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On Latinos and Latin America*

Although C. Wright Mills did not conduct a systematic study of Latinos or Latin America as such, his various writings on these topics are nonetheless important because, like his more popular ones, they address his continuing concerns with power relations, issues of character structure (symbols, self-image, personality), status, pragmatism, history, and social structure.

The corpus of Mills's writings on Latinos and Latin Americans consists of four items: (1) "The Sailor, Sex Market, and Mexican" (1943b), a magazine article on Mexican Americans and the Zoot Suit Riots in Los Angeles written during World War II; (2) *The Puerto Rican Journey: New York's Newest Migrants* (Mills et al., 1950), a research study on the Puerto Rican migration to New York City during the 1940s; (3) *Listen, Yankee: The Revolution in Cuba* (1960d), a paperback explaining what the 1960 Cuban Revolution meant to the Cuban revolutionary; and (4) a 1960 interview (published in 1961) with Mexican leftist intellectuals published under the title "On Latin America, the Left, and the U.S." Again, it must be pointed out that Mills never undertook a self-conscious, methodical examination of Latino as an ethnicity and these four pieces, singly or collectively, cannot be regarded as

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such. However, these writings do provide us with an opportunity to examine Mills's social psychological analysis of Latino populations. Accordingly, this chapter sets forth three objectives: (1) to understand how Mills's personal experiences and convictions influenced his associations with and views toward Latinos from 1943 to 1960; (2) to analyze the social structural conditions that four specific Latino populations—namely, Mexican American youth, Puerto Rican migrants, Cuban revolutionaries, and Latin American intellectuals—experienced as their personal troubles in their day-to-day struggles during that period in history; and (3) to study the character structure—the motives and self-images, personality traits and conduct patterns, moods and wishes, aspirations and discontents—of these four Latino populations. The chapter concludes with a synopsis and appraisal of Mills's personal perceptions of Latinos, the social structural factors that impacted on the four Latino groups, and the personality traits of Latinos as Mills saw them.

Because the social psychological approach that Mills most clearly articulates in *Character and Social Structure* (hereafter CSS) informs all of his work, including the four pieces considered here, its basic concepts, as already discussed in Chapter 3, will be employed in better understanding Mills's views on Latinos, their motives, moods, and self-images.

Mexican American Zoot Suiters

Mills wrote “The Sailor, Sex Market, and Mexican” at the height of World War II and while he was working on CSS. This article is a social psychological assessment of the Zoot Suit Riots, the confrontation between Mexican American youth and “Anglo” servicemen that took place in downtown Los Angeles during June of 1943. This piece, written for the political and cultural magazine *The New Leader*, was published less than 2 weeks after the riots had ended. In a letter accompanying the article, Mills informed the magazine's editors,

I would like to point out that nobody has explained the occasion of the riots. . . . I haven't explained [the riots] in the enclosed but I do offer a rationally understandable pattern, based on 3 or 4 years experience with the night life of Mexicans and soldiers in San Antonio, Texas. (p. 5)

Implied in this letter is the idea that, through his previous acquaintance with these two groups, Mills is able to make some systematic observations about the character structures of Mexican Americans and servicemen. As concerns the soldiers, Horowitz (1983) intimates that “The Sailor, Sex Market, and Mexican” is marred by two powerful sentiments and experiences of Mills:

his deep antipathy toward regimentation and his ambivalence about having done everything he could to escape military duty. It would appear that these sentiments and experiences stem from two specific sources: (1) from Mills's experience as an undergraduate student at the military-oriented Texas A&M University where he found the regimentation to be "childish" (Gillam, 1966) and (2) from his refusal to be drafted during World War II.

The riots, in brief, involved an attack on Mexican American "zoot suiters" by servicemen on leave. During the 10-day confrontations, some 5,000 civilians joined the servicemen in chasing, stripping, and occasionally beating zoot suiters and non-zoot suit wearing Mexican and African Americans (Mazón, 1984). The main outward symbol, or emblem, giving the zoot suiters their identity was their distinctive attire. This "uniform" consisted of a long suit coat with trousers pegged at the cuff, draped around the knees with deep pleats at the waist, and a low-hanging watch chain. In addition, the zoot suiter distinguished himself from other youths by keeping his hair well greased and duck-tailed (Scott, 1970). Indeed, during the 1940s, the zoot suit was the dominant symbol and style by which tough Chicano youth—the *pachucos*—sought status. The zoot suit provided them with a unique self-image and, concomitantly, a certain level of self-esteem.

Mills eschews the explanations that had recently been advanced in understanding the Zoot Suit Riots in Los Angeles: crowded slum conditions, "war emotions," the segregated military, various forms of ethnic oppression, and so forth. He admits that while these features may contribute to, sanction, or permit riots, they are not sufficient to "let them loose." Instead, he finds a partial explanation for the riots in social structure (the war condition of the "sex market") and in character structure (the inner lives of the sailors and zoot suiters).

For Mills, the sex market, or "the opportunities of one sex to offer favors and attentions which the other sex will take up," is not the cause, but a precipitating factor, one "immediate irritant," of the riots. To begin with, Mills contends that war affects the sex market by distributing the sex ratio in two ways: In some places, war makes available more women than men; in other places (like metropolitan Los Angeles with its large military population), it concentrates single men (young sailors on leave) without increasing the supply of the young, sex-able women. The latter situation makes for an increased competition among men for the favors of the women available. Thus, the condition of the sex market during wartime is that, as a social structure of the city, it acts as a "tension-center." Indeed, "if the 'tension-centers' of the original troubles were plotted on a map of Los Angeles," explains Mills (1943b), "they would be clustered where men meet women at night: the dance halls, the bars, the streets of the districts where a girl is too poor to be too choosy" (p. 7). What

is more, this tense competition for women has the potential to become a dangerous conflict between Anglo soldiers and Hispanic civilians, particularly if the women involved are also ethnically mixed.

In addition to the war condition of the sex market, Mills advances another explanation for the riots: the social psychology—that is, the moods, wishes, and motives—of the Mexican American boys and the sailors on leave. The young sailor on leave for a night in Los Angeles is “on the make,” searching for sexually available women. He believes that his uniform (which he perhaps sees as a visible symbol of the “generalized other” that was dominant in wartime America: the military order) exempts him from the moral restraints of civilian life and, in the anonymity of the large city, he can make the most of his freedom during his leaves. Moreover, the soldier has been trained to realize his will in groups with violence and wants to test himself against the zoot suiters, a less formidable group than the Japanese and German enemy. Under these conditions, existing within the context of a military esprit de corps, the sailors may riot.

The sailor’s moods and wishes center around women: Those “little tornadoes of sexual stimuli swishing and flouncing down the streets of our cities hit him straight in the groin” (Mills, 1943b, p. 5). The Mexican girl is attractive to the sailor, and the impersonal competition for her quickly becomes a personalized conflict that turns into a fight. Group lines are drawn between the sailors and zoot suiters, and the situation becomes a riot.

Looking next at the motives of the Mexican boy, Mills notes that built into his character are many frustrations stemming from racial segregation, job disappointments, and class antagonisms that he experiences as an underprivileged minority. Out of these frustrations comes his desire to wear the zoot suit as a badge that calls others to notice him. Mills says the Mexican youth will not soon forget the humiliation he received during the riots, as his suit—the tangible symbol designating his underprivileged minority status—was torn off him in public. He received an even greater humiliation when the soldiers proceeded to “unpant” him in front of “his girls.” For it is before his women that the zoot suiter’s underprivileged social status is most painfully obvious. Next time, warns Mills, the Mexican boy will carry a knife.

