



Culture and Policy Institute

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Critical Commentaries # 1

Frank Pino Jr.

The Hispanic Challenge: Threat or Opportunity?

“With 26 men of lead I shall conquer the world’ was the anonymous boast of an unknown craftsman in Medieval Europe.

In the middle 1700s an exiled British pamphleteer, Thomas Paine crystallized the dissatisfaction of the American colonies with the British Crown publishing a small pamphlet called “Common Sense.”

Ink-stained printers have always, in all countries and in all climes marched in the company of the thinkers, teachers and innovators.

Today’s printers who would emulate our proud predecessors are few. Those who yet believe that freedom of speech and thought is sacred wish to share this our contribution with you for the continued free exchange of ideas among all segments of our society”.

Stated by Ruben Munguia in an essay on the Cinco de Mayo titled “*Respeto, Libertad Justicia, Paz*” authored by Professor Frank Pino on May 5, 2000.



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■The Hispanic Challenge: Threat or Opportunity?●

Frank Pino, Jr.

The recent article by Samuel P. Huntington on ■*The Hispanic Challenge*● published in the March/April 2004 issue of *Foreign Policy* has stimulated thought around the world and resulted in numerous commentaries supporting and rebutting his analysis of Hispanics within the United States. While I am interested in addressing some of the points raised in his article to broaden the knowledge of those holding and projecting perspectives similar to Huntington's about Hispanics, I am actually more interested in addressing these issues for the benefit of Hispanics reacting to the article with expected outrage. I discover that the more I discuss the points raised by Samuel Huntington with many of my colleagues and most of my students, the more I realize that the article is based on distorted and false assumptions about multicultural experiences throughout the Hispanic world. However, I find that on reacting to Huntington's statements and to his conclusions, Hispanics are themselves reinforcing the false assumptions. As a professor myself reared and educated in the best ■American● tradition, I realize that many would think I should be making statements to students and non-academics rather than including them in my discussions. However, among the reasons I include them is that even though many of them are Hispanic, by the nature of their reaction, it is clear they remain the recipients of views and influences imposed upon them by Latino, Hispanic, Hispano, Mexican-American and Chicano professors and writers that are the same ones those Hispanics accuse Dr. Huntington of expounding. Rather than reacting to the view of Hispanics as a threat to the values commonly considered uniquely ■American●, we would benefit in our understanding of human relations if we focused our attention on how Hispanics, regardless of race or race mixture, nationality or immigration, ethnicity or heritage, or faith, are assets that contribute to the continued development of those universal values which Huntington and others identify as exclusively American, Anglo, and Protestant.

False assumptions. In presenting this perspective in discussing the *Foreign Policy* document, I have taken the approach that Huntington's article is based on false or incomplete assumptions often converted into absolute truths by academics, which are then stated as facts by them and others who esteem a purely intellectual approach to understanding; assumptions that are then propagated for political purposes and become popular topics for media distribution. These same attitudes for decades prohibited the speaking of Spanish on school grounds; declared one had to give up one language (Spanish) in order to learn the other (English), which of course is not true, and created stereotypes of an entire culture on the basis of examples limited to characteristics that were deemed undesirable. Rather than fall into the trap of denouncing the publication as has been suggested, and set out to refute the author's arguments point by point with equal pedantry, I have decided to take the approach recommended in the slip of paper enclosed in a Chinese fortune cookie that came my way recently. The message in Chinese, but which also was provided in English, advised the recipient to not mistake temptation for opportunity. It comes with the desire to choose peace rather than war (albeit a verbal one). The *Foreign Policy* article presents the opportunity to provide insights into the nature of the Hispanic experience as well as the American one for the benefit of *mi raza* as well as of those who do not profess to be Hispanic.

