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In retrospect. The "we feeling" among Puerto Ricans
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In the winter of 1955, August Robles, a noted hoodlum of the Eastern seaboard, was in serious trouble with the law. An ex-convict and much sought-after criminal in Maryland and New York, he was suspected of being the hired killer of a state witness against a former police magistrate accused of conspiracy for armed robbery. Robles was reported as hiding out in New York City. For three days hundreds of policemen searched the city for him in what the New York Times described as “one of the most dramatic manhunts in the city's history.” Then he was discovered in an apartment in El Barrio within walking distance of Eastville. Tipped off by a frightened woman, the police surrounded the building one Sunday afternoon, and for several hours there was a gun battle between the bandit and the police. It ended with Robles's death.

Hundreds of people had congregated to watch the battle from the streets, the rooftops, fire escapes, and windows near by. The battle, covered by local television stations, also made headlines in the New York press. Among the many people who went to watch the manhunt were Eastvillers, Puerto Ricans and non-Puerto Ricans alike. The well-publicized Robles incident caught the imagination of many New Yorkers. Among Puerto Ricans it posed many questions and mobilized social behavior that revealed in dramatic form some of their basic attitudes toward themselves, as well as their reactions to the larger American society.

For days afterward the Robles case was a frequent subject of conversation and comment in the homes of many Eastville Puerto Ricans. It was also discussed by shoppers in the stores, by friends and passers-by in the streets and on building stoops. Robles was not from Eastville, and had been a total stranger to Eastville Hispanics until the press made him a public figure. The press did not identify Robles as Puerto Rican, yet Eastville Hispanics identified him as such. His career of crime and its end were described not as experiences of a particular individual, but as having overtones and consequences for the Hispanics in New York. Robles's actions were talked about as if they reflected upon Hispanics. Similar effects had already been evoked by other cases of antisocial behavior involving Hispanics or individuals; assumed to be so, even if the culprits had never been known about before they achieved public notoriety.

After the Robles incident Hispano public opinion was mobilized. Among the reactions noted were those expressed by recent migrant mothers who talked about the importance of teaching children to respect, of how punishment—scoldings and beatings—were necessary in order to prevent children from growing up into Robleses. His life conduct was regarded as something calling for moral indignation and as an example of the result of improper ways of bringing up children in this country. Other comments centered upon the broader implications of the Robles case for Hispanics in the city. It was said that the police had been embarrassed at having had to call upon three hundred men just to capture one. And now the police could be expected to avenge this
affront by being tougher toward Puerto Ricans. But within this same framework, Robles was also regarded as a hero, whose conduct with the police attested to manliness and courage.

The corpse rested in a funeral chapel near Eastville. Hundreds of curious people—large numbers of Hispanics, among others—massed in queues, in between police horses and lines, for a chance to look at the bier. Among these were Gloria, a Hispano teen-ager born and brought up in New York, some of her friends, and a member of the field team. On seeing a cruising police car, Gloria commented wryly, “We had better be careful because now they’ll [the police] do anything to the Puerto Ricans.” Laughter from the other youngsters echoed her words while she continued in the same vein, “Puerto Ricans do everything wrong anyway—now they’re [the police] going to be on the lookout.”

After having had a look at the corpse, the youngsters continued their discussion of Robles. Mary said that now that Robles was dead and had made such a fool of the detectives it would go hard on Puerto Ricans, to which Jay replied, “Yes, I was surprised that they didn’t have it all over the headlines that he was Puerto Rican. Yes, now they [the Puerto Ricans] better be careful because anything they do will be twice as bad.”