In *CSS*, Gerth and Mills (1953) propose that status, in its psychological effects and meanings, is “close up” to the person because the level of self-esteem is a direct function of status position. Moreover, the type of self-image, as well as styles of conduct defining types of persons, is most readily understood in terms of the status sphere. According to Gerth and Mills, racial and ethnic minorities are status phenomena; more than that, they are status phenomena of an extreme enough nature to help illustrate how the status sphere affects character structure:

The status of any minority is revealed by their exclusion from specific occupations, educational opportunities, social clubs, preferred residential areas, as well as resistance to their intermarriage with members of the majority society. It is in this situation that the minority child comes to awareness of his status. In time, he also comes to experience its conflict with majority groups as his conflict—as others significant to him reveal hostile stereotypes based on it. Finally, he attempts to come to terms with the status situation in which he finds himself; and in the process he is organized into one of several types of personality. Whatever traits he has as a mature person of minority status will be a product of his status situation and of his cumulative reactions to it and interactions with it. (p. 326)

Gerth and Mills (1953) contend that there are two points in terms of which “minority types” of personality may be constructed: (1) the groups in terms of which the minority group members seek status—be it their own minority group or the majority society—and (2) the status symbols used by minority group members to claim status—again, those of their minority group or those of the majority society. In reference to these two points, Gerth and Mills produce four personality types (see Figure 5.1).

Figure 5.1

<i>The Symbols and Styles by Which Status Is Sought</i>	<i>The Groups in Which Status Is Sought</i>	
	IN HIS OWN MINORITY	IN THE MAJORITY SOCIETY
Of His Own Minority	I	II
Of the Majority Society	III	IV

Source: *Character and Social Structure* by Hans Gerth and C. Wright Mills. © 1953 Houghton Mifflin.

Gerth and Mills (1953) make it known that many possible varieties and types of men and women exist within each of these four situations. Applying this scheme in CSS to the Mexican American zoot suiters, they best fit into status situation II. This situation illustrates the minority personality types that have been formed by identification with the zoot suit lifestyle as a whole and who seek status from this identification, but from Anglos. These personality types may also include those resentful militant *pachucos* who ascribe all Mexican American ills to Anglos.

Returning to “The Sailor, Sex Market, and Mexican” and Mills’s analysis of the social structure of the sex market, he maintains that when the sex problem is not handled either as a commercial proposition (as in professional

prostitution) or as a thoroughly personalized arrangement (as in the middle class “date”), contentious competition for the few women available can incite a riot. Mills closes the essay by suggesting one practical solution to the problem of the unregulated sex market: the establishment of properly licensed and medically supervised houses of prostitution segregated for sailors and soldiers on leave. Such houses, Mills acknowledges, would not solve racial and class contradictions, nor remedy local conflicts between civil and military authorities; they would, however, lessen both of these tensions by minimizing and regulating a major irritant of them both.

Horowitz (1983) maintains that race and ethnic problems did not occupy Mills’s attention either before or after the war. (As we will see in the next sections, this assertion is only partially correct since Mills, if only superficially, did study the racial composition of Puerto Rican migrants.) Why, then, did he write “The Sailor, Sex Market, and Mexican”? Horowitz finds a partial answer in Mills’s biography. He states that Mills’s apparent concern for ethnic tensions in this article was part of his ever-deepening alienation from the American mainstream. The article enabled Mills to address the sociological problem of deviance, detached from the much larger political and global considerations he was already exhorting others to take into account. Despite Mills’s deeply sexist commentary, “The Sailor, Sex Market, and Mexican” is his “most forward-looking comment on the period” (Horowitz, 1983, p. 67).

Puerto Rican Migrants

According to Eldridge (1983), Mills’s two most well-known writings on Latin Americans, *The Puerto Rican Journey* and *Listen, Yankee*, “have in common a sense of the interdependency which exists between the USA and Latin America. . . . Both studies remind us of the asymmetrical economic and political linkages which the United States has had with Latin American client cultures” (p. 90). To be sure, given his great contempt for American expansionism, Mills, when discussing the peoples of these two cultures—Puerto Ricans and Cubans—always explains their conduct and motivations, their hopes, dreams, frustrations, and discontents, in relation to the political, economic, and cultural influences of “the colossus of the north.” In these two books, Mills makes a serious attempt at understanding the social world from the viewpoint of both the Puerto Rican migrant and the Cuban revolutionary. This and the following sections examine *The Puerto Rican Journey*, followed by *Listen, Yankee*, within the social psychological framework provided in CSS.

The Puerto Rican Journey (1950) is a study on the Puerto Rican migration to New York City. The book, with Mills as senior author, was written in

collaboration with Clarence Senior and Rose K. Goldsen. All three worked for the Bureau of Applied Social Research (BASR) at Columbia University. Horowitz (1963) recounts how Mills suggested to Paul F. Lazarsfeld, who at that time was the BASR's overall supervisor, that he take the Puerto Rican study off Lazarsfeld's hands as a way of compensating the BASR for major expenses that Mills had frivolously incurred. If this is the case, then, at least initially, Mills had no personal interest in the project; his involvement was motivated not by intellectual curiosity, but by expediency and indemnity. In any event, Mills ultimately designed the study and was in charge of its execution.

Mills's somewhat estranged, if not disinterested, attitude toward Puerto Ricans during the time he was working on this study may be gleaned from three sources. First, in a letter to the novelist Dan Wakefield, Mills writes candidly about his efforts at data collecting in San Juan:

[M]y own experience with them [the Puerto Ricans] was disappointing, especially in PR itself. They've little Spanish stuff and they've only the most blatant U.S. stuff. A sort of culture-less people. Hollow and really hysterical. But I don't really know them. My stuff was at a great distance and necessarily statistical in nature. (as quoted in Wakefield, 1971, p. 68)

Second, as concerns Mills's research in New York City, his coauthor Rose Goldsen (1964) describes Mills's Olympian detachment during the study's data-gathering phase:

In the days when we worked together on *Puerto Rican Journey*, I found much pleasure and excitement in wandering around Harlem and the East Bronx, chatting, drinking coffee with Puerto Ricans, questioning, arguing, wondering, commiserating, checking. Mills rode around Harlem and the East Bronx in his impossible open Jeep. He did not interview migrants or try to share their views. He interviewed English-speaking officials and intellectuals. (p. 90)

Finally, in a thinly disguised statement of self-reference, Mills, in *The Puerto Rican Journey*, expresses bafflement at Puerto Rican folkways: "To the New Yorker fresh from Texas, for example, behavior on the lower East Side is every bit as strange as that in Spanish Harlem" (as quoted in Mills et al., 1950, p. 126). In short, Mills's posture vis-à-vis Puerto Ricans, both islanders and migrants, was elitist at best and racist at the worst.

An Ambiguous and Ambivalent Identity

In *The Puerto Rican Journey*, Mills, Senior, and Goldsen undertake a comparative analysis of those Puerto Ricans who migrated to New York

City and those who stayed on the island. Focusing first on Puerto Rico, they maintain that the growing infiltration of United States influences on the island had produced a Puerto Rican identity characterized by ambiguity and ambivalence. On the one hand, island Puerto Ricans proudly identified with their Spanish heritage, a heritage strikingly different from mainland culture. To take but one example, on the island, kinship was organized in the Latin tradition with the despotic father-husband being the dominant pattern, and family structure extending beyond the primary family group to include aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents, nieces, nephews, *compadres*, and *comadres*. On the other hand, in addition to possessing a distinctly Latin tradition, the islanders strongly identified with the culture of the continental United States. For example, largely as a result of mainland advertising, their Spanish language was full of English words and phrases.

Mills, Senior, and Goldsen note that the status of island Puerto Ricans was ambiguous in yet another way: They occupied a marginal position between the United States and Latin America. Politically, economically, and culturally, islanders felt neither wholly American nor wholly Latin American. Focusing on economics, Mills et al. assert that when judged by North American standards of life, most Puerto Ricans were frightfully poor, but by Latin American standards, they were quite well off.