Misconceptions of ■Hispanic● and ■American●. Throughout my academic career I have been proposing to anyone who wishes to examine the issue that there probably are not any two labels that are more misunderstood than ■Hispanic● and ■American●. As a *profesor* myself, who happens to consider himself Hispanic born in the United States of America, I have often sought to explain to

listeners whether it is one individual, a roomful of persons, or an entire audience anywhere I happen to be, that my desire is to expand learning in ways that will increase understanding about the human condition by using an expanded perspective about the Hispanic experience. Although I am aware it is not in the best American tradition of academic politics, I inform deans, provosts and presidents, including Americanized Hispanic university administrators, that my classroom is anywhere I happen to be and that I don't need a particular classroom complete with the latest technology or a particular lecture hall or auditorium to deliver the message. Although American education thrives on formulas, classes do not require a minimum class size to share information; and, students, listeners or readers can be of any race, ethnicity, social or economic class, faith, age, sex, or educational experience to intervene in this discussion. All that is required is the willingness to listen, consider, meditate and then act.

The fact that that the article comes from one of the prestige institutions of higher learning in the United States and is written by one of academe's more respected intellectuals is no guarantee that its content should be accepted as absolute truth. It is unfortunate that its contents are saturated with false assumptions, erroneous information and seemingly well thought out conclusions, using established research approaches. It is worse that Hispanics are responding to the article in like manner. All things considered, the article creates the opportunity to offer an expanded point of view from the one presented, to provide documentation omitted from Professor Huntington's comments, and to broaden our understanding regarding Hispanics, not only for provincial Northeastern United States views of this country, but also for Hispanics, who, in our reaction to such a document, fail to consider the breadth of the Hispanic experience and limit our discussion to the purpose of refuting and denouncing Huntington's comments. For everyone involved, discussion about *The Hispanic Challenge*, instead of focusing on the threat to American life that Hispanics allegedly bring, should be directed to underscore the challenge Hispanics face everywhere, in the United States, throughout what is commonly called Spanish America and even Spain itself. This will require us to rediscover our common bond and emphasize an *hispanismo* that includes U.S. Hispanics. In such a vision the United States is identified as the part of Spanish America it has always been, and the Hispanic perception of this country replaces the concept of *el gran coloso del norte* with a broader *americanismo*. This cannot be done with the anglicizing of Hispanics that eliminates the enrichment Hispanics bring.

The article begins with the statement cited below, and the remaining text provides statistical information intended to support such claims. However, the discriminating reader does not need to go beyond this opening statement to understand why the documentation that follows is seriously flawed:

***The
Hispanic
Challenge***

The persistent inflow of Hispanic immigrants threatens to divide the United States into two peoples, two cultures, and two languages. Unlike past immigrant groups, Mexicans and other Latinos have not assimilated into mainstream U.S. culture, forming instead their own political and linguistic enclaves from Los Angeles to Miami and rejecting the Anglo-Protestant values that built the American dream. The United States ignores this challenge at its peril.

By Samuel P. Huntington

The falsehood that cultures in contact must cause conflict. From the beginning the article pleads for clarification and explanation of assumptions that have permeated ■American• (that is to say United States of American) xenophobia, even when the xenophobia may not have been intentional. The first of these assumptions is that immigrants will cause divisiveness, or that cultures in contact will cause conflict. This is not Samuel Huntington's only attempt at making this assertion.¹ Nor is it the exclusive domain of authors wishing to create interest by alarming their readers. This way of thinking is found even in the writings of John F. Kennedy, who was venerated by many Hispanics. In Kennedy's *A Nation of Immigrants*, after two chapters on the English, one chapter on Waves of Pre-Revolutionary Immigration, in which he refers to British, French and Spanish settlements and acknowledges Spanish influence in architecture, the old missions, and family and place names, he dedicates a chapter to Post-Revolutionary Forces in which he devotes numerous pages with abundant photographs on the Irish, the Germans, and the Scandinavians, followed by a section within that same chapter on ■Other immigrant groups• in which the former President includes Italians, Russians, Poles, Czechs, Hungarians, Rumanians, Bulgarians, Austrians and Greeks.² In his only reference to Hispanics, although not by name, Kennedy stated:³

Today many of our newcomers are from Mexico and Puerto Rico. We sometimes forget that Puerto Ricans are U.S. citizens by birth and therefore cannot be considered immigrants. Nonetheless, they often receive the same discriminatory treatment and apprehension that were faced by other waves of newcomers. The same things are said today of Puerto Ricans and Mexicans that were once said of Irish, Italians, Germans and Jews: *They'll never adjust; they can't learn the language; they won't be absorbed.* (emphasis added)

