La herencia sí importa: A Study on the Generalization of Hispanic Cultures in US Media

An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)

by

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Abstract

Minority groups have unfortunately always been discriminated against in the US. The Hispanic cultures specifically have dealt with many issues that continue to grow. Especially with the vast differences between some of these subcultures, generalizing all under this word “Hispanic”, that really has no concrete meaning, creates this paradox where everyone and yet no one is included in this group of people. How Hispanics are portrayed in the media, and the stereotypes that are used are important in understanding how the rest of the US population’s perspective of the largest minority group in the country is formed and maintained, especially when not everyone in the US comes in contact with a Hispanic subculture on a regular basis. I researched the differences between multiple of these subcultures, stereotypes of Hispanics in TV and Film, and their representation as a whole and discuss how generalizing into one group and the lack of proper representation affects how the general US population views the US Hispanic population. I intend to identify different areas in the media where this generalization can be found and discuss why it is important to avoid this generalizing, while at the same time illuminating the cultural differences that distinguish these distinct cultures from one another. In doing so, I also hope to show the importance of cultural diversity in a population and the importance of pride in one’s cultural background.

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La herencia sí importa: A study on the generalization of Hispanic cultures in US Media

In today’s society, television and film have a remarkable amount of influence in our perceptions, personalities, and points of view. A viewer does not often think about how the characters they see on screen portray the social groups that include them. We often ignore the fact that anything a character does gives us insight on the reality of that group’s attributes. Especially in the media, the characters that are supposed to be representations of reality do not always properly portray minority groups. While many people understand that characters are not always perfect representations of reality, there is a large majority that do not understand the true depth of the diversity that we have in the US, especially when it comes to the Hispanic population. It is important to realize how much even the slightest negative/generalized idea can affect how groups are seen in reality. The Hispanic population in the United States is a very diverse group, and it is not often seen as such, but rather a grouping of “others” that may be different from an Anglo-American majority. Understanding the different cultures that are incorporated under the term “Hispanic” or “Latino” as one social group causes the population to continue to stigmatize these cultures as one. In discussing the differences between the different groups that are included under this term “Hispanic”, there are different areas in the media where this generalization can be found and analyzed. Avoiding this generalizing, while at the same time illuminating the cultural differences that distinguish these distinct groups from one another, is crucial in beginning to eliminate discrimination against these groups and underlining the relevance of retaining pride in one’s ancestral background.

It is important to know who in the United States is being included in the umbrella-term “Hispanic”. Many different cultures have been included in this grouping, some of
which have very little in common with the rest of the members of the group. According to María Lugones, who spoke at an NWSA conference in 1989, this “label” is harmful to society because it has no real definition. There is technically no description of who is included in this group. This word has basically been manipulated since its popularization in the late 1970’s by those “in power to suit their own purposes” (Keating 1).

There has also been continuous controversy as to if Hispanics should be considered a racial category or an ethnic group, especially when dealing with the census (Moore 3). This controversy is demonstrated in how the race listings dealing with this word has morphed in the past 80 years. The census before 1930 used a basic “White” and “Nonwhite” categorizing system, since “Blacks” were the largest nonwhite racial group. This was difficult for particularly Mexicans, but also other Hispanic groups that were already living in the country, and many jumped back and forth between the one of these two classifications or the “Other Nonwhite” group until 1930, when “Mexican” became an optional response as a race (Arreola 14; Moore 3). In 1940, the classification for people who came from backgrounds where Spanish was the native language became the ethnic group categorization “persons of Spanish Mother tongue”. While that was a little more specific, there was still some confusion for Hispanics trying to identify themselves in the census when the classification “white persons of Spanish surname” was added, intending to identify those that considered themselves White, but still originating from a country where Spanish is spoken. This classification was used in five states in the Southwest during the 1950-1960 censuses, but not anywhere else in the US (Moore 3). In fact, there was no data for Hispanics collected elsewhere in the US (Arreola 14). In the 1970 census, the categorization changed to “persons of both Spanish surname and
Spanish mother tongue" and in 1980 there was a kind of all-encompassing ethnic group created for Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, and what at the time as still considered just “other Hispanics” (Moore 3). They were sometimes listed as such as a separate race with white, black, and other non-whites, and sometimes they were listed with other groups of descent from another nation.