In light of the island's various social problems—high illegitimacy rate, low educational level, political uncertainty, poverty, a population explosion, and so forth—Puerto Ricans of the postwar generation found themselves caught in a situation that strongly impelled them to leave the island. While it might be expected that their Spanish cultural ties might have drawn them to Latin American countries, Mills maintains that, strictly speaking, the Puerto Ricans were not Latin American. So influenced were they by United States culture that they had become “Puerto Rican American.” If they left the island, their standard of living, way of life, mannerisms, and values made the pull of the States especially strong. These general cultural and specific economic pulls, along with the unrestricted migration that Puerto Ricans enjoyed as U.S. citizens, operated so that migration from Puerto Rico meant, by and large, migration to the United States mainland, and principally to New York City.

In articulating the islanders' reasons for migrating to New York City, Mills and his associates couch them in terms of a series of push-pull motivations. First was the push from the homeland because of the population pressure, manifested in the objective facts of low living standards and lack of jobs. Indeed, Puerto Rico's population had doubled during the previous half-century.

Second, the various island sources of information about New York City were generally favorable. These information sources took the form of

informal face-to-face contact as well as conversations with and letters from friends who were living in or had visited the city. In addition, compared with New York, which had the greatest concentration of Puerto Ricans, other scattered settlements of Puerto Ricans in the States had only very weak pulling power. This supports the finding that most of the people who considered leaving the island thought specifically of migrating to New York City and never seriously considered any other place. Thus, when Puerto Ricans were ready to leave the island, they were already “psychologically prepared” to move into one of the Puerto Rican enclaves of New York City.

Third, and the most crucial motivating force of Puerto Rican migration, was New York’s economic pull; the islander was beckoned by the city’s reputation for economic opportunity. Indeed, the majority of respondents expressed their motivations to migrate in terms of the pull of New York City rather than the push of the island. Mills, Senior, and Goldsen also point out the sex differences in the Puerto Rican’s motivation to migrate: The men tended to migrate for economic reasons; the women migrated for family reasons. That is, the women were either responding to the pull of relatives already settled in New York, or they wanted to escape or avoid difficult family situations on the island. Subjectively, however, economic reasons were more often experienced as a push from the island, while family reasons were associated with the experience of a pull to New York. Mills and his colleagues state that, all things considered, the immigrants’ motive for transit was primarily an economic one.

Since the Puerto Rican journey to New York was primarily an economic transit, it required occupational aspirations. In point of fact, only a few of the migrants eventually rose occupationally, the majority remaining at island levels, with more than a few sinking lower, ending up concentrated in, and restricted to, semi- and unskilled wage work. This pattern created in the migrant community a “poverty of aspiration,” meaning that those who aspired to a different type of job were as likely to wish for a low- as for a high-skilled job. Of all the migrants interviewed, only 18% of the men and 10% of the women articulated a job aspiration of any kind. These lowered occupational aspirations of the Puerto Ricans departed from the classic pattern of assimilation of other migrants to the United States who, upon learning the language and customs of their new residence, began to aspire to jobs requiring a little more skill.

Mills et al. attribute the Puerto Rican migrants’ leveled aspirations to the lack of a Protestant work ethic, or the willful feeling that the individual can command the future to serve his or her ends. Mills, to be sure, always maintained a fierce devotion to the Protestant work ethic, what he called, “the gospel and character of work” (as quoted in K. Mills & Mills, 2000, p. 41),

the idea of working hard for work's own sake, a notion that he claimed he learned from his father. This character structure of the Puerto Rican migrant contrasts sharply with the character structure of the 17th-century English Puritan that Mills describes in *CSS*. The English Puritan sought to "master the world" through all the traits that Mills personally admired: hard work, self-discipline, and control over external circumstances. In *CSS*, Gerth and Mills (1953) write approvingly about the classic Puritan's character type:

The heroic Puritan of seventeenth-century England could methodically pursue his quest for salvation by disciplining himself for hard work and thriftiness, and thus by his success assure his religious worth and his salvation in the hereafter. He could, in short, relieve his anxieties by hard work, by work for work's sake, and, under the appropriate premiums, take great pains to develop a new "contract morality" in business relationships. Thus perfectionism and moral rigor, punctiliousness, and pleasure-denying work, along with humility and the craving for his neighbor's love all combined to shape the character structure of the classical Puritan who sought to master the world rather than adjust to it. (p. 188)

Mills, Senior, and Goldsen explain that Latin American conditions of life had not encouraged this kind of ambitious focusing on one's future and deliberate searching for the means of achieving it. The migrant Puerto Ricans, in the quality and connections of their dream life, were caught between two conflicting cultures; some few had begun methodically to strive, but most retained the Latin (read: Catholic) heritage of their island background that was bereft of the Puritan notion of worldly work as duty. The future, as Mills and the others saw it, was not a hopeful one for the Puerto Rican migrants of New York City.

Given that the racial makeup of the Puerto Rican enclaves in New York City was Spanish, Caribbean Indian, and Black, Mills instructed his interviewers to record the respondents' physical type according to a three-category distinction: (1) "White," of Spanish ancestry; (2) "intermediate," which included the *indio* who had copper-colored skin and prominent cheekbones, and the *grifo*, who might be quite light complexioned, with blue or gray eyes, but had kinky hair (*pelo malo*), or had some other combination of racial features; and (3) the "Negro," which included Blacks and mulattoes. In general, the interviewers were expected to classify the respondents with respect to skin color (white, tan, brown, black), hair (kinky, wavy, straight), lips (thick, medium, thin), and nose (narrow-thin, medium, broad-fleshy).

Upon arriving in New York, the Puerto Rican migrants were either plunged into one of two worlds, or they had to exist between them. If they were White, they had to adjust themselves to the dominant White culture of New York; if they were not White, they had no choice but to blend into the

African American community. Whereas the White migrants had to take on the behavior and values of White America, the “colored” migrants found that they had to adapt themselves to Black America. Although no other community would accept them, the intermediately colored Puerto Ricans were frequently unwilling to identify themselves with the African American community.

Mills and his colleagues found that in New York, the Puerto Rican migrants became products, producers, and victims of ethnic, social, and cultural conflict. They had been products of cultural and racial conflicts on the island where, even though discrimination was subtle, they nevertheless had created racial classifications on the basis of skin color and physical appearance. The Puerto Rican migrants were producers of further ethnic antagonisms in New York City where they became acutely aware of other minorities. However, the migrants did not absorb ethnic group prejudice to any great extent, as indicated by their willingness to work with other ethnic and racial groups. All of the Puerto Ricans, but especially those in the intermediate racial classification—the *grifos* and *indios*—believed that they were victims of racial prejudice in the metropolis. Mills and his colleagues found strong indications that, among the intermediate group, problems of adjustment were more acute.

Difficult Adaptation

Mills and his associates point out that in order for the Puerto Rican migrants to find even minimal comfort, they had to cross an enormous cultural and social gulf to a world that contrasted sharply with the community they knew back on the island. Indeed, in the metropolis, and even in the clusters of Puerto Rican settlement, the migrants had no community in the sense of a shared life in a familiar area. In New York, instead of “communities in the sun” like those realized in the Puerto Rican plaza, there was only congregation in the crowded, often cold and dirty, always hurried streets. The streets of New York offered a poor substitute for the community interaction that existed in the slower-paced and more ample life of Puerto Rico.

