



## Hispanic Legacies in American Culture

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Page 1

American society today carries the distinct stamp imposed upon it by the first immigrant Americans, the English. When American minorities use the word "Anglo" they usually refer to certain dimensions of a cultural mold fashioned by these first immigrants. These dimensions have helped give the United States a common cultural fabric. When a Cuban American, for example, speaks to a 5th generation American (son of an Englishman) both will understand each other to a large extent because of shared cultural values or practices. Both speak English, say what is on their mind and recognize the important role of protestantism. They may share a meal of meat and potatoes.

In recognition of Hispanic Week, it might be refreshing to know that in certain parts of western United States, this Anglo cultural mold fuses noticeably with *hispano* and Indian or Native American. (Anglo culture also fuses with assorted regional cultural traditions in ways that most of us ignore because of the force of the melting pot theory, i.e., the Slavs of Chicago, the Swedes of Minnesota, etc.). This process is known as "cultural exchange." In the U.S. West, these two groups were "exchanging" long before the arrival of English speakers (trail blazing Kit Carson married and lived with a Spanish-speaking woman he met in New Mexico). They too left their stamp on the West.

The most obvious Hispanic legacy involves place names. These may be found in an arc stretching from Florida via California to Alaska. Spanish explorers reached the 60th parallel and left behind the names of Cordoba and

Valdez, which now grace Alaskan hamlets near the big oil spill of 1989, as well as Malaspina, the name given to a nearby glacier. The Southwest is filled with Spanish place names including Sacramento, [Nuestra Señora La Reina de] Los Angeles [de Porciúncula] and Galveston. In the Southeast you have Cañaveral (stand of sugarcane), St. Augustine and Florida itself.

The Hispanic contribution to farming and ranching is less obvious. Spanish-speakers bequeathed to America certain types of horses, burros, alfalfa and assorted fruits including grapes. Mexican *vaqueros* taught the first Anglos about horse-riding gear, methods, and vocabulary. Today, much of this passes as American Cowboy culture. Examples of this vocabulary include the word lariat which comes from *la reata*, buckaroo from *vaquero*, cinch from *cincha*, chaps from *chaparejo*, mustang from *mesteña*.

The least obvious legacy involves the law. Anglo-Saxon law, for example, did not allow for adoption or the lawful inclusion of a non-family member. Adoption became part of U.S. law when the Southwestern states inherited the idea from their former Spanish status. Generous community property laws also came from western states that borrowed from their Spanish past. Under Spanish law, a married woman could own property and enter into contracts whereas under English law she could not.

Inter-personal relationships among Latinos are heavily influenced by *personalismo*. This means that ties

between individuals can run very deep. This leads to the oft-stated observation that there is "more emphasis on people" among Latinos. All business or political discussions are preceded by an exchange of personal information (i.e., how's the family? How is your wife? And the children?) *Hispano* ways are so noticeable in the Southwest that newly arriving Anglos detect them right away. One such friend commented one day, "There's a different way of doing things here in Albuquerque."