Pushing forward a little, in the 2000 census, the word “Latino” was used for the first time. “Hispanic” and “Latino” were used as general responses, but Hispanics could also choose specifically “Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, or Other Spanish/Hispanic/Latino” (Arreola 14). The other category had the option to specify even more, like Dominican or Salvadoran. Most Hispanics then, are considered as such because of how they identify themselves in the Census. However, each of these subcategories is still labeled as some version of “Hispanic/Latino” in the Census and, while all the aforementioned are groups with definite cultural differences and historical contexts within the US alone, they are grouped into one large US minority group.

Thus, people of a wide variety are considered being a person of Hispanic descent. “Hispanic” means a person who comes from an area where Spanish is the spoken language, and is especially notable of people from Latin America (“Hispanic”). Anyone with roots from Spain, Central America, South America, Mexico, and the majority of the Caribbean islands are included. That makes for a particularly varied group of different people, backgrounds, and cultures. This coverall term creates a paradox, according to Maria Lugones in her NWSA speech (Keating 1), in which by definition all Hispanics are the same, yet without an exact definition of what Hispanic is, no one fits the category. This creates even more disconnection between Hispanics of different backgrounds, which
in turn keeps them from uniting as one and combating the oppression that confronts them, and the negative stereotypes that are pitted against them every day in the US (Keating 1).

The Hispanic minority group has been the fastest growing population in the US for quite some time. While the total US population grew by about 50% from 1950 to 1980, the Hispanic population in the US grew by about 265% in that same time frame (Raigoza 97). Growing from the mere 14.6 million people or 6.4 percent of the population in the 1980 census, to 35.3 million people or 12.5 percent of the total population in 1990 (Arreola 18), Hispanic numbers continued to increase much more drastically than other racial minorities in the US. By 2003, the US Census Bureau stated that Hispanics had surpassed African Americans as the largest minority group in the country (Arreola 18), and it remains the largest minority group today according to the Census Bureau’s research on minorities growing towards majorities, and encompasses 16.3% of the nation’s total population (Wihbey).

For such a large population that is considered relatively homogenous in the US, the distinct subgroups of the Hispanic population in the US are fairly heterogeneous. Many of the contrasting characteristics have to do with not only the culture from which these different groups originate, but also the time period in which they came to this country and the reasoning behind it. Within the 52 million people that are considered Hispanic in the US, over half of them are of Mexican descent (Moore 1; Wihbey). Many Mexican-Americans come from families that were already living in what is now the American Southwest before the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo and the before the fight over what is now Texas in 1846. When the United States gained control over these areas,
the Mexican peoples already living there were not forced to leave and therefore became US citizens in time (Moore 19).

Mexican immigration has had multiple bursts since then, as Mexico borders the US, and there has been to some extent a continuous shift of Mexican citizens moving to the US, legally and illegally, looking for economic advancement (Arreola 18). The first explosion of Mexican immigrants to the US occurred prior to WWII, and included mostly agricultural workers due to the rise of industrial agriculture, especially in the US (Zong). The Bracero program, which was a program that allowed Mexican men to come to the states to work for a short time frame in mostly agricultural labor, brought in another wave of Mexicans, and then the termination of this program plus some changes in the immigrations laws brought in another wave (Zong, “About”). There was a larger majority of the immigrants in this wave of Mexicans that were unauthorized immigrants due to the first immigration limits put on not only Mexico, but some other Latin American countries as well (Zong). As crossing the border into the US became more difficult, there has been more law enforcement in this area, and there have been more low-paying job opportunities for foreigners, many migrant farmers began to bring their families along as well and settle permanently in many areas of the Southwest (Zong). Moreover, while most of Mexican-Americans can still be found in the American Southwest, they are slowly beginning to permeate other areas of the US as well, According to a figure on the migrationpolicy.org site, Mexicans are more likely to migrate towards areas in California, and even in bigger cities in the Midwest like Chicago, Illinois (Zong).

The second largest subgroup of Hispanics is people with Puerto Rican background, and make up about one sixth of all Hispanics. Puerto Ricans in the US
mostly reside in New York City and New Jersey (Arreola 27), but there are other states, like Florida, that also have significant Puerto Rican populations. However, they are the only subgroup that has US citizenship in any of the 50 states automatically upon moving to any of the states, as Puerto Rico is a US territory (Arreola 19). Puerto Ricans tend to migrate to the mainland due to poverty on the island and increased opportunities off the island, much like many Mexican immigrants today.