The Puerto Ricans’ legal status as U.S. citizens notwithstanding, Mills, Senior, and Goldsen contend that psychologically and culturally they were foreigners in New York City because of the dramatic contrast between their largely rural island with its Spanish heritage and the American metropolis. It is easy to see how Mills himself may have personally understood the migrant’s difficulty with the process of assimilation through adaptation. Try as he might, Mills was never able to escape his outlander status. In effect, Mills lived on the cultural margins of provincial Texas, on the one hand, and

of metropolitan New York, on the other, while never completely belonging to either.

For the Puerto Rican migrants arriving in New York, adaptation to their new environment was particularly difficult. This was so primarily because New York City, being multicultural, did not offer the migrants a consistent set of available norms to which to adapt. The only constants in this heterogeneous world were the representatives of society at large, that is, the official authorities. Moreover, the usual and most obvious way a person becomes conspicuous to the society as a whole is by coming to the attention of these authorities and their agencies, which occurs when he or she causes them trouble. In the United States in particular, economic trouble is viewed as considerable, both for the individual and for the officials. In fact, "trouble" for the official agencies is likely to be anything that costs them money, directly or as time and effort. The degree to which money trouble made the Puerto Rican community conspicuous was illustrated by the publicity given to Puerto Ricans on welfare.

Mills et al. posit that there are objective as well as subjective meanings of *adaptation*. Objectively, and from the standpoint of society, adaptation can have only a formal meaning: to stay alive by not coming to the attention of the authorities. This means that the migrant must "function inconspicuously." Subjectively, and from the psychological point of view of the migrant, satisfactory adaptation must include some kind of psychic contentment. Combining its objective and subjective meanings, Mills et al. (1950) define adaptation as "inconspicuous functioning with psychic contentment" (p. 141). The opposite of this state is conspicuous lack of functioning accompanied by psychic discontent. According to Mills et al., low fluency in English and coming into trouble with the official authorities and agencies were the factors that contributed the most to the migrants' psychic discontent. Lack of language proficiency was a threat to the migrants' ego, and this created in them feelings of suspicion, anger, dejection, and hostility toward that in which they could not participate. This caused them to further withdraw from the wider New York scene. In addition, if the migrants needed help with family problems or money troubles, to the extent that they came to the attention of official agencies or even thought of going to them, that entailed an insecurity, which is to say, a certain amount of psychic discontent.

Mills and his researchers found that language proficiency was the most important factor in adaptation, having money troubles was next in importance, and coming in contact with official agencies was the least important. In addition, Mills, Senior, and Goldsen isolated several major variables influencing the adaptation of Puerto Ricans in the New York milieu. They found that the Puerto Rican migrants with the highest predisposition for adaptation—that

is, for functioning inconspicuously and having a high degree of psychic contentment—were White males under the age of 35 who were employed and had at least some high school education. In contrast, the migrants with the lowest predisposition for adaptation were older women of intermediate color who had little or only grammar school education and were unemployed.

Puerto Ricans who planned to leave or thought about leaving New York were about evenly divided between those who felt pulled back to the island and those who felt pushed from New York City. Those who felt pulled toward the island intended to return to Puerto Rico because of a job or family expecting them. The other half—those who felt pushed from New York—indicated the limitations on real aspirations in the city, the difficulties of properly rearing children, and the impossibility of finding peace of mind in New York.

In New York, the family—or more precisely, the household (since the Puerto Rican “family” was defined by residence rather than blood)—formed the migrants’ basic set of relations. Their center of social organization was, therefore, the household—which itself tended toward fragmentation into homeless and anxiety-ridden individualism. Any attempts by the migrants to enlarge their world beyond the household and street were frequently beset with great difficulties and frustrations.

Outside of the household, the migrants’ social world usually became impersonal, casual, distant, and confusing. The lack of community and the subsequent isolation of the individual, generally characteristic of modern metropolitan society, became all the more acute for the migrant, a man or woman on the cultural margins of two worlds. There is, however, a positive side, according to Mills and his associates. The migrants’ personal freedom had increased in the city; they were freer to pursue new ideas and ambitions and were also able to escape from the island’s rigid moral standards. Yet, in many cases, their freedom did not compensate for the loss of psychic security and comfort previously provided by the tight social control of small communities in Puerto Rico.

Furthermore, according to Mills and his coauthors, the Puerto Rican migrant’s circumscribed worlds of Spanish Harlem and Morrisania were not unified, and they did not produce strong feelings of solidarity beyond the general slogans of national pride. However, the researchers discovered that the migrants exhibited growing feelings of solidarity with other Spanish-speaking peoples in New York City. There seemed to be emerging a Spanish consciousness and a Latino type. In its less formal aspects, the Latin solidarity was suggested by conversations among recently arrived Puerto Ricans who called themselves “Latinos” and referred to East Harlem as “El Barrio Latino.” Indeed, when dealing with Latinos, Puerto Ricans considered them as “belonging to our race.” This feeling of identity and the creation of a Latino type are based on several factors. First, there was the common

language, Spanish, implying a preexisting connection with Latinos of all nationalities. Second, there existed a kind of abstract community feeling maintained by a pervasive “anti-Yankee” sentiment. For some Puerto Ricans, the Latino type of solidarity served as a core of resistance to assimilation and to the hard travail attending it. It led Puerto Ricans toward both a non-Puerto Rican and non-American type of adjustment, a type that was easier than and more congenial to their previous orientation. Mills and his colleagues note that this Latino pattern of conduct and feeling was a somewhat “Americanized” variety of the general pattern of Spanish culture. At the very least, there were parallels within it that were closer to American than to Puerto Rican cultural habits. Finally, Mills et al. explain that the Latino identity allowed Puerto Ricans to rise in their status as minority group members. Their self-image was better served as Latinos than as *Puertorriqueños*. In their struggle to escape their minority position, they could reach out and borrow prestige from some larger and more favored minority group. To the extent that there were romantic elements in this Latino image Puerto Ricans had of themselves, these elements were a thing of pride and necessary for enduring their difficult life.

Whereas “The Sailor, Sex Market, and Mexican” ignited Mills’s interest in Hispanics as minority populations, *The Puerto Rican Journey* served as an intellectual transit obliging him to undertake an intense investigation of the Latin American question: the problem of how the Latin American countries are positioned with respect to the United States’ hegemonic control of hemispheric affairs. In his intellectual biography on Mills, Horowitz (1983) states that “[s]ince the mid-1940s, when he had written essays on Mexican barrios in Los Angeles (which were followed, later, with research on the Puerto Rican communities of New York), Mills had had a special at-a-distance love affair with Latin peoples” (p. 299).

Clearly, by 1960, Mills’s familiarity with Latinos had been transformed into a near-obsessive desire not only to understand their world thoroughly, but also to educate others, particularly North Americans, on the Latin American struggle for self-determination in the face of U.S. imperialism. Mills inveighed against U.S. intervention in Latin America and began to see the significance of the newly achieved Cuban Revolution as an opportunity for the United States to rethink its foreign policy in relation to the third world Cold War strategy and Latin American containment.

Cuban Revolutionaries

“In Mexico, in Cuba, in Brazil,” writes the Mexican novelist Carlos Fuentes (1970), “Wright [Mills] discovered a world that was worth fighting for”

(p. 104). By 1960, Latin America had become for Mills the object of intense fascination. It was also during this period that his pamphleteering and evangelical fervor reached a fevered pitch. With this in mind, we now turn to a discussion of Mills's book about the revolution in Cuba, the highly controversial and much maligned *Listen, Yankee* (1960d).