Whether Samuel Huntington had John F. Kennedy's presentation in mind is immaterial, although both have their home-base in Massachusetts. In speaking of ■The persistent influx of Hispanic immigrants . . .• he shares Kennedy's perspective of Hispanics as immigrants and

fails to consider the extensive Hispanic exploration and colonization of North America. Neither refer to European maps from the early 1520s that identify *Las tierras de Esteban Gómez*, The Lands of Esteban Gómez that included Massachusetts, Maine and Labrador.⁴ In assessing the achievements and policies of the Spanish in the Americas, the Yale Professor of History (Edward Gaylord Bourne) provides greater understanding than the present Ivy League colleague from Harvard:⁵

These great expeditions of De Soto and Coronado, undertaken for the exploration of the interior of the present United States a century and a half before La Salle, and over two centuries and a half before Lewis and Clark, were the natural outflow of the marvelous experiences of Cortés and of Pizarro in Mexico and Peru, and mark the highest reach of Spanish energy in our own country; nor have they ever been surpassed as exhibitions of skilful leadership and enduring labor by any similar enterprises by the French or English in North America.

If Professor Huntington wishes to emphasize *The persistent inflow of Hispanic immigrants*, he would do well to begin with the initial appearance of Hispanics on this continent and recognize that even Massachusetts was explored by Hispanics more than three-quarters of a century before the landing of Pilgrims on Plymouth Rock, and not limit his focus to Mexicans and other Latinos during recent years.

However, all would benefit from a view based on seeing encounters of different cultures as an opportunity for enrichment rather than divisiveness. There certainly are non-Hispanics who have had such an orientation, even on the East Coast of the United States. Through its exhibits and publications, The Hispanic Society of America founded in New York at the turn of the twentieth century has contributed a great deal to the expanded understanding of Hispanic culture by United States citizens and other entities in the Hispanic world.

The falsehood of homogeneous *Hispanic* and *American* peoples. A second false assumption rests in the misuse of *Hispanic* and *American* as homogeneous political and national terms. In the first place neither term can be fully explained accurately in political or national terms. The term *Hispanic* is fundamentally a cultural term, and it becomes political only when it is transformed to be such by individuals not familiar with the many segments of Hispanic culture evident throughout the world. Hispanics are found not only in North, Central, and South America, or as immigrants to the United States, but they reside also in Europe, Africa and Asia. The parochial use that Professor Huntington makes of the term does not adequately explain the many varieties of Hispanics, be they Mexicans, Cubans, Spaniards, Argentines, Bolivians, Colombians, Costa Ricans, Chileans, Guatemalans, Hondurans, El Salvadorans, Nicaraguans, Paraguayans, Uruguayans, Panamanians, Santo Dominicans, Puerto Ricans, Venezuelans, Ecuadorians, Philipinos, Spanish Saharans, or citizens of the United States descendant from any of the above nationalities. Even Hawaiian culture was influenced by Hispanics going there from California to teach horsemanship to the Hawaiians.

Unfortunately, this view of the breadth of the label *Hispanic* is not held by all Hispanics. There are Chicanos who deny or want to deny their Hispanic roots and *tejanos* who prefer to not be identified as *hermanos* to the *hispanos* from New Mexico because they see the terms *Hispanic* and *hispano* as equivalent to *Spanish* or *Spaniard*. They still see the Spaniard as a conquistador who subjugated the indigenous groups already present in the Americas, or they tell their students that the

term ■Hispanic• was created by the U.S. government as an ethnic term leading to increased discrimination. Hispanics everywhere need to understand that Spain itself is a multicultural entity with significant ■varieties• of Spaniards that can be loyal to a regional ■patria chica• as well as the national ■patria grande•. The national *español* broadened to become *hispano* or *hispánico* with Spain's increased colonizing ventures. Clearly the term is multifaceted.