Especially after WWII, there was an explosive shift to migrate to the mainland, particularly New York City, due to rising unemployment levels in Puerto Rico, and a surplus of unskilled jobs near the already well-established barrio communities in NYC. The lower costs of flights and more frequent flights to and from the island and NYC also generated movement particularly to that area. Between 1940 and 1950, mainland Puerto Rican populations quadrupled, and then tripled again by 1960 (Moore 33). When Puerto Rican immigrants started flooding into NYC in the late 1940s after the Depression, there were so many that settled in specific areas of the city. Harlem was one of these areas that was filled with Puerto Rican immigrants so much that East Harlem soon was called “Spanish Harlem”. Even with the “Spanish” tag-on, this area was very closely connected to Puerto Rican culture (Moore 34). There are other cities that also have important Puerto Rican barrios or neighborhoods, but the Puerto Ricans are beginning to mix with other Hispanic subgroups so much that their migration is less evident. Even today they are still quickly scattering themselves throughout all areas of the US, not just the east coast (Moore 35).

Cubans are the third largest, and also a more recent Hispanic subgroup to begin immigrating to the US. While there have always been a few occasional Cuban
immigrants, there was a rapid increase beginning in 1958 when people began fleeing as political refugees after Fidel Castro came to power in Cuba (Arreola 19). In 1966, refugees began being airlifted pretty regularly out of Cuba and into the US. There was another incident in 1980 where a large group of Cubans took refuge in a Peruvian embassy and eventually were able to leave Cuba (Moore 36). These three incidents are most commonly seen as three most relevant waves of Cuban immigrants into the US (Moore 36).

While one can find Cuban communities in other large cities around the country, the majority of these refugees settled in Miami, Florida. A lot of the refugees had higher political power, but there were also many refugees from lower social classes as well. As a result, Cuban immigrants are unique in the sense that the US can observe a larger scale of social class structure from the Cuban immigrants than many other groups that migrate to the country because of the vast social classes represented in this population. In addition to this range of social class, due to the fact that there was still a larger amount of the Cuban immigrants who were politicians, businessmen, and government officials, they had a lot more political power in the US immediately upon entering the country (Moore 36).

Roughly one in five Hispanics do not have roots in these first three groups and are categorized as “other”. Immigrants from Central America and South America are inclusive to this category: Salvadorans and Guatemalans are the two largest subgroups from Central America, while Colombians and Ecuadorians are the largest subgroups from South America (Arreola 20). All four of these subgroups did not generally immigrate before the 1980s. While the cultures from country to country vary greatly, many of them from this area come to the US to flee civil conflicts (Arreola 20) or, like many Mexicans,
to seek enough economic success to better support their families. While there are second and third generation Hispanics of South American and Central American descent, the majority of Hispanics in the “other” category, especially the aforementioned nationalities, are foreign-born, and immigrated to the US with their families. Since so many are fleeing as well, there is quite a large number of immigrants from these areas that are undocumented. However, many of the refugees from Colombia and a few from Ecuador were political refugees like the Cubans, so it was more common to see Colombian or Ecuadorian immigrants that were middle-class or higher with better education. With the exception of the majority of the Colombian immigrants, however, many people in these categories come from humble backgrounds, and have little to no education, so it is a little more difficult for them to increase their economic status upon arriving in the US (Arreola 20).

After discussing the differences behind these varying immigration cultures in the US, knowing some of the reasons behind the generalization of them can be significant. However, they are significant only with the purpose that the argument against this generalization can then be more acutely defined. First, regardless of the diverse identities of these groups, a large majority of Hispanic minorities have the same living situations. More and more Hispanics live in urban settings, where many struggle with poverty, prejudice, and discrimination. For that reason, these populations are being treated by the larger majority as a singular group because of their similar characteristics and problems, and have begun to morph their differences into the melting pot idea instead of celebrating the distinctness of each culture. For example, bilingual education is a common thread between the subgroups that many want to pursue as a community goal (Moore 2).
However, not every person understood as a “Hispanic”, to borrow language from the Census, even speaks the Spanish language. While virtually all ancestors of anyone with Central American, South American, Mexican or Caribbean descent in the US spoke Spanish at some point, more and more second and third generation Hispanic immigrants do not hear Spanish even in home and may not learn the language at all (Diaz-Campos 243).

