surrounding these discursive exchanges leaves the majority of discussions of early modern racial formations neatly ensconced within the hegemony of English departments. The fact that what most English Renaissance scholars know about Columbus, “La Malinche,” and Cortés was taught them by Stephen Greenblatt is a symptom of a general lack of knowledge about early modern Spain. The responsibility for this situation must be shared by U.S. Hispanists who until very recently have resided blissfully in their own disciplinary walled community. The consequences, however, for Spanish-speaking students and faculty are serious and the topic for a different occasion. Let me just say that

the devaluation of Spanish-speaking cultures and populations is rampant in the U.S. today, a condition not unrelated to the deep-rooted opposition Anglo/Spanish that in the 19th century would mutate into Anglo/Mexican. In terms of scholarship, I would argue, the on-going reproduction of Black Legend-inspired common sense about the origins and structures of Spanish colonialism seriously impoverishes our understanding of “race in the Renaissance.”

In this essay, I want to investigate Spain’s role in the genealogy of racism as narrated in two influential books: Michael Omi and Howard Winant’s *Racial Formation in the United States*, 2d. ed (1994) and Etienne Balibar’s essays in *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities* (1991). What I am interested in tracing are the ways in which these critics construct Spain’s role in the emergence of modern forms of racism in order to develop a general theory of race and culture.

Omi, Winant, and the Conquistadors

Omi and Winant base their study on two basic hypotheses: 1) that “a modern conception of race does not occur until the rise of Europe and the arrival of Europeans in the Americas,” and 2) that antagonisms directed at Muslims and Jews “were always and everywhere religiously interpreted.”

With their claim that modern ideas of race only appear after Columbus, Omi and Winant follow a line of thinking that is part of a long-standing debate that continues to resist closure. The other side of the debate, with which I find myself in agreement, is summed up in Michael Banton’s study *The Idea of Race* (1977): “It is sometimes assumed that contemporary Western conceptions of race arose out of the contacts between white people and black people that followed European voyages of exploration to America, Africa, and Asia in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. This is too narrow a perspective and underestimates the significance of social changes within Europe” (13).

While I am in fundamental agreement with many of Omi and Winant’s main theses with regard to the function of “race” in the modern period, I believe that racial categories in pre- and early modern Spain fit the basic definition of their keyword “racial formation” and that those categories existed decades before Columbus made landfall in the Caribbean. If, as Omi and Winant argue, racial formation is “a process of historically situated projects in which human bodies and social structures are represented and organized” (55-6), we are obliged to acknowledge

that Spanish social relations qualified as a racial formation at least as early as 1449 when the city of Toledo excluded under penalty of death all *conversos* from public office and certainly no later than 1480 when Rome granted the Spanish monarchs their own inquisitorial powers. The point here is not to single out Omi and Winant for being insufficiently versed in the history of the Iberian peninsula (in this they join thinkers as important as Foucault, Said, and others), but to argue that the exclusion of Spanish society from accounts of Western racism is itself a byproduct of eurocentric practices. As one French intellectual put it, "Africa begins at the Pyrenees;" the ideological consequences of this attitude permeate most of Western scholarship to this day. The wider point, of course, is that an overreliance on stereotypical versions of the past or even worse a lack of interest in the past, produces a distortion of major proportions of what many of us are attempting to understand—forms of white supremacy, racism, and economic injustice as they exist today in the United States.

My intention is certainly not to defend early modern Spanish culture nor even to push back the origins of modern racism. What I am arguing is that once we accept standard accounts of the origins of modernity, Iberian culture before America drops out of the historical tableaux. With developments south of the Pyrenees erased, Spanish and Portuguese contributions to anti-semitic and racist discourse in the medieval period are ignored and we lose access to a large chunk of raw material upon which later forms of Western racism would be constructed. The influence of racial typologies developed in Islamic Spain (Al-andalus), for example, on later Spanish and Portuguese practices has been one focus of new research on slavery (Sweet). At the same time, Portugal's fundamental role in the development of the African slave trade, from the delivery in 1444 of the first large group of sub-Saharan African slaves to the establishment in 1462 of a Portuguese-Castilian slave market, is crucial to an understanding of early modern European racist discourse.