Huntington's presentation identifying ■America• as the other of two cultures is equally misleading since ■American• (“*americano*”) refers to an individual from any of the countries of North, South or Central America and does not refer exclusively to someone from the United States, although the monolingual anglicized American uses the English label “American” in this way. Even United States culture is not of one race, ethnicity or political perspective but is rather the result of the enrichment of different groups in contact with each other. That he seemingly does not understand the ■americano• dream is unfortunate, since the *americano* dream is much broader and more inclusive than the strictly U.S. Anglo American Protestant dream to which he refers. As a native born citizen of this country I pledge allegiance to the United States of America as my country but consider myself Hispanic by virtue of my heritage.

Building not assimilating. A third false assumption is to reason that all other past immigrant groups to the United States prior to present day Hispanics have assimilated. As we have noted, ■prior• does not represent what really has happened in U.S. history. Rather than seeing immigrants from Italy, Germany, Ireland, Sweden, Poland and the other pre- and post-revolutionary groups as transforming themselves into an anglicized America, the author and some of his critics would benefit from a different perspective, perhaps by focusing on the role those groups have had in *forming* what he calls mainstream U.S. culture and by noticing how some members of most of these groups still retain their cultural ties. Such a perspective would help one understand the contributions all groups, including the many varieties of Hispanics have made, could have made, are making and can make to what he calls ■American• culture. Since as of the 2000 census, U.S. Hispanics comprise a group forming the fifth largest Hispanic population in the world, the potential for future development is great.

New political and linguistic enclaves. A fourth false assumption is the statement regarding the formation of the Hispanic's own political and linguistic enclaves. It is true that in some states newly established organizations and political units have taken a local Hispanic focus, but on closer examination, for example, by reviewing data on Hispanic membership in mainstream U.S. political parties or by checking out ballots everywhere in the United States, but especially in New Mexico, Texas, California, Florida, Illinois, etc.; the Professor from Harvard will find that by and large Hispanics run for office affiliated to the United States' major political parties. One can only assume that when brilliant minds such as President Kennedy's and Professor Huntington's seemingly ignore, neglect or minimize the roles people from different cultures have had in building The United States, it is because the biases have so permeated the thought process that they have affected their ability to recognize such contributions, or that the will to create divisiveness is so intense that such details are ignored. Unfortunately many so called educated Hispanics are becoming so Americanized that they react in a similar manner by rejecting their own Hispanic heritage.

Spanglish. Rather than see the adoption of Spanish words into English or English into Spanish as corruptive and unwanted, linguists from both traditions should see this interface of the two

languages as a way of enriching their lexicons and of acquiring new ways of expressing newly gained perspectives. This is a phenomenon which has occurred throughout the histories of both languages. Indeed, all languages have undergone similar processes. English speakers have had no problem with enriching their perspectives on foods with new names: taco, enchilada, tamales, etc. Western United States society has absorbed and adapted words such as corral, lasso, and rodeo. The lists of vocabulary are too numerous to provide comprehensive quantities of examples in an essay such as this one, and one can point out that examples coming from other groups within the Hispanic community would provide additional examples not established through nor found in Mexican Spanish. Likewise, modern universal Spanish has been influenced by English and the advent of computer technology has enriched vocabularies throughout the world. By the nineteen seventies words like ■parking•, which would have horrified Spanish teachers in United States classrooms in the fifties, could be observed in the streets of Madrid. Linguists from both languages would create greater mutual respect and acceptance if they focused on *aportaciones/contributions* to describe vocabulary that has enriched their languages over centuries and eliminated the term ■barbarismo•. All should view these contacts as continued opportunities for enrichment as opposed to corruptions of the respective languages. As Kennedy noted, there are place names throughout the United States that have originated from Spanish as well; and these, too, should be accepted as a valued part of our heritage.

The falsehood of the exclusively Anglo-Protestant American Dream. That fourth false assumption is minor in the context of the statement referring to ■Mexicans and other Latinos . . . rejecting the Anglo-Protestant values that built the American dream.• Where does one begin addressing this point? With the false assumption on rejection? With the false assumption on Anglo-Protestant values? Or, with the false assumption on building the American Dream?