The particular ways in which the Robles incident was talked about reflected many aspects of feelings of identification and solidarity, as well as conflicts about being a Puerto Rican in New York. On one level, the Robles issue was one of special concern for all Hispanics, regardless of how long they had been in New York. It had been seen as a “proof” of why Puerto Ricans are not considered acceptable in New York City, and it had also been seen as the way the unacceptable actions of a particular individual can be utilized by the larger society to justify and intensify prejudice against Hispanics. On another level, statements, like those quoted above, from young people born and/or reared in New York concerning Robles illustrate a set of attitudes that is widespread among youth and adults who have grown up in New York. That is, they consider themselves Hispanics or Puerto Ricans as they are so defined from the point of view of the larger society, but as outside the Hispano group when seen from the standpoint of the Hispano social group itself. These attitudes are simply manifestations of the social and cultural schisms running through the matrices of the Hispano group in Eastville, which, in turn, are aspects of the social and cultural divisions among Puerto Ricans in New York.

From the standpoint of American society, Puerto Ricans form a group. This is defined either as a racial group, an ethnic group, or a cultural group. From the point of view of official statistical sources, Puerto Ricans are individuals born in Puerto Rico and children of Puerto Rican-born women. But this criterion for identifying Puerto Ricans is not consistent: miscellaneous Spanish-speaking individuals, and odd assortments of dark-skinned individuals are frequently assumed to be Puerto Ricans. In general, Puerto Ricans are assumed to have a common and uniform culture and to share in individual and social behavior. There is a tendency to ignore individuality and to obliterate social and cultural differences among Puerto Ricans. From the standpoint of Puerto Ricans, there is a Hispano group in New York, but this is defined differently from the usually prevailing definitions of Puerto Ricans expressed by non-Puerto Ricans. The Hispano group includes Puerto Ricans, their descendants who may or may not be Spanish-speaking individuals, and also Spanish-speaking persons from Latin America and Spain. In this sense the Hispano group includes peoples who share elements of a common Hispanic historical heritage. The Hispano group is a communal form of adaptation of peoples of such heritage in the context of American life. Basically, the Hispano group, nonetheless, is formed by the Puerto Rican migrants and
their descendants, and in some contexts “Puerto Rican” and “Hispano” are equivalent terms, to the point that “Hispano” is a preferred term to “Puerto Rican” when referring to Puerto Ricans.

The group owes its existence both to its own internal structure and esprit de corps and to the external social and cultural pressures of the larger society upon Hispanics. Sources of solidarity and bonds of understandings among Hispanics are partly derived from the historical common general cultural traditions of the peoples who are considered Hispanics. But partly, too, they are a reaction against the position of the group as an ethnic minority in New York. In this sense the group exists as a social body that protects its members from the hazards, strains, and psychological dislocations that can be effected by lack of social acceptance and by the handicaps to life fulfillments that act upon members of minority groups, who are targets for prejudice and bigotry. The bonds of solidarity among Hispanics, nonetheless, are not so effective as to offer foolproof protection to the members of the group, for being incorporated within the larger society, the Hispanic group also shares and incorporates within itself values, standards, and orientations of the larger society. The culture of Puerto Ricans in Eastville is a slum adaptation of the Hispano subculture of New York.

In a cultural sense, cleavages within the Hispanic group of New York mark sharp differences in ways of life, values, and cultural orientations among the group members. In a social sense, however, members of the Hispanic group can be spoken of as sharing many common sentiments of solidarity, as well as feelings of belonging and being part of a social group. There are ideals of behavior, standards of values, and rules for living that are considered appropriate to Hispanics, rather than to others, and there are forms of social control—sanctions and standards of approval and disapproval—that emerge from the body of ideals of behavior expected from Hispanics. In fact, many cultural diversities and behavioral expectations cluster within subgroups of the larger Hispanic group, and each subgroup is geared to the others as if they were all parts of a system, a system we can call the Hispano social group. This, in turn, is part of the larger system and the sets of subsystems that make up American society.

The Hispanic society in New York is class structured. Its class system and the culture of its classes are not, however, wholly identical with those of the larger society. There is a tendency for individuals born and brought up in New York and for those who migrated in early childhood to conform to the class culture expectations of the larger society. Individuals who migrated in their adult years, on the other hand, tend to conform more to Hispanic values and standards of behavior that are oriented toward bringing recognition and enhancement of self, not only in New York, but also in the island. The latter feature is a consequence of the continuity of migration, the back and forth movements between the island and New York, and the degree of communication between the two places.