Largely as a result of his meetings and discussions with Fuentes and other Latin American intellectuals during the early part of 1960, Mills became captivated by the recent triumph of the revolution in Cuba. Mills (1960d) frankly admits that,

[u]ntil the summer of 1960, I had never been to Cuba, nor even thought about it much. In fact, the previous fall, when I was in Brazil, and in the spring of 1960, when I was in Mexico for several months, I was embarrassed not to have any firm attitudes towards the Cuban revolution. (p. 9)

While in Mexico, Mills decided "to look into Cuba," and upon completing his lecturing tour, returned to the States with tentative plans to write about Cuba's 3-month-old indigenous insurrection, which had been created and successfully completed by intellectuals and pragmatists: Fidel Castro, Ernesto "Che" Guevara, Camilo Cienfuegos, and the *Fidelistas*. Castro and his rebel army had supposedly studied *The Power Elite* during their guerrilla campaign in the mountains of the Sierra Maestra, from 1957–1958 (K. Mills & Mills, 2000). Readily accepting Castro's personal invitation to visit a Cuba in revolutionary transition, Mills traveled to that country in August of 1960. On his trek through the island, he observed the common people building new schools, poultry houses, and fisheries. He saw the *campesino* rebel soldiers planting thousands of eucalyptus trees, and raising peanuts, cotton, and tomatoes. In short, Mills witnessed the innovative ways in which Cubans were beginning to build, at breakneck speed, an entirely new society. He regarded the Cuban Revolution as a humanist revolution because it did not deprive people of their essence, but found its justification in caring for their needs (Mills, 1960d).

Armed with a tape recorder, Mills spent three 18-hour days and an additional half-day with Castro. Having been given complete access to information, Mills interviewed many of the principal government officials, including Oswaldo Dorticós Torrado, the Cuban president, and Che Guevara, president of the National Bank of Cuba and Castro's right-hand man. Evidently, Mills held Guevara in high regard, as 2 years later he included an excerpt from Guevara's "Notes for the Study of the Ideology of the Cuban Revolution" in *The Marxists* (1962).

Mills also greatly admired the pragmatism of the young intellectuals and students from the University of Havana who, seemingly devoid of political

dogmatism, were leading the revolution. He refers to the young intellectuals as the “new men” and sees them as being original, spontaneous, and unafraid of what had to be done in Cuba. He describes their pragmatic organization as a “do-it-yourself outfit,” not oriented to any particular ideological blueprint. The plan for the new Cuba, Mills tells his readers, is not informed by capitalism or Stalinism, but by “socialism of a sort.” He fully expected other Latin American countries to follow the spontaneity and pragmatism of the Cuban model in overcoming their own abject poverty and miserable conditions.

Mills also spoke to hundreds of Cubans while traveling the length of the island; in particular, he interviewed those close to events of the revolution and who, once trust was established, Mills maintains, were eager to express everything they felt. Mills (1960c) contends that trust was given to him, not because of any particular viewpoint he held toward the Cubans or their revolution, but simply because of their acquaintance with his books. Mills’s interviewing strategy was straightforward (and presumably in accordance with his rules for interviewers listed in chapter 2): He asked a few fruitful questions and then sought out and listened closely to as wide a variety of answers as he could find. The object was to apprehend the Cubans’ revolutionary mood, to understand their agonies, hopes, and aspirations. No doubt Mills was deeply moved by what he heard, for by the time he completed his intensive study of the small Caribbean nation, he had already personalized—and internalized—its revolution as a symbol of the properly developing society.

After a few weeks in Cuba, Mills returned to the United States and immediately began work on *Listen, Yankee*, which he completed in just 6 weeks’ time. The book was published within a few months, as a paperback, and sold nearly half a million copies. “My major aim in this book,” comments Mills (1960d), “is to present the voice of the Cuban revolutionary, as clearly and as emphatically as I can, and I have taken up this aim because of its absurd absence from the news of Cuba available in the United States” (p. 8).

Cuba Speaks

Listen, Yankee consists of a brief introduction followed by eight “letters” in which Mills uses direct speech to convey a composite viewpoint of how the Cuban revolutionaries see their revolution as well as how they define their aspirations and their relationship with the United States. As a point of startling fact, it is instructive to note Mills’s social psychological use of three literary devices in *Listen, Yankee*. First, there is the ostensibly depersonalized “we,” which he employs as part of his ongoing effort to reach the masses, and which is really a generalized “I” (Horowitz, 1983). Mills’s (1960d)

disclaimer notwithstanding—“insofar as I have been able, I have refrained from expressing a personal opinion” (p. 12)—he is clearly speaking for his partisan self; that is to say, he is writing as a propagandist who has internalized and converted to the idea of Cuba’s revolution. According to Gerth and Mills (1953), “[a]bsolute belief justifies and motivates the actions of the propagandist who would convert others and thus spread his faith” (p. 292).

Second, speaking specifically to North Americans, Mills throughout the book doggedly, almost mercilessly, addresses them by the moniker used by Latin Americans in referring to citizens of the United States: “Yankee.” This appellation presents Americans with the idea that *others* hold views of *them*. Thus, in employing this politically charged epithet, Mills intends to dislodge Americans from their provincialism and political indifference and make them conscious and self-aware of the fact that a hatred had been building up of what the U.S. government and American corporations were doing in the third world:

What is done and what is not done In Your Name about Cuba, is being watched by people all over the world. In it, these peoples see “the Yankee” revealing himself; when they read about Cuba and about the United States, they are reading about what “Yankee” means today. . . . Nobody ever sees himself as others see him, and we’ve tried to explain in our very first letter why you and we have not really known each other. (Mills, 1960d, pp. 151–152)

In letter eight, Mills tells Americans that “Yankee” has principally meant one thing to Cubans: insane hurtfulness. The appellation, being synonymous with arrogant imperialism, is not a favorable one, and Mills presses its dubious significance to great advantage by peppering the book with the revolutionary cry of defiance, *Cuba sí, Yanqui no!* Furthermore, the designation “Yankee”—as a symbol—confronts North Americans with an image of their national character, an image dramatically different from that which they hold of Latin Americans. Accordingly, Mills not only makes it clear that Yankees are not Cubans and Cubans are not Yankees, but that there are “two Americas,” a rich northern half and an impoverished southern half. Speaking in the voice of the Cuban revolutionary, Mills exhorts that “perhaps we Latin Americans had better realize that the people of whom we are a part is not part of whatever civilization you North Americans belong to. Once and for all, let us get it straight: we belong to the peoples of the hungry nations” (p. 30).

The third, and perhaps most effective, rhetorical technique that Mills adroitly employs is that of speaking in the voice of the Cuban revolutionary. This “voice” is presumably a synthesis of the various sentiments Mills heard

articulated while in Cuba. However, in order to give legitimacy to this collective voice, in the book Mills appears not as an observer, but as an actor in the revolutionary process. In effect, he takes on, that is, internalizes, the role of the Cuban revolutionary. The end result is that Mills introduces North Americans to the voice—the vocabulary of motive—of the generalized other that was emerging in revolutionary Cuba. There is, however, a great irony in the fact that Mills, being severely monolingual, presents the Cuban voice to the American public in English, the language of imperialism. “Of all our social acquisitions, perhaps our vocabulary is most directly geared to our perceptions. Our perception is organized in terms of symbols, and our vocabularies influence the perceptions to which we are sensitive” (Gerth & Mills, 1953, p. 71).

To be sure, Mills considers Cuba’s voice as the voice of the hungry-nation bloc (that is, Asia, Africa, and Latin America), and the Cuban revolutionary, he believes, was speaking (mainly through Mills’s book) in the name of many people in that bloc. For Mills, it was imperative that Cuba’s voice be heard in the United States because this country was too powerful, its responsibilities to the world and to itself too great, for North Americans not to listen to every voice in the hungry world. Up to that point, the American public had virtually ignored Cuba, and Mills pleads with them to hear well the message of the Cuban Revolution. For only by dealing with the perils of ignorance could the perils of disastrous mistakes be avoided.