The false assumption on Anglo-Protestant values identifies those values as distinctly Anglo-Protestant, which of course is absurd. It has been demonstrated that Anglo Catholics also defend their right to the values of truth, loyalty, freedom, justice and peace. Likewise, Anglo Jews, Anglo Muslims, Anglo Buddhists, Anglo Hindus and even Anglo atheists, have sought their access to those rights. What about Protestants? Can the author be implying that unlike the Scots, the Germans, the Scandinavians and other immigrant Protestant groups, the Hispanic Protestants don't exist? There are Spanish-speaking Hispanic Protestant churches (*iglesias bautistas, metodistas, presbiterianas, iglesias de Cristo, iglesias evangélicas*, etc., etc.) throughout the United States and in Latin America. Or, is the insinuation that even if Hispanic Protestants do exist, because they are Hispanic, they have rejected those values? The uninformed reader may reach that conclusion from the text presented. Such an assumption should strike fear into the hearts of the leaders and members of all Protestant denominations everywhere, since it would deny the validity of any Protestant commitment to Christianize all peoples. In this scheme of things, only the Anglo-Protestants survive, and only the Anglicized-Protestants embody those ■American• values, since with the statement about Mexicans and Latinos rejecting the Anglo-Protestant values, the assumption is that either Hispanics as Protestants have rejected those values, or that because they are Mexicans and Latinos, Hispanic Protestants don't exist. Both stands are erroneous. There has been and continues to be plentiful evidence of Protestantism among Hispanics, including Mexicans of all religions; and there is great commitment by Hispanics of all religions to the values identified as exclusively ■Anglo-Protestant values.• There is ample evidence the statement on ■rejection• is unfounded. These values are civic, extend beyond a single religious perspective and under gird our separate church-and-state society. One of the greatest challenges Hispanics face is realizing we don't have to abandon our heritage in

order to participate in the American dream; another is to refrain from imitating the American experience to the degree that we assume the biases, prejudices and undesirable practices of the American Way to the extent that Hispanics do nothing more than replace those whom we began condemning.

Furthermore, Huntington's denial of an *■americano* dream ignores the commitment to unity of many Hispanic thinkers, including such leaders as Simón Bolívar, who spoke of a united *■gran Colombia*, and José Vasconcelos, who wrote of a *■raza cósmica*.

Unfortunate implications. The most unfortunate and distressful aspect of the article is that it comes o

ut of one of the presumed most highly-regarded institutions of higher learning in the United States, not to say the world, and has already been widely distributed. With the esteem afforded higher education, the role the author has had in it, especially at his institution, and the presumed function the journal serves, readers will assume that the opinions expressed in this article have merit; that the assumptions projected in the article, and therefore the perspectives provided concerning Hispanics, are accurate; or, if the readers are of a critical mind, they may reason that higher education and the development of the intellect are no guarantee of gaining a better understanding of humankind's existence. In any of the three cases, the result is most distasteful, especially in a society committed to increasing knowledge and understanding among its citizens. For Hispanics to retaliate by providing data and arguments to refute the perspective Huntington and others share without first demonstrating how the views provided about us are based on false assumptions only serves to underscore the need for Hispanics to broaden our own perspective on our heritage.

A New Perspective. In situations like these, understanding is critical, and can only come with a broadening of one's perspective. This is true not only of perspectives emanating from the Northeastern part of the United States, but also of perspectives from throughout the rest of the world, especially the Americas, and from within the Hispanic community within the United States. Let us commit ourselves to help.

The very first thing that must happen is a broadening of the perspective of our own United States history. United States *■American* history has traditionally been seen as beginning in England, continuing in New England (especially Massachusetts), crossing the Alleghenies, continuing across the Mississippi, the Midwestern plains, and finally the Rockies until reaching the Pacific. In this vision in the process of laying claim to new territory the ideals of the new settlers from the East were absorbed in new lands by the sparse population residing therein. Then, further territory was gained following the Mexican American War or the purchases of lands made by the United States government, and by the affiliations into which the United States government entered following the Spanish American War (*■Remember the Maine?*), all as the result of initiatives which the United States sponsored, supported and executed; and *■American values* were to be extended into these lands.