It is possible to speak of the Hispanic group as an ingroup when viewed from the standpoint of the larger society and its influences on Hispanic social life and, in the same sense, of the larger society as an outgroup. The two groups, nevertheless, must be seen as interrelated with each other, neither existing in isolation from the other. This book, however, is concerned only with one of the subcultures of Hispanics in New York, namely, slum dwellers and underemployed or unemployed Puerto Ricans who live at the bottom of the ladder. In Eastville there are no well-to-do or professionals among the Puerto Ricans. A few have become skilled or white-collar workers. Their backgrounds in Puerto Rico were also characterized by poverty and deprivation. Individuals who at one time or another have achieved higher income and economic wel-
fare have generally been moving out of the neighborhood. Old-timers in Eastville speak about former neighbors who improved their economic position and left. Moving out of Eastville is regarded as a step ahead, even if this does not actually accompany any material improvement. Only individuals with real or imagined social disabilities have stayed in Eastville after having improved their economic position substantially. Fear of encountering intolerable prejudice and rejection are given as explanations for not leaving the neighborhood. Yet one of the areas in which Hispanics, as well as other Eastvillers, seemed to show agreement was in judging the neighborhood a bad place in which to live. There was a stated preference to live elsewhere in the city rather than there.

Even within Eastville where all Puerto Ricans share being members of a lower-class slum subculture, significant differences are found among them with reference to the length of time they have resided in the city and the degree of Americanization achieved. These two factors are of basic importance in shaping the culture of Eastville Puerto Ricans and are essential to the formulation of any generalization concerning their cultural behavior.

From the standpoint of length of residence in the city, Hispanics range from those who have lived here all their lives to those who only yesterday, or perhaps only a few hours before coming to Eastville, were in Puerto Rico. In between are those who come and go to Puerto Rico several times a year, and there are also those like Maria Reto’s father, who only came to paint her apartment in Eastville. From the standpoint of degree of Americanization Hispanics range from those who are thoroughly oriented toward American society and its values and who are native speakers of English to those who are thoroughly oriented toward Puerto Rican society and its values. While these extremes lie within the boundaries of the Hispano group, the central tendencies in the group represent intermediate kinds of cultural adaptations, or accommodations, to New York society. From the standpoint of acculturation, the Hispano group can be described as the main channel through which this process takes place. It provides a framework and model for adaptations: it has norms and provides social techniques through which Hispanics can channel their relationships with the larger society; at the same time it holds norms that emphasize resistance to change in conformity to demands of the larger society. Other norms held are in varying degrees of conflict with each other, bespeaking the consequent conflicts and unsatisfactory rewards they provide the individuals who ascribe to them. In a sense the cultural conservatism represented by emphasizing a preference for Hispanic values conflicting with those of the larger society is an aspect of the changing nature and general instability of the Hispano subculture. The conservative elements are part of the functioning social order which acts to brake overwhelming changes that could lead to strain, disorganization, and chaos.

One of the circumstances in which pan-Hispano solidarity appears most pronounced among those in Eastville is when an individual is considered to have been mistreated or abused by individuals or agencies of the larger society. Such instances are likely to be judged as prejudice against an individual because of his being Hispano. This calls for sympathy toward the victim, expressed verbally to him, or even to strangers. Unflattering press reports on Puerto Ricans also provoke expressions of anger and disgust against “the Americans,” and against persons considered responsible for having written or relayed the information. Prejudice is suspected in relationships with agencies or individuals representing the larger society, and individuals may argue defensively and hostilely with persons who presumably have acted in a prejudiced way.