Indeed, Mills maintains that mistakes with calamitous global consequences had already been made by the U.S. government through its clandestine plan to train an exiled paramilitary Cuban force for the purpose of overthrowing Castro. Ironically, at the time that Mills was interviewing Cubans in order to present the truth about the revolution to the American public, President Dwight D. Eisenhower was approving a budget of \$13 million for the covert operation, which had by that time become somewhat of an open secret.

Aftermath

After the publication of *Listen, Yankee*, Mills came under scrutiny by the investigative agencies of the U.S. government. He also received threatening phone calls from the “Tigres” and other counterrevolutionary organizations of Cuban exiles in the United States. In one such anonymous call, Mills was told that if he continued to defend Cuba, he had better take care to prevent his little daughter from having an accident (Fuentes, 1970). What is more, a Cuban exile, who claimed he had been libeled in the book, filed a lawsuit against Mills. About these Cuban exiles—“The Batistas” and “The Defectors”—Mills

(1960d), in the voice of the Cuban revolutionary speaking to North Americans, writes,

The Batistas who got away and The Defectors who ran off—they will, of course, try to make the counterrevolution. Most of them certainly don't have the courage to become military men themselves. But they are conspiring against us and we believe that Yankee interests and your Yankee Government is helping them do this. . . . Your Government is protecting in the U.S.A. war criminals from the old Batista regime. Probably your CIA is recruiting some of them while they plot to harass our work and quite possibly to invade us. (p. 64)

Mills wrote these lines just one year prior to the abortive Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba planned by the CIA in conjunction with the Cuban exiles in the United States. In *CSS*, Gerth and Mills (1953) outline the steps leading to counterrevolutionary formation:

New leaders of a counterrevolution are appraised as past experience is rationalized. New theories are developed which dispute the legitimacy of the revolutionary regime and debunk, psychologically, theoretically, and politically, its new measures and styles of life. So after the first revolutionary shocks have been overcome, fatalism and defeatism tend to wane and give way to political plotting, inspired by the observation of incipient cracks and points of strain in the new structure. Out of informal gatherings grow nuclei of political and perhaps eventually military organizations. Their leaders play on the sentiments of the disappointed, woo the good will of foreign governments who may hesitate to grant recognition to the revolutionary regime. (pp. 444–445)

Despite his internalization of the Cuban Revolution, Mills cautions its supporters against being caught up in a state of ecstasy, being beyond themselves, against being taken by the revolutionary euphoria of the moment. Careful not to become infected by the revolution's ebullient spirit, Mills (1960d) worries that the charismatic figure of Fidel Castro could potentially subvert freedom and democracy in Cuba. "I do not like such dependence upon one man as exists in Cuba today, nor the virtually absolute power that this one man possesses" (p. 182). In *CSS*, Gerth and Mills identify three psychological aspects experienced by the charismatic leader and his or her followers immediately following a revolution: (1) Charismatic leaders experience time as a crisis, a turning point. They see their time as the beginning of all time. (2) Charismatics and their followers experience social life as a new reality, one that is optimistic and seemingly infinite. "With eyes fixed on the distant yet foreshortened goal, they move ahead with the certainty of the sleepwalker, often immunized against the costs of blood, self-sacrifice

and terror which the deliberate destruction of the old entails” (p. 447). (3) The charismatic leader and followers feel that freedom has increased for all. This newfound liberation produces an expanded generalized other, which inspires the charismatic group’s sense of mission. These three aspects of revolutionary mentality are seldom experienced self-consciously; if left unbridled, they could potentially subvert the revolution.

Castro had personally promised Mills that he would never embrace communism. By 1961, Mills’s faith in Castro had peaked. But it was not long before Castro, with his identification with the Soviet Union, had seemingly broken his promise, and Mills could not help but feel betrayed. “In his last months Mills was torn between defending *Listen, Yankee*, as a good and honest book, and acknowledging publicly for the first time in his life that he had been terribly wrong” (Swados, 1963, p. 42). In a larger context, however, for Mills, Latin America seemed to represent the ideal typical oppressed region, whether in Spanish Harlem or Playa Girón, Cuba (Horowitz, 1983). His intention, at the time of his death in 1962, was to write a book on Latin America (Landau, 1965).

Whereas the North American public either dismissed or condemned Mills’s message in *Listen, Yankee*, Latin American intellectuals praised him. Indeed, the affection seemed to be mutual as Mills increasingly turned his attention away from the English-speaking first world and toward the Spanish-speaking third world. As Horowitz (1983) explains, Mills “became lionized by everyone from Fidel Castro to Carlos Fuentes, receiving the sort of flattery his colleagues in American sociology, especially at Columbia, had entirely denied him” (p. 296).

Latin American Intellectuals

In March of 1960 and just prior to his Cuban sojourn, Mills was interviewed in Mexico City by four writers and intellectuals—V́ctor Flores Olea, Enrique Gonzáles Pedrero, Carlos Fuentes, and Jaime Garća Torres—about his thoughts on Latin America, the Left, and the United States. Judging from the tang and feel of the interview questions, these cultural figures of the noncommunist or independent Left were apparently expecting Mills not only to condemn U.S. imperialism in Latin America, but also to identify that imperialism as the main factor contributing to the region’s underdevelopment. If this was indeed their expectation, Mills disappointed them, for he exhorted Latin American intellectuals not to consider the major source of Latin America’s abject poverty to be the imperialist power of the United States (although Mills makes it clear that he is not an apologist for U.S.

policies), but rather the power elite in their own countries. Mills (1961) goads the intellectuals to take a pragmatic approach in understanding and rectifying the Latin American countries' political and economic plight:

Another point I want to make, you probably won't like. It is this: one of the chief obstacles to the development—the modernization and the industrialization—of many Latin American countries does not lie *outside* those countries at all. Nor does it lie in the “ignorance,” “laziness,” “apathy,” and so on of the populations of these countries. It lies with the ruling groups of those countries. . . .

What I am trying to say is this: were I a Latin American in any given country I would first of all try to explain why my country was not further developed, or not developing faster, by exhausting all the internal factors that I possibly could. Only then would I search for the external mechanics. I think that this is not only good methodology, but it is also, if I may say so, politically more effective, for the simple reason that the Chilean intellectual, for example, can do very little *directly* about United States policies. But he can declare political and economic war on his own ruling groups in so far as they are deterring real development. (pp. 117–118, emphasis original)

Mills proceeds to admonish the Latin American intellectuals for their tendency to excuse their own political inactivity by reference to what the United States will or will not do. He chides them to get on with the business of conducting a serious sociological study of every Latin American country that would (1) render a penetrating account of the ruling structures in each country and (2) give a measurement of the extent to which these ruling structures, and the entire lack of development of these countries, could be conscientiously imputed to the economic, political, and military policies of the United States. When the answers to these two questions are obtained, Mills informs his interviewers, they will have no more excuses for their political inactivity and will stop imputing Latin America's misfortune to relations with the United States.

One main inference can be made from Mills's comments: that the national character of Latin Americans in general, and Latin American intellectuals in particular, is centered around blaming the United States for their countries' economic misery, abysmal backwardness, and various social injustices. By the early 1960s, Mills quite consciously rejects the negative stereotypical traits typically attributed to the Latin American personality—ignorance, laziness, apathy—and holds Latin Americans responsible for their own fate. Mills is well aware of the fact that true freedom of action, that is to say, engaging in free initiative for self-determination and accepting responsibility for choices made, can occur only after negative stereotypes—selected images of the symbol sphere that highlight a group's liabilities of conduct—are dispelled.

Individuation of the self results from the variety and scope of voluntary actions which we undertake. It involves the reality of individual decision and being held responsible for personal choices.