Rather than positing a break between earlier European racial projects and the conquest of America, as do Omi and Winant, it behooves us to delve deep into the pre- and early modern record in order to locate what Foucault once called the "grid of intelligibility" through which later theories of race take shape. For modern racism was not born of a break with earlier practices brought about by the conquest of the new world, although that conquest was undeniably a major event in the genealogy of racism, but was pieced together from what Raymond Williams calls "residual" elements and emergent practices in the present. This leads us to Omi and Winant's second claim—that racialized social structures in their

modern guise do not “appear” until after 1492. Before that, they tell us, what might be mistaken for racial categories are in fact religious.

On this point, Omi and Winant cite as their authority George Mosse’s 1978 book *Toward the Final Solution: A History of European Racism*. This is a somewhat curious choice because Omi and Winant want to locate the origins of modern racism at the moment Europeans stumble onto American soil whereas Mosse argues that modern forms are not visible until the 18th century. Omi and Winant use Mosse to support their claim that anti-Semitism does not become racialized until the 1700s but Mosse himself makes the following assertion: “Certainly in sixteenth-century Spain racism existed in its modern sense.... Yet the Spanish policy toward ‘Jewish Christians’ faded with time and did not constitute a viable precedent for the rest of Europe” (xv). The claim that racist practices “faded” in Spain is a dubious one, and just why the existence of an early and significant model for Western racism should not qualify as a viable precedent is unclear. The precedent is not viable only if we agree to detach Spain from the West, that is, from the rest of Europe.

On the issue of race and religion, I agree with Kim Hall who has written that those scholars who want to reduce racialized representation in the pre-modern period to religious concerns alone are oversimplifying matters.² Spain is a crucial test case here because of the coexistence for over seven centuries of those three groups—Christian, Muslim, and Jew—or what Hispanists refer to, following Américo Castro, as castes. It is important to remember that in the early modern period religious discourse cannot be separated out from the general discursive formation as it might be in secularized, post-Enlightenment societies. The language of religious difference is clearly dominant, yet pseudobiological concerns are already visible in mid-fifteenth century texts such as Alonso de Cartagena’s *Defense of Christian Unity*. A lengthy treatise designed to defend *converso* interests before the expulsion, the *Defense* uses the biblical story of Ruth to argue for the primacy of faith over blood. Although Ruth was a gentile, her conversion washes her blood clean: “aunque nacida de sangre extranjera, o por mejor decir de sangre enemiga, sin embargo, por la aceptación de la ley habían hecho su alma israelita” (190). The notion of “enemy blood” is striking in that it resonates not so much with religious thinking as it does with nineteenth- and twentieth-century “scientific” racisms.

Into this mix of religious but already racially inflected distinctions, we must add representations of the Roma or Gypsy population which, decades before the European encounter with indigenous groups in the

Americas, would be cast as a dark and shiftless people in need of unusually severe social controls and discipline. One classic example of the longstanding discourse on Gypsies is the following passage from the Jesuit Martín del Río's book, *Disquisiciones mágicas* (1606): "In the year 1417 after the birth of Christ, there appeared, first in Germania, misshapen men, ugly in their blackness ... with filthy clothing. They lived primarily by theft ["furtis imprimiis intenti"], especially the women ... for the men lived off the thieving of their women [They] existed like dogs with no concern for religion." The case of the Gypsy is especially relevant, I would argue, because it is the Gypsy's color, physiognomy, private language, and moral laxitude (that is, racial and ethnic differences) which had to be emphasized since, in the face of the Gypsy's professed devotion to Catholicism, religious justifications alone could not sustain arguments for exclusion or expulsion.