In part, Hispanics accept indictments of prejudice against their group, as is demon-
strated by their own claims that Hispanics “are all bad,” that “the Americans are right in hating us,” and so on. Yet antiprejudice civic campaigns or political appeals to Hispanics on the basis of civil rights and antidiscrimination legislation do not mobilize Eastville Hispanics to concerted political and social action. Such appeals are interpreted as exposing Hispanics to others, and furthermore, as associating them in the public eye with other minority groups, particularly as placing them in the same position as American Negroes. In this sense attitudes of Hispanics toward American Negroes affect their political behavior.

Another aspect of this behavior is the displacement of actions considered improper, such as criminality or delinquency, on members of other ethnic groups. This is clearly a mechanism of prejudice in itself. For example, when a crime is committed by a person with a Spanish name, it may be said that the accused is not really a Hispano, but someone from Cuba or the Dominican Republic who, purchasing or forging a birth or baptismal certificate, claimed to be from Puerto Rico in order to enter New York without a passport. Occasionally the New York press has carried news about undesirable aliens from those countries who did enter and remain illegally in the United States by claiming birth in Puerto Rico. These accounts have lent validation to the assumption that a criminal act attributed to a Hispano by non-Hispanos has not been committed by a Hispano at all, but by some foreigner who claims to be Puerto Rican. Thus his act is seen as stemming from his national heritage.

Another way of shifting the assumed responsibility of the Hispano group for the actions of a particular individual is by saying or implying that that individual, although Hispano, belongs to a subgroup other than one’s own. For example, antisocial behavior, delinquency, bad manners, illiteracy, acceptance of low wages, poor sanitary conditions, and so on are characteristics that New York-born-and-reared Hispanics claim as those of recent migrants. In turn, recent migrants are likely to say about a delinquent, a “bad girl” or some other deviant that “he is from here,” implying that he is not Puerto Rican. Among the New York-reared Hispanics, this is a matter to be expressed ambivalently. As one of them put it:

They [my parents] don’t like them. . . . They spoiled everything for us. . . . Yes, because they’re Puerto Ricans, and things are . . . . the way people treat Puerto Ricans, the ones that ain’t been here. Well, they thinking that if they’re Puerto Ricans, they ain’t no good. They don’t give a damn if you been here, or if you just came over. They just classifies you like the bad ones. . . . They came over, and the way New York was, it was all right the way it was, until they all start coming over. . . . They give the Puerto Ricans a bad name. . . . Today all you have to do is tell someone you are a Puerto Rican, and they classifies you with what they read, or what they say in the papers, that you must be that way also.

“But it’s not true because Puerto Ricans is just like any other nationality. They’s good and bad. Well, this, what they did when they came here, they making it rough on all of us, people that was born here, that’s sorry that they have to say they’s Puerto Ricans. Well, the majority of crimes and all that today is from Puerto Ricans, they say, and the records . . . the arrests and all that . . . and they print that stuff in the papers, and the people eats it up. . . . They think that all Puerto Ricans are ‘like that.’”

Hispanos, nonetheless, are expected not to harm the reputation of other Hispanics with members of the outgroup. Those who are known to speak in a derogatory way about other Hispanics to non-Hispanos are criticized, and comments such as “What kind of Hispano is he?” are made about him. Criticisms of Hispanics as a group, or of particular Hispano subgroups, are more permissible and in fact these can be quite dep-
recatory, but the criticisms are to remain within the group. Criticisms from outsiders, whether mild or intense, are not acceptable, and can result in “putting on ice” or subjecting the critics to severe criticism in turn.