Personal or joint “responsibility” exists socially when the individual, as an individual or as a member of a group, is held accountable for his activities, in short, when his acts are ascribed to his self or his group. In a society where roles are quite stereotyped, this reality of alternatives, and such conceptions as personal responsibility, may not exist. (Gerth & Mills, 1953, p. 100)

Latin American Identity and Latino Personality

In sum, it may be said that Mills’s 20-year fascination with, first, Latinos, and later, Latin American affairs was significantly informed by the social psychological theoretical framework proffered in *CSS*. Mills’s view of Latinos, their traits and motives, yielded a character structure that was initially (and during a time when he had little knowledge of these populations and was in the process of formulating the social psychological paradigm) based on gross stereotypes of them as minority members within the context of United States culture. Thus, in 1943, Mexican American zoot suiters were seen by Mills as frustrated young men who were afflicted with low self-esteem and continuously seeking the attention and respect of the Anglo majority. In 1950, he considered Puerto Rican islanders to be “culture-less,” hollow, and hysterical. In New York City, Puerto Rican migrants were, according to Mills, motivated by economic forces, but had low economic and educational aspirations, and suffered from a considerable amount of psychic discontent. As a provincial Texan, he found the behavior of Puerto Ricans living in the Lower East Side of New York and in Spanish Harlem to be “strange.”

However, by 1960, after he had traveled through Latin America and years after completing his social psychological conceptualization, Mills came to understand the Latin American personality within the context of United States imperialism. Cuban revolutionaries were viewed favorably as innovative, original, and pragmatic, and Latin American intellectuals as capable of helping their countries achieve self-determination.

Biographical Experiences

An examination of Mills’s biography, including his view of individuals and society, helps to assess the personal experiences and convictions, the associations and views, that he had regarding Latinos during the most active and productive period of his career, 1943 to 1960. Mills, who had moved from the relative calm of the Maryland suburb of Greenbelt directly to the frantic

environment of the metropolis in order to become a “New York intellectual,” hopelessly remained a product of his parochial Texas heritage. To be sure, Mills throughout his life was culturally and psychologically an “outlander,” caught between two worlds, isolated and never quite belonging anywhere. He did not feel accepted by, nor was he accepting of, academic sociology, his colleagues at Columbia University, or the New York Jewish intellectuals. Mills’s marginal status and identity doubtless instilled in him a dialectical disposition toward other marginal peoples. For example, while on the one hand, he maintained his distance from the Puerto Rican migrants (whom he obviously did not wish to interview since he interviewed only English-speaking officials and intellectuals), he on the other hand was deeply curious about “the full human meaning of the journey from Puerto Rico to New York City and of the splendors and miseries of the people who make it” (Mills et al., 1950, p. lvi). His compelling interest in statuses and identities and which of the two, *Puertorriqueño* or Latino, was most advantageous for the Puerto Rican migrant to adopt, seems to express his own unresolved dilemma of self-image in New York City: whether to, psychologically and culturally, identify and conduct himself as a southwestern cowboy or as an East Coast intellectual.

Mills’s romanticized recollections of his maternal grandfather, Braxton Bragg Wright, also involved an odd admixture of views about Mexicans. In Mills’s mind at least, his grandfather had had amorous affairs with (or at least was attracted to) Mexican women and had a deadly encounter with a Mexican man. According to Mills, Bragg Wright was shot in the back with a 30-30 rifle for one of two reasons: It may have been because he “liked the girls—married and unmarried, Mexican and white. This one was Mexican and married, a bad combination for him” (as quoted in K. Mills & Mills, 2000, p. 25). Or else Bragg Wright was killed “over somebody’s water-hole,” from a bullet fired by a Mexican as an act of vengeance. Regardless of which colorful version of the story he did or did not believe, Mills’s image of his rugged ancestor prominently involved Mexicans, rifles, and death (see Gillam, 1966, p. 9 ff.). Indeed, in Freudian fashion, sex and violence are the two lenses through which Mills viewed the Mexican American zoot suiters and their *pachuquitas* in understanding their sentiments and motives.

While his mother’s Roman Catholicism made no particularly strong impression on Mills, his Protestant father’s emphasis on “the gospel of work” remained for him a significant influence throughout his life. This may explain Mills’s contempt for the Catholic Puerto Rican migrants’ low aspirations toward work and getting ahead.

Pragmatism, as an early intellectual influence upon Mills, taught him to forge a fusion between theory and practice. In this regard, he admired the Cuban intellectuals for their attempts to make a “do-it-yourself” revolution.

Further, borrowing from Mannheim's notion concerning the social influence of free intellectuals, Mills saw them as capable of constructing reality for others. This idea of the union of power and intellect, which he first articulated in *The New Men of Power*, may shed some light on Mills's peculiar combination of admiration and fear, respect and suspicion that he had for the charismatic authority of Fidel Castro.

As we saw in Chapter 2, Mills viewed individuals as possessing a nature that is volitional and active and that endows them with the potential to be free. In his view, the good society—the properly developing society—was a democracy in which social issues were debated openly before a community of free and knowledgeable publics. Thus, while Mills was much inspired by the ability of the Cuban intellectuals to make history, he was also concerned about the revolution imposing limits on their political freedom. In addition, he appears to have had great faith in the ability of Latin American intellectuals to make their own history, to be responsible for their own fate, despite U.S. interference in their countries' political and economic affairs.

Historically Located Social Structures

Mills's analytical approach, which maintains that in order to understand the inner lives of individuals, they must be placed within the context of historically located social structures, provides several insights into the epochal events and institutional setup that the four Latino groups experienced as part of their private troubles in their daily lives.

Mills intimates that during World War II, Mexican Americans in general, and zoot suiters in particular, were subjected to several onerous influences of a racist society: crowded slum conditions; the segregated military; and various forms of ethnic oppression including racial segregation, job discrimination, and class antagonisms. However, he specifically attributed the 1943 Zoot Suit Riots to one major structural factor: the war condition of the sex market. In this case, the sex market involved a place (Los Angeles) where there were large numbers of single men (young sailors on leave) versus a much smaller number of sex-able women (the *pachuquitas*). This sex ratio created tension-centers throughout the city which turned riotous when the sailors and zoot suiters competed for the Mexican girls.

Mills also explained the personality types of people in Puerto Rico and Cuba with reference to social structural and cultural factors—in particular, the political, economic, and cultural dominance that the United States exerted over these tiny Caribbean islands. As concerns Puerto Rican islanders, Mills suggested that mainland culture—through advertising, language, patterns of race consciousness, and the like—had distorted their Spanish

lifestyle, mannerisms, and values, and thus transformed the islanders from “Latin Americans” to “Puerto Rican Americans.” Mills also recognized that a series of economic, familial, and other structural forces operated as push-pull mechanisms impelling some Puerto Ricans to migrate to New York City.

In Cuba, the social structural—that is, imperialist—forces of the United States affecting the island in the early 1960s were politically and economically coercive. Owing to the rabid anticommunism of the Cold War era, the U.S. government was overtly and covertly, politically and economically preparing Cubans, both islanders and exiles, to overthrow Fidel Castro and counter the revolution that he had started. By contrast, Mills saw the economic and political orders as well as the symbols, status, technology, and education spheres that the rebel soldiers and intellectuals were constructing in Cuba in largely positive terms: as pragmatic and humanistic.

Again, as concerns his analysis of social structural factors, Mills found that the Puerto Rican migrants, as members of an ethnic and racial minority group, were generally uninvolved with social agencies and organizations in New York. Instead, the migrants’ household became almost their entire social world, as they found the metropolis to be an environment inhospitable to making friends and rearing children.