A comparative analysis of the treatment of Gypsies in Spain and England is useful insofar as it reveals a common repertoire of racial attitudes adapted to local circumstances. In Spain, longstanding disciplinary policies directed at the Gypsy community that began in the fifteenth century would culminate by the mid-eighteenth century in a series of "raids" in which Gypsy men, women, and children were forcibly removed from their dwellings and transported to reservations or sites throughout the empire where they were used as forced labor. Official orders for some of the largest deportations are among the earliest examples of Euro-American immigration policies and resonate with the language of the most recent acts of xenophobia in California and elsewhere: "se arrojarán a las casas de los Gitanos, prenderán a todos, hombres, mujeres y niños, cerrarán las casas o dejarán centinelas en cada una, llevarán los presos a la cárcel".³ The surprise "redadas" of 1749, for example, saw Andalusian Gypsies from southern Spain rounded up and transported by ship to the northern region of Galicia, to military outposts in North Africa, to various locations in the Americas, and to the silver mines of Almadén. Gypsy women were incarcerated in three regional "depósitos" which were both prisons and cloth-making factories (in modern terms, sweatshops).

As I stated above, it was in the fifteenth century that the Spanish monarchy promulgated the first official measures aimed at the Gypsy population. In 1499, Ferdinand and Isabel ordered the expulsion of anyone without "oficio y señor," an attack primarily against Gypsies who refused to be coerced into the servant class. From that point until the mid-1600s, state and ecclesiastical officials devised expulsion programs that, although never realized, were symptomatic of the hostility directed

at Gypsies at the level of daily life. A law passed in 1586 stated: “Mandamos, se guarden las leyes y pragmáticas destes reynos, que prohiben y mandan, que los gitanos hombres y mugeres no anden vagamundos, sino que vivan de estancia con oficios o asiento, y se ponga esto por capítulo de Corregidores; y ansimismo mandamos, que ninguno dellos pueda vender cosa alguna, así en ferias como fuera de ellas, si no fuere con testimonio signado de Escribano público.”⁴ The Portuguese monarchy engaged in similar measures, and made it a regular practice to deport Gypsy families to its colonies in America, India, and Africa.

In England, the earliest references to Gypsies or “Egyptions” dates from the early sixteenth century. By 1530, Henry VIII’s ministers had passed an “Egyptions Act” which ordered the immediate departure of all Gypsies; those Englishmen who aided in the apprehension of Gypsies were to be granted half of the Gypsy’s property with the monarchy receiving the other half. Those who were forcibly deported were ferried across the channel to reservations near Calais, at that time an English colony. Because the attempted expulsion was unsuccessful, a series of measures attacking the Gypsy population continued well into the eighteenth century, ranging from attempts at forced assimilation to capital punishment for male heads of family.⁵

In both the Spanish and English cases, the reasons stated by government officials for policing Gypsies were based on ethnic and cultural factors with religious discourse often functioning as a screen ideology. A rendering in verse of the basic complaints against the Gypsy lists religion first but proceeds to name language (*germania*) and hereditary predispositions towards theft as traits most troubling to spokesmen for dominant cultural expectations: “Es gente sin Dios ni Rey/y entroduzen una lengua/ con que ellos se entienden solos/y nadie no los entienda/Y lo que mas me ha espantado/es que las criaturas tiernas/nacen con la inclinación/de las maldades que heredan” (Sánchez Ortega 21). In addition to linguistic reasons and an overall lack of respect for state and church authority, concerns included the Gypsy’s reluctance to accept dominant attitudes about domesticity and property (bigamy and nomadism), their participation in occult practices (fortune-telling), and, perhaps most troubling of all, their ability to fade in and out of surrounding cultural environments at will (“passing”): “acomodándose con todas las naciones” (Memorial de 1618) or “son moros con el que es moro/ereje con quien profesa/su maldad, y con christiano/en España de apariencias” (Relación de 1617).

The racial projects that sought to represent and police Gypsies, Jews, and Muslims at the same time created new institutions that attacked in-

dividual bodies that were up and running in Spain and England by the end of the fifteenth century. According to Omi and Winant, these early projects are part of a “proto-racial awareness by which Europe contemplated its ‘Others’ in a relatively disorganized fashion” (62). The inability to address seriously the Iberian context and specific groups such as the Gypsies produces a tentative language (“proto-,” “relatively”) that weakens Omi and Winant’s account, and forces us to consider the possibility that “modern” racial formations have a history that reaches back to at least the late Middle Ages.