Looking at varying nationalities alone that make up the Hispanic population makes it easier to notice the even more broad cultural differences. While the Spanish language, as mentioned earlier, and Catholicism connect many Hispanics, even these differ based on original nationality. A great deal of the differences between the subgroups depends on their national origin. For example, Puerto Rican Spanish vocabulary and pronunciation differ from that in a Mexican Spanish variety, and Cubans are more heavily represented in the Catholic Church than both Puerto Ricans and Mexicans. Even class status, racial identity, and political affiliation revolve around national origin (Duany 11). As such, it is almost impossible to study any aspect of culture from this hypothetical and unrealistic “Hispanic” angle and not a nationality point of view.

In dealing with peoples views on minority cultures, discussion of stereotypes often appears because they help determine how one social group views another, regardless of if the stereotype is a correct representation of that group or not. According to Joan Moore and Harry Pachon in their book *Hispanics in the United States*, “Stereotypes are assumptions that allow society to classify individuals into groups” (3). These assumptions or theories about social groups then dictate and assist in the nature of the relationships between races. Once a stereotype is determined, it is often used as
justification for discrimination and prejudice against a group. While as noted, there are a variety of differences between the different nationalities, the few common themes between these groups has created this generalization issue and is an important reason behind the converging stereotypes of all Hispanics.

The basis of many aspects of the Hispanic stereotypes comes from Hispanics with Mexican descent that originate from the area that is presently the US Southwest. Before the 19th century, not much about colonial Hispanic populations is included in literature, and with the friction between white settlers and Mexicans along the Santa Fe Trail, there were a lot of negative feelings towards Hispanic populations from that (Wilson 66). With all the hostility in the Southwest during the Mexican-American War, and especially the war for Texas’s independence, Mexicans specifically were seen as inhumane and cruel (Wilson 66). This comes from the Anglo-American propaganda against the Mexican Americans during the fight for Texas, and was a stereotype even before their representation in films (Larson 59). These basic stereotypes were virtually solidified before the 1900s because of the disdain and negative tones that were set up by many Anglo-American writers, before other Hispanic heritage groups were even recognized as existing in the States (Wilson 67). This lead to an excessive exaggeration and assimilation of other Hispanic subcultures into the already known basic stereotypes, especially in the portrayal of all subcultures in the media that followed.

In addition to these negativities, Mexican American men, were seen as lazy, ignorant, and unclean. For example, in the early 20th century, the two films Let Katie Do It (dir. Chester M. Franklin and Sidney Franklin, 1916) and Martyrs of the Alamo (dir. Christy Cabanne, 1915) depicted Mexicans as “greasers” and “banditos” (Williams 14).
Adding to that, more often than not, other Hispanics as well, in addition to Mexicans are seen as violent criminals in a lot of media representations. Some films even go as far to display the idea that the only appropriate “place” for someone of Hispanic heritage is on the streets or in prison (Larson 59). Another version of the male Hispanic stereotype is the idea of a “Latin Lover.” Most often this specific stereotype portrays the character as more suave, sensual and tender. This stereotype is more likely to be seen if the character in question is of European descent instead of Latin American or Mexican descent (Larson 60). It changed for a while beginning in the early 1930s but has more recently made a comeback with actors like Spanish actor Antonio Banderas. This stereotype is also becoming more common among many different Hispanic characters, not just European characters (Larson 60).

Latina or Hispanic women are often thought of as charming with extra-feminine features in relation to their Anglo-American counterparts (Wilson 67), and were considered somewhat untouchable, but in a different sense than males. The female stereotype tends to be even more sexualized even when they are characterized as a more violent person, much like Latino males (Larson 60). There are also two sides to the female stereotype as Hispanic females could be considered a more “innocent-yet-desirable” type or a “hot-and aggressive” type in their character portrayals (Larson 60). The more violent stereotype can be seen in many cases where, for example, the Latina mother is considered to have a “spitfire” personality (Larson 61). The two sides vary in use based on the purpose of the character in the story in general. Regardless, both sides of this specific stereotype are demeaning to the Latina women by seeing them as either almost helpless or completely crazy.
Stereotypes can be helpful in learning about an unfamiliar group of people but can also be harmful to one's view of this group without even the slightest contact. Media, like television shows, movies, and commercials, can be powerful in affecting society, especially in the media-centered US today. It is especially crucial for visualizing aspects about our world without having to actually experience it. Media researchers have proven that consumers, while unintentionally, usually compile a "sense of reality" from not only news programs, but other media programs as well. However, with many media outlets being supported by and focusing on dominant and mainstream Anglo-American culture in the US, it is no wonder that Mexicans, Cubans, and other Hispanic peoples, are all morphed into one subculture, especially in television programming (Sizemore 767).