In seeking and maintaining the cooperation of Hispanics with the research team it was necessary to recognize these characteristics of Hispano social solidarity, self-judgment, distrust of outsiders, and conditioned feelings of discrimination against the group. The intentions of fieldworkers were often questioned. We were asked if the study was interested solely in Hispanics and whether Hispanics were being singled out for research. Comments were made about newspaper articles in “the American paper” said to have insulted and discriminated against Hispanics. The fieldworkers had to be particularly careful not to provoke feelings of resentment, to reserve their personal opinions and judgments to themselves, and to avoid arguments. Time—in days, weeks, and months of visiting informally, of giving and gaining friendship and acceptance—was necessary to obtain reliable data on materials not revealed otherwise. Cooperation with the research workers was assured when informants were convinced that it was the truth about Hispanics the anthropologists were interested in. At first, this truth meant a denial of the undesirable stereotypes and views of Hispanics assumed to prevail in New York. Eastville Hispanics would invite non-Puerto Ricans, and particularly professional people, to their homes to show them “we are not like the papers say.” It was claimed the newspapers told lies about Hispanics when printing stories on crime and delinquency, conveying the idea that Hispanics as a group were criminals and delinquents. Their eagerness for recognition as “decent people” by the outgroup makes for self-appraisals which emphasize and exaggerate qualities of propriety and correctness. This implies acceptance of a basic premise of social discrimination: that the behavior of selected individuals on selected occasions can be used as a basis for generalizing about the behavior of a whole group. In self-defense Hispanics overemphasize those elements and characteristics of behavior they consider essential for bolstering the integrity and self-esteem of members of the ingroup in the eyes of the outgroup, while those who discriminate against them choose the opposite.

Discrimination on the part of the outgroup has been a powerful mechanism in splitting the Hispano group as a positive and creative source of social and emotional strength. It has operated negatively to increase the internal cohesion of the group as a defense against the threat that discrimination represents. It has also contributed to the acceptance by Hispanics of images of disapproval and devaluation of individuals for being members of their group. So for some Hispanics it is openly accepted and unquestionable that Hispanics are undesirable persons. Juan, a thirty-six-year-old migrant who has been employed in a restaurant since he came to New York in 1949, voiced his feeling when he said, “Our race, the Latin race, has spoiled this country by the use of drugs. That is why the Americans hate us.”

There are Puerto Ricans, Hispanics themselves, particularly recent and old migrants, who, having come to this country in adulthood, proclaim the social inferiority of Hispanics. They are also outspokenly disapproving of American Negroes and West Indians on grounds of their imputed behavior or race. At the same time they disclaim being prejudiced. There are others in this same group, however, particularly those who came from families oriented toward the traditional values of respect and dignity as qualities residing in the properly reared individual, who have no problem of ambivalence about being Hispanics. With pride and assertiveness they speak of the values and traditions of their Puerto Rican backgrounds without fear of being disapproved for being what they are. As an important aspect of their children’s growth,
these people try to see that the children learn to identify socially as Hispanics. Being Hispano for them revolves around emphasizing the ideals of the good life for Hispanics in New York and the proper and approved methods of achieving them.

For recent migrants, the most important and most desirable life goals and adaptations in New York are: working hard and being a “good” worker; valuing formal education and schooling; learning English while not forgetting how to speak Spanish; cultivating the desire to “progress” and get ahead, or “to get the feet off the dish,” particularly through the education of one’s children; being brave and assertive; not letting anyone take advantage of oneself, or “take you for a ride” (no dejarse coger de bobo); being quiet; being careful in the selection of friends and trusting only a very few; and preferring the unity and continuity of relationships with one’s own family and cooperating and helping those relatives and close friends who are in need. With the social preference for white persons above colored ones is joined those of coming from a “good family” in Puerto Rico and restricting one’s group of friends to those possessing desirable characteristics.

These social aims are taught to children from an early age. Mike O’Neill, a seven-year-old boy, born in New York of Puerto Rican parents and now attending one of Eastville’s grammar schools, was indicating some of the ideals of recent migrant parents that he had already accepted when he said: “Most of my friends are Spanish, but we mostly talk English. When we talk to Spanish people we talk English to help them to learn to talk English. At home my father and mother mostly talk Spanish, but when the book men [credit collectors] come, they talk English.”