Omi and Winant adhere to a theory of racist thinking in which one formation “gives way” to another (religious to scientific, for example). On this point, Ann Stoler’s reading of Foucault may be helpful. Stoler argues that in his 1976 College de France lectures Foucault presupposes a “transformational grammar of racial discourse between the seventeenth and twentieth centuries” (73). According to Foucault, discourses about “race” ought not to be assigned to certain ethnic groups who then deploy them against other groups. Rather, “race” is a field of practices and discourses that provides a conceptual repertoire from which specific groups draw in order to consolidate privilege and further their political projects. If we accept this formulation, nineteenth-century European theories of scientific racism are less the product of an epistemological break with earlier practices than they are a rearticulation of residual and emergent elements in a different political register.

How would the inclusion of the Spanish model of racial formation change current assumptions of race theorists working in the fields of ethnic and cultural studies? In my opinion, the connection between pre-modern forms of anti-Semitism and early modern racist practice would have to be more tightly drawn. I have argued that the Spanish record reveals that racialized social practices were in place long before Columbus’s landfall; thus the relative ease with which they were adjusted and transferred to indigenous people from the Caribbean to the Phillipines. One curious feature of the first stage of Spanish transatlantic discourse was the way in which notions of “Jewishness” crossed over to the new world and back again. Not only were the indigenous people of America cast as descendants of the lost tribes of Israel, even those Spaniards who visited the Indies and returned home with significant amounts of accumulated wealth were retyped as *conversos* (former Jews). Spanish racial projects, stretching from the late fifteenth to the early seventeenth centuries, struggled mightily to connect Amerindians and Jews, producing texts such as Gregorio García’s *Origen de los indios del nuevo mundo y las Indias*

occidentales (1607). García attempts to apply long-standing anti-Semitic stereotypes to the “newly discovered” people. Like Jews, he writes, Indians have large noses and speak a guttural language: “Entre todas las Naciones, ninguna ai que tenga tan grandes Narices como los Judios, de donde toman algunos motivo para entender, que uno es de esta Casta, i Nacion, viendo que tiene la Nariz grande. Las Historias del Perú nos cuentan como [the Spaniards] llegaron a una Provincia de Indios, los quales tenian los gestos ajudiados, i Narices mui grandes, i hablaban de tal manera, i con tal pronunciacion, que las mas de las letras pronunciaban gutturalmente” (87).

While the term “casta” may be limited to religious belief systems, the term “nación” cannot. By the middle of the fifteenth century, the latter term was being used with “pueblo” to signify a “Jewish nation” separate and apart from Spain proper, a “nation” constructed through both ideological and structural exclusionary practices. García’s text is much more than a catalog of somatic features. It builds an entire edifice of analogies that connect “jewishness” with “indianness,” analogies ranging from the Hebrew journey out of Egypt and the Mexican journey out of “the North” to the reported use of crucifixion as a punishment in both cultures. Following Foucault, we can classify García’s text as an example of pre-modern thinking whose fundamental categories are similitude and resemblance rather than identity and difference. More important, it is part of a racial formation that takes shape through both structures of governmentality (the State’s management of populations) and representation. The meanings carried by ethnic/racial markers in early modern Spain would lead directly to the distribution of social space and resources that produced the specific nature of the Spanish Inquisition, the final expulsion of 1492, the treatment (and proposed but never realized expulsion) of Gypsies, the *encomienda* system in the New World, the expulsion of former Muslims in 1609, and so on.

In this sense, early modern Spanish racial formations combine elements of earlier moments, e.g. one group’s fear of another or discourses of contamination by external sources, with what Foucault called “a racism that a society will practice against itself, against its own elements, against its own products; it is an internal racism—that of constant purification—which will be one of the fundamental dimensions of social normalization.⁶ In Spain, the disciplinary regime included not only a pseudobiological understanding of “race” but a concentrated social apparatus to protect aristocratic interests threatened by an emergent class whose power derived from accumulated wealth. If America’s impact on

racial projects was decisive, it can be explained less by the encounter with previously unknown peoples than by the influx of wealth that began the slow reconfiguration of traditional European class structures. As class conflict intensified in the coming centuries, the aristocracy's tactical deployment of racial projects could be appropriated by society at large in order to limit the rights of racial and ethnic minorities and those of the working class.