The media sends a number of messages that a viewer do not always notice when watching something on TV. These messages shape many aspects of our personality, like our point of view, attitudes on certain subjects, and personal preferences we may have. Cultivation analysis is a communication/social psychology theory developed by George Gerbner and colleagues, that explains the significance of a society's media viewing habits and how effective those habits are in molding attitudes and preferences about these certain subjects (West). This theory has shown that for example in the news media, Hispanics as well as other minorities have been portrayed in a negative light: as criminals, gang members, or illegal immigrants. This gives the general public an already negative idea of these ethnic groups before even viewing them in a fictitious media setting like a television program (Sizemore 767). While most of the studies done so far have dealt with crime and African-American males, and how crime is seen as a more
“black” activity, this influence of media on a society’s perceptions can be applied to Hispanic peoples as well.

Another large issue with how Latinos/as in mass media are represented is actually just the general lacking of representation. While Hispanics are often represented negatively, most of the time Hispanic representation in American media is completely excluded or ignored. A study administered in Washington, D.C. by The Center for Media and Public Affairs shows that Hispanics are represented in roughly two percent of mainstream media in the past thirty years (“Latinos”). This is far less than the 16.3% of the population Hispanics encompass. In fact, there was rarely any inclusion of Hispanics at all in other types of American mass media, like newspapers and literature, until the 19th century, even though Mexican Americans at least have been in certain areas of the present-day US far before that. Even more recently, a study done by Czepiec and Kelly in 1983 showed that in magazine advertising, the combined Hispanic audience from all magazines studied was roughly ten percent, yet in two hundred and six ads with live models, only three contained someone of Hispanic descent. Another study done by Greenburg and Baptista-Fernandez found that only 1.5 percent of all characters with speaking roles were Hispanic, in a three-season span of network television programs (Wilkes 20). While these studies were done several years ago, they are still helpful in seeing the continuation of the lack of representation. There is more of a presence of Hispanic actors and actresses today, but this presence is still not representative of the extent of the overall population of Hispanics in the US.

Furthermore, when Hispanics do actually appear in the media, they normally do so in specific genres. For example, Mexican Americans appear much more often when
dealing with Westerns that are set in the American Southwest. Puerto Ricans are more often seen in crime films that are set in a larger city, regardless of it that city has an impactful Puerto Rican population or not (Larson 58). When Hispanic characters and actors are included, certain aspects of a culture are avoided if they connect with only certain cultures. To be able to work with this lack of Hispanic characters, often Hispanic actors who want a lead role must play a character that would otherwise be white. There have been multiple instances where Hispanics have played Italian characters to get a lead role. Another example is Anthony Quinn, a Mexican-American actor, who played the lead role in the 1964 film *Zorba, The Greek* (Larson 58). This also shows that it is not only the lack of correct Hispanic representation that is the issue, but also potentially the general grouping of multiple ethnic groups in which Non-whites are understood to be more of less the same all around.

Especially as Hispanics are still relatively in only specific areas of the country not all Anglo-Americans come in contact with one or more of these cultures on a regular basis. In this case, media portrayals of Hispanics are even more critical in influencing one’s views of the people and cultures mentioned. This also can cause a larger proportion of Hispanic images that shed a negative light on the minority group. In addition, the Anglo-Americans that can only base their perceptions on media portrayals of Hispanics, are a major factor in the continuation of Hispanics being characterized and stereotyped as distrustful, criminal, and negative (Sizemore 767). So the more negative depictions of these groups the majority of the population watches, the more separation and generalized stereotyping of minority groups this distance between ethnic groups causes. This vicious cycle continues and will continue until something breaks this negativity and presents a
more realistic representation of the spread of diverse ethnicity in all aspects of society in
the US.

In today’s media, there is a relatively persistent visual image of a Hispanic or
Latino person, regardless of original nationality. Dark features, a darker skin tone, and an
accent usually accompany a Latino character in films and television series (“Latinos”).
This generic version of Hispanic appearance is another prime example of the lack of
recognition across the diverse spectrum that is the Hispanic community in the US. This
example specifically shows how dangerous the assumption that the Latino community is
so homogenous that it creates this idea that no diversity exists in the Hispanic population.
This generalization indirectly oppresses this specific community by seeing everyone as
the same. In addition, it prevents the cohesion of the distinct yet similar cultures to fight
against the falsities that are displayed in the media, like the inadequate and inaccurate
representations of the ethnic group.