However, the present situation as described in the *Foreign Policy* document did not originate from recent persistent waves of Mexican and other Hispanic immigrants flocking to the United States. There is an historical Hispanic precedence in the United States even prior to the creation of the Republic of Mexico. The states commonly referred to as the Southwestern United States are seen as such from a Northeastern perspective when in fact as we all know they were at one time *■a parte*

norte de la Nueva España. The United States changed the border to the Rio Grande following the Mexican-American War, incorporating lands and peoples with a Hispanic background. The United States executed the Louisiana and Gadsden purchases, both of which included significant Hispanic populations. The Northeastern United States expanded its claims to new lands, undoubtedly thinking all along that it would settle those lands with its cultural citizens, knowing intellectually but not fully understanding that other peoples with other cultures were already present and would not be absorbed in the same way nor contribute to the formation of this nation in a similar manner as immigrants coming from across the Atlantic. In fact the culture of the ■conquered■ or ■colonized■ peoples has quite naturally influenced the culture of the ■conquerors■ or ■colonizers■ just as it has historically in many similar situations, with Greece and Rome's interchange as a good example. The oddity is the objection to this phenomenon of cultural enrichment from other cultures in the Americas, especially in the United States. Perhaps this is due to a misunderstanding of who or what an American is, or the focus on one way Americanizing, as opposed to a unified building of a greater *americano* dream.

Many Hispanics can lay claim to having been born in the United States, but not because of waves of recent immigration. Our ancestors occupied territories in the present-day United States from times in which those territories were parts of Hispanic countries, namely Mexico and previously Spain. Mexican Americans must recall, of course, that our ancestors also can be considered invaders of what has come to be called indigenous lands forming a part of the Uto-Aztec Empire.⁶ In all cases a focus on the enrichment provided by the groups in contact as a result of their relationship and seeing a greater universality to their respective values would create a richer and a more peaceful interaction than failing to recognize the global nature of these values. *The Hispanic Challenge* is in reality one of contributing to the continuation of broadening the ■americano■ dream so that it recognizes and incorporates the rest of its roots. In the process it will enrich the U.S Anglo American Dream in ways that will serve to enlighten and benefit monolingual English-speaking *americanos*. In addition U.S. Hispanics will broaden our own concept of our pre-American and *pre-americano* multicultural Hispanic heritage and follow a dream that builds on the universal values that emanate from the blending of this *hispanismo* with the *civilizaciones indígenas* and the *encuentros* with other European, African, Asian and world cultures. All Hispanics, including those in a self-limiting Spanish America, and Spain itself must envision the role U.S. Hispanics have in connecting present-day Hispanics with each other and with their common heritage.

A more purpose-driven Hispanic Challenge for all, including Anglo American Protestants, and Hispanics everywhere, is to not lose the opportunity of continuing to build on the challenge and opportunity identified by Dr. Tomás Rivera in his address on ■*The Chicano Renaissance and the Humanization of the Southwest*■⁷ at Michigan State University on April 13, 1972, in East Lansing, Michigan, to a standing-room only university and community audience in which he encouraged all present to use knowledge to inspire positive changes in human understanding, behavior and relationships by expanding the Hispanic view of who we are and replacing the limited canons of American education with a more universal vision. *Bienvenidos* to the broader *americano* dream.

- ¹ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilization and the Remaking of World Order*. New York: Touchtone, 1997.
- ² Kennedy, John F. *A Nation of Immigrants*. London: Hamish Hamilton, 1964, p.10.
- ³ *Ibid*, p. 63.
- ⁴ Edward Gaylord Bourne, *Spain in America, 1450-1580*. New York: Barnes and Noble, 1962.
- ⁵ *Ibid*. p. 174.
- ⁶ Holland Edward Spicer, *Cycles of Conquest: the impact of Spain, Mexico and the United States on the Indians of the Southwest, 1533-1960*. Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1962.
- ⁷ Tomás Rivera, former Chancellor of the University of California at Riverside, professor and writer presented his address "*The Chicano Renaissance and the Humanization of the Southwest*" at Michigan State University on April 13, 1972.

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