Balibar and the Recuperation of Spanish Racism

It would be a mistake to dismiss Etienne Balibar's essays on race, nation, and class simply because they reveal a superficial understanding of the history of Spanish-speaking populations in the U.S.⁷ Balibar's account of Western racism is important because it reintroduces the Spanish experience, albeit tentatively, as an early example of a state-sponsored racial project that draws on the representational repertoire of European anti-Semitism. Like Mosse, whom I have discussed above, Balibar makes a halting gesture toward the key role played by early modern Spain in the genealogy of racialized practices: "Modern anti-Semitism—the form which begins to crystallize in the Europe of the Enlightenment, if not indeed from the period in which the Spain of the Reconquista and the Inquisition gave a statist, nationalistic inflexion to theological anti-Judaism—is *already* a 'culturalist' racism.... In many respects the whole of current differentialist racism may be considered, from the formal point of view, as a *generalized anti-Semitism*" (23-24; emphasis in original).

With this statement Balibar puts us back on the road to recovering a section of the transformational grammar of racial discourse that is erased in traditional accounts produced in the U.S. It is important to note that Balibar sounds remarkably like the Foucault of the 1976 College de France lectures when he rejects the notion of discursive breaks and posits instead a lingering inheritance of European racist representation that provides discursive resources for successive political projects: "This is why the question, which is perpetually being revived, of the irreducibility of anti-Semitism to colonial racism is wrongly framed. The two have never been totally independent and they are not immutable. They have a joint descent which reacts back upon our analysis of their earlier forms. Certain traces function constantly as a screen for others, but they also represent the 'unsaid' of those other traces" (45). As I have suggested, the residue of previous racial projects in Spain would include not only anti-Semitic but also anti-Gypsy representation both of which contributed at a later mo-

ment to those writings that sought to justify the Spanish colonial project in America.

Balibar's remarks about the functioning of modern racism through a "projection mechanism" are important for my argument because the Spanish example is one of the earliest in Europe in which that mechanism manifests itself. As was the case with European anti-Semitism, the construction of a "pure" racial essence upon which nationality might be built was dependent upon a preoccupation with "impure" groups who posed a threat to the nation. As Balibar puts it: "By seeking to circumscribe the common essence of nationals, racism thus inevitably becomes involved in the obsessional quest for a 'core' of authenticity that cannot be found Since it is impossible to find racial-national purity and guarantee its provenance from the origins of the people, it becomes necessary to create it in conformity with the ideal of a (super-)national superman" (60-61). It is this ideal fantasy type, not yet the Aryan superman but a precursor to it, that stands at the center of the myth of the Spanish "godo." What is unique about the Spanish case, however, is that the origins of a "pure" lineage can be "located" insofar as they were produced by centuries of struggle with darker peoples (la Reconquista) and therefore traceable to a specific geographical core—the northern provinces of the Iberian peninsula known within Spain as "La Montaña."

Spanish anthropologist Julio Caro Baroja has written about the ways in which, from the fourteenth century on, aristocratic writers and ecclesiastical jurists created the cultural fantasy of a racially pure Castilian ruling class descended from the Goths. Caro Baroja's discussion is important to my earlier contention that biological or pseudobiological considerations were always already at the heart of religious justifications that were taking shape at the level of ideology. "Contaminated" groups were defined by religious beliefs but religious beliefs themselves, it was often argued, were a transmitted inheritance conveyed through bodily fluids such as blood and mother's milk. Caro Baroja explains: "Existen estrechos nexos entre lo religioso y lo biológico, de suerte que las ideas de pureza o limpieza, impureza e infección de la sangre, se fundan en criterios religiosos" (489). At the same time, divine punishment was thought to produce somatic markings that were passed on from generation to generation; thus, the curse of Ham (or Cain, depending on the tradition) that marked Africans as dark-skinned and inferiors. In a culture very far removed from modern secularization, Spanish ideologues of race and empire like Ginés de Sepúlveda employed the most authoritative discourse at their disposal—religious discourse—as a rationale for racialized

social practices, yet traces of pseudo-biology also permeate the religious master-code: “Con perfecto derecho los españoles imperan sobre estos bárbaros del Nuevo Mundo e islas adyacentes, los cuales en prudencia, ingenio, virtud y humanidad son tan inferiores a los españoles como los niños a los adultos y las mujeres a los varones, habiendo entre ellos tanta diferencia como la que va de gentes fieras y crueles a gentes clementísimas, de los prodigiosamente intemperantes a los continentales y templados, y estoy por decir que de monos a hombres” (101). In the mid-nineteenth century, secular ideologues would use the human/animal distinction to promulgate their fantastic theories of the “Races of Man.”