Curiously, it is interesting to note that many people, Hispanic and non-Hispanic
alike, believe that Latino cultures have had much influence on multiple aspects of
American culture, including TV programing. According to a study done by Conill called
“The Hispanic Influence on American Culture,” roughly 54% of each separate group
thought that Latino culture has influenced American television in a moderate or large
way. In fact, two of the highest paid actresses in 2012 were Hispanic women: Sofia
Vergara in *Modern Family* and Eva Longoria in *Desperate Housewives* (4). Yet even
with the success of these actresses among others, there are still negative stereotypes being
presented, that these two actresses display themselves in their characters. Vergara herself
has been regularly criticized for playing up the Latina stereotypes off- as well as on-
screen. The network television show, *Modern Family* has become quite popular in the American household, yet there are many aspects of Vergara’s character and part in the show that play off of these stereotypes instead of adjusting them to correct Anglo-American views. Episode thirteen in season four discusses how her relatives ask where the river is to wash their clothes, insinuating that Colombian people are all too poor to have washing machines (Buckley). In another episode during season 1, her character’s own husband has a line that seriously stereotypes Latinos as one culture. “I got two Colombians at home trying to turn Christmas into Cinco de Mayo” (“Modern”). She even mentioned in an interview that there was a scene with “Colombian” people at a party and they were dressed like Mexicans (Moreno).

Vergara understands the difficulties the show’s Anglo-American writers have with introducing a new culture into a mainstream TV show. In an interview, she told TIME Magazine, “I cannot blame the writers because when you’re a writer, you write about what you know. You cannot tell an American writer to just write about some other culture and think it will be as natural as writing about an American person” (Moreno). While ignorance of the culture being portrayed is an adequate excuse for not knowing the difference between the culture of Mexico and Colombia, this lack of knowledge is exactly what I am arguing against. The general public, especially in more homogenous areas of the country, knows virtually nothing about the profound diversity involved in the largest minority group of the country. Not only are Hispanics not represented nearly as equally as they appear in the population, but the diversity within this culture and the accuracy of cultural aspects in the media is severely underrepresented.

While Vergara is fortunate enough to be able to portray a character of her own
cultural background, not all actors and actresses have this opportunity. Hispanic actors and actresses are often seen as interchangeable between their different cultures, and the cultures are seen as indistinguishable. Therefore the cultures are not specifically recognized in the scripts or narration of the films (Larson 58). This makes it difficult to come across as authentic many times because of the cultural differences that appear and perhaps the lack of knowledge of how to portray such characters in the film. For example, in the 1997 film *Selena* (dir. Nava), Jennifer López plays a main character of Mexican descent, even though she herself is Puerto Rican (Larson 58).

Furthermore, another potential frustration is the misrepresentation of Hispanics characters through the use of white actors and actresses, especially when a Hispanic is the lead role in a film or TV show. For example, the lead roles for the 1961 film rendition of *West Side Story* are both Puerto Rican. While many of the supporting roles of the film were in fact played by Puerto Rican actors and actresses, both of the lead roles were played by white actors: George Chakiris and Natalie Wood (Larson 58). While 1961 is definitely different than 2014, and there were even more examples of this misrepresentation, it still happens today between ethnicities. Italian Americans also often play Hispanic roles, as seen in the 1995 film *The Perez Family* (dir. Mira Nair) and the 1999 television program *NYPD Blue* (prod. Steven Pochco and Mark Tinker). Both of these films had an important Hispanic character played by Italian American actors (Larson 58). This is yet another example of how not only Hispanics are being misrepresented, but minority groups are often being grouped together in this sort of "other" category and seen as all being more similar because of it.

