

**Clara E. Rodriguez (2000) Changing Race – Chapter 6****Main Point:**

Latin America has a very different population composition as compared to the United States. Although Latin American's concept of race is similar to that of the ancient inhabitants of the Mediterranean area, it is quite different. This chapter states that the concept of race in Latin America implies a "pigmentocracy", a racist paradigm in which honor and skin color are signaled by skin color. It argues that recent literature has emphasized this difference from ancient times and has also stressed the similarities between racial formation in the United States and Latin America. Rodriguez compares the criteria for the racial construction in the United States and Latin America and its reasons and also traces the differences in perspectives to early Spanish America and how racial categorization is like today in Latin America and in the eyes of Hispanic-Americans.

**Central Issues and Concepts:**

- *Pigmentocracy*: a racist paradigm in which honor, status, and prestige are signaled by skin color and phenotype. (Example: the whiter one's skin, the greater is one's claim to honor and privilege; the darker one's skin, the greater is one's association with subversion and the conquered).
- *Racial Construction in Latin America*
  - Based on social-racial constructions
  - Composed of a multitude of overlapping racial categories
  - Racial constructions is fluid
    - Seldom based solely on the color of one's skin
- *Racial Construction in the United States*
  - Based on genealogical/biological attribute of an individual
  - Composed of a few, discrete and mutually exclusive racial categories
  - Racial constructions have limited fluidity
    - Color is the basic variable in forming racial categories
- *Similarities in the Racial Construction in both Regions*
  - A history of indigenous conquest, slavery and immigration
  - The racial construction in both regions has been constructed to benefit the individuals in power
- *Reasons for the Differences in the Racial Constructions*
  - The Spanish had a different view of dark-skinned people as compared to the Northern Europeans
    - They were from the Mediterranean region and had been in contact with darker skinned people. They tended to see the darker skinned people as more like them (white).
      - This changed over the course of time and they began to see darker-skinned people as inferior
    - A slave could be a person of any skin color. People who were slaves were considered to be "unlucky".

- They were also considered as royal subjects and they had certain rights. However, they were still mistreated as slaves were treated in the Northern European colonies.
        - The Spanish Catholic Church, compared to the English Church, promoted the conversion, baptism and attendance of slaves at **integrated** religious services
  - The Latin American colonies were also less dependent on slavery than the British colonies and there were less slaves in these colonies
    - This coupled with the immigration of Europeans and substantial portions of natives might have led to a fluid conception of race (instead of it being just black and white)
  - The gender ratio
    - The Latin colonies had much more extreme women to men ratios compared to North America, which led to extensive mixing of races and much more blurring of the color line
- *Contributions of Early Spanish America*
  - Early Spanish America had many fluid and overlapping race categories based on physical, social and economic variables
  - Color was also used to describe Europeans
    - It was not a variable in different castes because lower-class Spaniards were also defined
  - Reputation/social acceptance were also used to emphasize racial classification
    - A person was not classified by first-look basis (such as skin color), but from how people around the person viewed them (social perception)
  - Race was also based on if a person had “honor” or not
    - However, honor was not measured from physical differences but from social status based on religion, ethnicity, race, occupation, ancestry and authority over land of the individual
    - Europeans were favored in these social orders but natives could also improve their position.
  - Culture was never abandoned and mixed people were defined by social their cultural factors and socialization
    - The concept of “purity” was present, but the blood ancestry was not considered as important as the North American colonies
    - Race was not definitely passed on from the parent to the offspring
  - Racial stereotypes were not confined to one race, but to multiple groups of people (Example: Bad drinking habits were connected to Mexicans, Indians and even Spaniards)
  - However, pigmentation was emphasized, implicitly and explicitly, contributing to the determination of one’s social status
- *Racial Configurations*
  - Each country in Latin America has a different criteria for defining race
    - It is also divided within regions of the country as well
    - They have some things in common:

- Legacy of slavery
  - Oppression of non-European peoples
- Race is classified by the government (by the elite) and is often different from the popular view of race
- “Race” is created by cultural practices by writers, and once it is created, it speaks about culture and influences the way we think of ourselves
- *Racial Legacy*
  - To Hispanics in America, race is closely tied to national origin and cultural identity and weakly tied to biological appearance

**Two Key Quotes:**

- “Hence in contrast to the United States, the blood quantum was not ranked, although like the United States, the sense that mixture diminished “purity” was present [in Latin America]” (117)
- “Yet despite what may have been great fluidity in early colonial Spanish America, the race order relied on the existence of oppressed “others” in order to define “the included” (121)

**Two Questions:**

- Why did Spain stick to the Roman slave laws, when the British colonies started with these laws (indentured servants) but veered off to establish a hierarchy between the individuals in power and those who were enslaved?
- Based on the records from early Spanish America, if the individuals did not inherit the race, were they categorized into a certain racial group based on the social perception of the individual when he/she was a baby?