It is in his discussion of the connection between racism and nationalism, however, that Balibar draws directly upon Spain’s contributions to the Western tradition of imperialist ideologies. I want to quote Balibar’s text at some length on this issue because it contains several points which are crucial to my argument about the centrality of Spanish developments in the early modern period:

Even more interesting is the case of Spain in the Classical Age, as analysed by Poliakov: the persecution of the Jews after the *Reconquista*, one of the indispensable mechanisms in the establishment of Catholicism as state religion, is also the trace of the ‘multinational’ culture against which Hispanization (or rather Castilianization) was carried out. It is therefore intimately linked to the formation of this prototype of European nationalism. Yet it took on an even more ambivalent meaning when it gave rise to the ‘statutes of the purity of blood’ (*limpieza de sangre*) which the whole discourse of European and American racism was to inherit: a product of the disavowal of the original interbreeding with the Moors and the Jews, the hereditary definition of the *raza* (and the corresponding procedures for establishing who could be accorded a certificate of purity) serves in effect both to isolate an internal aristocracy and to confer upon the whole of the ‘Spanish people’ a fictive nobility, to make it a ‘people of masters’ at the point when, by terror, genocide, slavery and enforced Christianization, it was conquering and dominating the largest of the colonial empires. In this exemplary line of development, class racism was already transformed into nationalist racism, though it did not, in the process, disappear. (208)

In this reading, early modern Spanish racial formations are not only a prototype for the rest of Europe but for North America as well. What commentators such as Omi and Winant want to call “modern racism,” that is, the rearticulation of the West’s racist heritage in the eighteenth

century caused by changes in capitalist social relations is for Balibar the “first neo-racism,” for the fundamental variables of racist practices and their use as tools for nationbuilding were already visible in Spain by the end of the fifteenth century. Of equal importance are the ways in which those practices that might have constituted a class racism in the Spanish context quickly spread to the entire Christian population regardless of rank, a situation that already destabilized the ideological underpinnings of aristocratic privilege.

From the Black Legend to Manifest Destiny

The coexistence of class and nationalist racisms have persisted throughout the multiple transformations of Western capitalism, and would fuel Europe’s imperial projects, the rise of Anglo-Saxonism in the U.S., the establishment of manifest destiny doctrines, and the conquest of the Southwest in the mid-nineteenth century. I want to conclude with 1848 and the Mexican War because it marks the completion of one circle in the spiral of Western racism. If, as I have argued, the anti-Spanish Black Legend was an early English appropriation of Western racial discourse for political purposes, then the U.S. move against Mexican territories was the ultimate achievement of the “Anglo-Saxon race” in its struggle with inferior peoples of Spanish descent. The stage was set a decade earlier when writers like Thomas Hart Benton urged British readers to approve of the U.S. conquest of Texas which was being realized, he argued, by “a people sprung from their loins, and carrying their language, laws, and customs, their magna carta and all its glorious privileges, into new regions and far distant climes” (quoted in Horsman 213). Another racist ideologue, Levi Woodbury, writing from New Hampshire, warned that unless white Texans were defended by the U.S. government “their Saxon blood [would be] humiliated, and enslaved to Moors, Indians, and mongrels” (quoted in Horsman 217). The representation of Mexicans and Spaniards as “inferior” mixed breeds echoes the eighteenth-century portrayals of Spain as insufficiently European and harkens back to sixteenth-century anti-Spanish discourse. The myth of racial purity, which had been the basis for Spanish nationbuilding in the fifteenth century, ironically would be turned against Spain itself by every emergent empire until the demise of Spanish power in 1898. On the eve of the Mexican war and the eventual U.S. takeover of the Southwest, the gendered and racialized language of Manifest Destiny, a direct descendant of European racisms, was capable of producing the awful poetry of nascent U.S. imperialism:

The Spanish Maid, with eye of fire,
 At balmy evening turns her lyre
 And, looking to the Eastern sky,
 Awaits our Yankee chivalry
 Whose purer blood and valiant arms,
 Are fit to clasp her budding charms.
 (quoted in Horsman 233)

One hundred and fifty years later in California, opportunistic politicians push “English Only” propositions on to the state ballot and accuse Spanish-speakers of using a private language in order to resist assimilation. The recycled repertoire of Western racism that centuries before in Spain had produced official decrees and violence against Jews, Gypsies, and Amerindians, adapts itself yet again to a new racial project and rears its ugly shape, this time dressed in a business suit.

Notes

¹Compare Bernal Diaz’s description of Tenochtitlan with William Bradford’s description of Massachusetts in *Historia verdadera*: “Y desde que vimos tantas ciudades y villas pobladas en el agua y en tierra firme otras grandes poblaciones ... nos quedamos admirados” (159). *History of the Plymouth Plantation*: “What could they see but a hideous and desolate wilderness, full of wild beasts and wild men” (65).

²Kim Hall writes: “The traditional assumption that the religious difference of ‘Moor’ is the primary threat to English culture does not tell the whole story” (13). On the intersection of religion, race, and class in early modern Spain, see Charles Amiel, “La ‘pureté de sang’ en Espagne,” *Etudes inter-ethniques* 6 (1983): 27-45 and Deborah Root, “Speaking Christian: Orthodoxy and Difference in Sixteenth-Century Spain,” *Representations* 23 (1988): 118-134. See also, Margo Hendricks and Patricia Parker, eds., *Women, “Race,” and Writing in the Early Modern Period* (London: Routledge, 1994).

³Quoted in Gómez Alfaro (37). It is not surprising that the contemporary situation of Spanish gypsies is not unlike that of some segments of U.S. minority populations: average life expectancy of the Gypsy male—nine years less than the Spanish average; unemployment rate for Gypsy males—around 75 percent; percentage of Gypsy children in public schools—around 25 percent. See Hancock (103).

⁴*Novísima Recopilación*, Libro XII, Título XVI, Ley III, 358.

⁵See Mayall and Kenrick/Bakewell. French policies were similar throughout the early modern period: expulsion order, 1427; all Gypsy men to become forced labor in galleys, 1560; round up and deportation, 1682.

⁶Quoted in Stoler (67). Foucault's comment that the notion of "alien races" has less to do with external Others than with "a permanent presence that incessantly infiltrates the social body" (Stoler 66) is particularly apt for Spanish anti-Semitic and anti-Gypsy policies. Adjusting for historical difference, we might argue that the comment is also appropriate for Anglo relations with people of Mexican descent in the U.S. Southwest.

⁷In his final essay, Balibar confuses the political term "Chicano" with "spic" and other generic racist slurs: "Thus, just as many North Americans are incapable of pointing out a Chinese, a Japanese or a Vietnamese, or indeed a Filipino, or telling them apart (they are all 'slants'), or, alternatively, a Puerto Rican and a Mexican (they are all 'chicanos') ..." (220).

⁸Before explaining the Ham and Cain stories, Alonso de Sandoval writes in his 1627 treatise on the African slave trade: "Ni es cosa agena de la providencia y sabiduria de Dios, el notar con semejantes marcas, o otras, a los que se burlan de sus siervos, pues leemos en la vida de S. Thomas Becket, que todos los descendientes de aquel que cortó a la mula del santo la cola nacieron con colas en pena del atrevimiento del padre, lo cual no se ha de entender que fuese milagro en cada uno dellos, sino que la natureleza a quien Dios avian tomado por instrumento de aquel castigo" (74). In other of his comments on the somatic differences that distinguish Africans, Sandoval practices a kind of pseudo-biology without drawing at all upon religious discourse: "Las suturas, esto es junturas, con que unas partes de la cabeza se unen, encaxan y traban con las otras, que comunmente vemos en las calaberas de los difuntos, no las tienen las de los negros, siendo todas de una pieza, sin sutura o trabazon alguna" (75).

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