Character Structures

Perhaps most significant to the four writings considered here are Mills’s observations regarding the character structures of Mexican American zoot suiters, Puerto Rican islanders and migrants, Cubans in revolutionary transition, and Latin American writers and social scientists. These observations are highly informative as he renders a poignant psychological inquiry into the Latino experience in various social milieus. Mills’s early stereotypical commentary notwithstanding, he accurately describes the Mexican American zoot suiters in Los Angeles as requiring a unique image of themselves that called others’ attention, but in particular the majority group’s, attention to them and, through the status sphere, provided the zoot suiters with a degree of self-esteem. Thus, Mills undoubtedly understood why, in this particular social context, the zoot suiters needed to adopt a certain personality type: the personality type formed by identification with the symbol sphere of the minority group (i.e., the *pachuco* lifestyle and its emblematic zoot suit), and that seeks status from this identification. When his main status symbol, the zoot suit, was literally torn off his “person,” and he was subsequently degraded further in front of his girlfriend, by the very people from whom he craved deference, the Mexican American youth, Mills predicted, will vent his rage through lethal violence.

As noted above, Mills saw the Puerto Rican islander's identity as being driven by an ambivalence that stemmed from the competing Latin and continental United States cultural influences and ways of thinking that barged the island population. The predicament for the islanders was whether to identify with the Latin culture, the American, neither, or both. Elements of the two cultures invariably prevailed (the mainland culture infiltrating the island primarily through commercial advertisements), and the islanders adopted an ambiguous identity: that of Puerto Rican Americans. Thus, politically, economically, and culturally the islanders occupied an indeterminate position, being neither Latin American nor full cultural participants in the dominant U.S. culture.

The migrants in New York, as minority group members, were doubly and even trebly endowed with an ambiguous and ambivalent identity. If the New York migrants were White, they had to adjust to the majority culture of White America; if Black, the Puerto Rican migrants had to try to insinuate themselves into the African American community. The intermediate *indios* and *grifos*, however, were often unwilling to identify themselves with the African American community. Thus, the intermediates had the most ambiguous, even confusing, image of themselves. On the island they were, strictly speaking, neither Latin Americans nor North Americans. As "foreigners" in New York City, they were neither purely New Yorkers nor *Puertorriqueños*. As members of an intermediate racial group, they were neither Black nor White. Thus, due largely to their conflicted self-identity, Mills found that the intermediate group's problems of adjustment were especially acute. As concerns their psychic life, Mills found the Puerto Rican migrants to have a high degree of discontent because of their lack of fluency in English and their conspicuous contact with official authorities.

Mills states that his purpose in tape-interviewing the Cuban people was to understand their revolutionary mood, their agonies, hopes, and aspirations. It is difficult to assess to what extent he was able to truly capture the Cubans' sentiments. However, judging from the words of praise Mills received in personal letters sent to him by Mexico City publisher Arnaldo Orfila Reynal and a young Cuban scholar, Armando Betancourt, he was at least successful in understanding the revolutionary mood as Latin American leftist intellectuals would have wanted him to. Orfila Reynal wrote,

In reading aloud your *Listen, Yankee!* with my wife, we were deeply touched with the greatness you show in your sheer understanding of the root of the problems of our Continent. It is the exact essence of the Cuban Revolution. I want to express to you the profound satisfaction I feel to be able to diffuse your beautiful message to the Spanish-speaking world. (as quoted in Horowitz, 1983, p. 297)

Betancourt wrote in similar effusive terms:

Your name is already popular in all Cuba, to say Wright Mills sounds to say a friend [sic]. We thank you very deeply from the bottom of our hearts for having done that task, of telling our neighbors to the north the truth about this little island, little in size, but great in hopes, and spirit, and courage. (as quoted in Horowitz, 1983, p. 297)

Finally, the prime example of Mills's pragmatic use of the social psychological approach is found in *Listen, Yankee* where he tries to proselytize to his readers and open their eyes to the "message" of the Cuban Revolution. Mills concretely utilizes his social psychology—and more specifically his sociolinguistic theory of mind (Mills, 1939) first formulated by G. H. Mead—by organizing his tract into eight letters, "epistles" of a sort, in which he sermonizes to North Americans by employing the collective "we," the appellation "Yankee," and the Cuban revolutionary's "voice." Indeed, Press (1978) attests that "Mills, the Preacher" endeavors "through language to change peoples' minds" (pp. 20–21). In so doing, Mills, speaking in the voice of the Cuban revolutionary applied Weber's concept of *Verstehen* (interpretive understanding) and, at the end of his life, came to interpretively understand, not only the Cuban revolutionary mood, but also the Latin American identity and the Latino personality.

Conclusion

The foregoing discussion of Mills's writings on Latinos and Latin Americans reveals that the more involved he became in their lives, Mills, in both his personal sentiments as well as in his social psychological theorizing about these populations, seemed to shift his perceptions about them. In the earlier writings, where he considers gang members and immigrants, Mills explains their motives, moods, and self-images in reference to the dominant society exemplified either by the "Anglo" world or by "mainland culture." Thus, in the context of the internal United States—where we can more clearly discern an in-group and an out-group in reference to ethnicity—he characterizes these two minority populations largely in negative terms: as frustrated, discontent, disrespected, hollow, ambiguous, and ambivalent.

It has been suggested that the sociologist Erving Goffman first made use of the term "identity politics" in his classic book, *Stigma*. Here, Goffman (1963) talks about the politics of identity in terms that appear eerily similar to Mills's social psychological apperception of Hispanics as members of a minority group:

The in-group and the out-group, then, both present an ego identity for the stigmatized individual, the first largely in political phrasings, the second in psychiatric ones. The individual is told that if he adopts the right line (which line depending on who is talking), he will have come to terms with himself and be a whole man; he will be an adult with dignity and self-respect.

And in truth he will have accepted a self for himself; but this self is, as it necessarily must be, a resident alien, a voice of the group that speaks for and through him.

But all of us, sociology sometimes claims, speak from the point of view of a group. The special situation of the stigmatized is that society tells him he is a member of the wider group, which means he is a normal human being, but that he is also “different” in some degree, and that it would be foolish to deny this difference. . . .

In brief, he is told that he is like anyone else and that he isn’t. . . . This contradiction and joke is his fate and his destiny. (pp. 123–124)

We can only wonder about what Mills’s social psychology would have made of a politics of identity had he possessed the conviction to carry it out in this direction.

In contrast to Latino minority populations in the United States, after having traveled and lectured throughout Latin America and having considered those countries’ geopolitical situation relative to “the colossus of the north,” Mills depicted Latin Americans, but particularly intellectuals and revolutionaries, in more hopeful terms: as masters of their destiny, responsible for their self-determination. In the end, it may have been mere elitism on Mills’s part that influenced his humanist concern about these populations: Latin American intellectuals and revolutionaries are volitional and active; Latino gang members and immigrants are complacent and inactionary.

One small but interesting comment may help disclose further Mills’s divergent feelings about Latinos, on the one hand, and Latin Americans on the other. In a letter he wrote to his parents 6 days after the Bay of Pigs invasion, Mills contrasted his mother’s experiences of Mexican Americans—by whom she was raised in Texas, for whose culture she had the utmost respect, and who formed for her the ideal images of the human being—with the revolutionary Cubans. “The Cubans,” Mills explains to his mother, “are my Mexicans” (as quoted in K. Mills & Mills, 2000, p. 331).

Several questions for thought suggest themselves:

- Despite his four writings on Latinos, why is it that Mills never earnestly took up the subject of ethnic discrimination in his more general sociology?
- How accurate are Mills’s mid-20th-century perceptions of Latinos in regard to those same populations today?
- How have U.S.–Latin America relations changed, or not changed, since Mills’s time?
- Is there a Latino/a sociology that can be derived from Mills’s four writings?