Furthermore, the increase in Hispanic-concentrated media, such as Spanish
television networks, in the last forty years has increased some awareness of the lack of representation phenomenon, but has done little to notify the US population about the elongated Hispanic spectrum of differing cultures. While this increased awareness began in the early 1900s with the spread of Spanish newspapers, it became much more obvious more recently. Panethnicity became an important concept for Spanish-speaking Hispanics especially in the early 1980s. News programs included reports on specific Latin American countries from which parts of the US's Hispanic population originated, especially in areas of the country where these groups had flocked. In the southwest there was broadcasts about Mexico, and in New York, broadcasts from San Juan could be found frequently on certain stations. Eventually programs in Spanish would also be included. Univisión was one of the leaders in conceptualizing panethnicity and actually broadcasting to multiple areas at once. Joaquin Blaya, president of Univision, stated in a press interview that Univision was “American television in Spanish” (Mora 146) and that it focused on broadcasting American TV to Americans who spoke Spanish. They especially tried to use a variety of speech that would mostly be recognized and understood throughout the US, even with the variety of different Spanish dialects being spoken at that time in different regions of the country. While it has received scrutiny on occasion for being a little too Mexican-heavy, this network continues to be popular today, as it is among the top five most popular networks in the country (“Hispanic” 4; Mora 146). Univision has been popular enough to even beat out one or more of the top 4 English Networks (ABC, CBS, NBC, and FOX) on multiple nights during 2012 and 2013 (“Univision”).

Univision is yet another example of the generalization of Hispanic culture into
one large group. On one side it has helped in the spread of language use and the increase in communication between different cultures within the Hispanic spectrum, but many have taken this consolidation of cultures to see Hispanics as one population instead of a unified population. This explores even further a generalization that many have taken advantage of or misunderstood. Many believe that if one has Hispanic heritage, they must understand Spanish. While that is common to find among immigrants, and even people born in the US in certain areas like the Southwest and near the Mexican border, many second and third generation Hispanics do not learn the language. Especially with most Latino/a characters in TV and film usually being accompanied by an accent, it creates a border of “us versus them,” between Anglo-Americans who speak only English, and Hispanic Americans who speak only English as well, but are stereotyped to not.

The change that is potentially happening in the US from the “Melting Pot” ideology to an ideology more geared towards multiculturalism is another important aspect in society that parallels generalization issues. The Melting Pot ideology basically describes this idea of conforming to the majority, or rather that there is a “status quo” setup in society, where the composition of the country’s race and ethnicity continues to morph under this umbrella of the Anglo-American majority (Wilson 14).

Multiculturalism is the idea that, even if our society were still mostly English speaking, we would be a multi-cultural society that accepts and tolerates other languages and distinct cultural differences. These two opposing ideologies often include some meaningful friction between them, since most often people of one side or the other feel very strongly about their position on the subject. While the rise of the multicultural idea is raising some harsh debates both locally and nationally, it looks like the US may be
slowly changing to be what Leon F. Bouvier and Cary B. Davis describes as “the first truly multi-racial society on the planet earth” (Wilson 14). This ideology would create a country of a group of minorities instead of the one all-encompassing majority, where the different groups would all be counted under the census and all call attention to addressing their groups’ issues, like discrimination. The main point behind multiculturalism though is that everyone is included in the majority group without having to assimilate or hide their own specific cultural values. In a 1981 interview, Bruce Chapman, Director Designate of the Census Bureau at the time, stated, “They may want to retain some cultural identification with the old country, but they also want to be unhyphenated Americans” (Wilson 15).

In conclusion, the generalization of Hispanic subcultures into one promotes negative stereotypes and rids them of their individuality. If Mexicans and Puerto Ricans and Argentines are all portrayed the same in the media, the country’s population, especially those who only have these portrayals as input for these specific subcultures, will see them as they are portrayed and will not fully grasp the depth of each one’s distinct cultures and those cultures contributions to the culture of the United States. In addition, the more that Hispanic heritages are demoted and looked down upon, the more people of Hispanic descent will be ashamed of their ancestry and heritage. As a group, they may lose the connection they feel to others so they can fight against the discrimination they face in general. Much of the United States would be different without the influence of all racial and ethnic minorities that live here. The US would be a much more boring nation culturally. Diversity matters in dealing with heritage, especially in a country that was built on that diversity, and it should be celebrated through representative
portrayals of the majority and all minorities that make up the US, not simplified into what ultimately becomes an "Us versus them" mentality. This lack of appropriate representation creates a nation divided instead of a nation, of many different subcultures, all united as one majority. In keeping media representations of the groups that make up minorities, particularly the Hispanic minorities, accurate, the US population can begin to eliminate at least a portion of discrimination against these US subcultures because there would be less inaccurate and negative representations of these groups. In doing this, we do create the idea of a multiracial majority, instead of many minorities, which is important in allowing everyone in the US to retain pride in their own ancestral heritage.
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