To reach the approved group goals one may seek the help and alliance of God and saints. Prayers and the forecast of the future through dreams or revelations by spirits and ghosts may also assist in bringing desired goals to fruition or in clarifying what is in stock in the struggle that life presents to every man. Among migrants, destiny (the concept of the inevitable) and chance (the concept of luck or adventure) are seen as playing a part in determining the paths of their lives.

For old migrants, recent migrants represent old-fashioned people with antiquated ideas that the old migrants gave up when they became “modern.” These ideas center around methods of rearing children, the definition of a good woman as one who stays home and does all the household work, who is subordinate and obedient to her husband, and the expectation that relatives will feel obligated to take care of them in case of need. For adults who were born or grew up in New York, recent Puerto Rican migrants represent ignorant people who do not know how to live modernly, and who, in their eagerness to be employed, work for low wages in inadequate jobs, get into trouble easily with the law, and contribute in these ways to increasing prejudice and discrimination against all Hispanics.

While actually there are no sharp contrasts in life ideals and social values among old and recent migrants who came to this country as adults, there are sharp differences between persons who migrated as adults and those adults and adolescents who either were born in New York or came to New York in early childhood (de muchacho). This gap is acknowledged by both subgroups.

The New York-born-and-reared Puerto Ricans are oriented toward the United States rather than toward Puerto Rico, and consider themselves New Yorkers and the United States their homeland. They place a high value on speaking in English, at the expense of Spanish; they reject identification with recent migrants and often express dislike and criticism of them. They frequently express ideals of success in life in terms of individual accomplishment and initiative without much reliance on fate. Life in New York is not
conceived of as an adventure, and while progressing and getting ahead are life goals, their point of reference is American society, rather than Puerto Rican society or the society of other Puerto Ricans in New York, as is the case among migrants.

Looking at how recent migrants view their early experience in Eastville, one can gain insight into the whole Hispano group there, for it is those who are facing New York for the first time who are most affected by and aware of the changes that Puerto Ricans undergo in the city after being here a while. The pattern of Hispanics already established in New York becomes a social model of life in the city for recent migrants to follow. Newcomers from Puerto Rico soon realize that New York Puerto Ricans are not like Puerto Ricans in Puerto Rico. Either they revise their expectations of Hispanics, or else they are due for disappointments. This is one of the lessons they learn while living in New York. Soon after they arrive in the city, they become aware that Hispanics do not conform to how Puerto Ricans “should behave,” and it is most clear that adolescents and adults born and reared in New York are much less Puerto Rican than are their migrant parents. Furthermore, the people who came years ago are not any more as they used to be. It is said that men, women, and children change in New York. The men become rascals and shameless (sinverguenzas), losing their sense of responsibility toward their wives and children. The women are said to become “free” (meaning morally lost); they smoke and drink without feeling remorse. And the children have no respect for their elders, talking back to adults as if they were their contemporaries. The Hispano group is not “united,” Hispanics do not help each other and are not concerned about undermining other Hispanics. They are not like other groups of people, non-Puerto Ricans, that is, who also live in New York, and who give the impression of having unity based on their color, language, or religion—the Italians, Germans, Jews, Irish, American Negroes, and so forth, who to Puerto Ricans are not real Americans.

Relatives and other close family members cannot be counted on in New York to the extent that is necessary. Years of separation have made relatives practically strangers, to the point that if migrants come and stay with their kin here, the latter expect the migrants to pay for their rent and food and encourage them to move out as soon as possible. If one is too poor, one is not really welcome at relatives at all, not even for short visits.

While relatives and close friends usually help recent migrants to find jobs, the expectations from work in New York are not like those one had in Puerto Rico. The income in dollars is higher in New York than that which migrants earned in Puerto Rico, but being employed and earning more cash than in Puerto Rico does not mean that one is going to live better in New York. A larger amount of money is spent here for rent, food, and clothes than in Puerto Rico. Other economic needs also increase in New York: credit outlays are available for furniture, food, and clothes, and these are necessary to maintain the apparent prosperity that bestows social acceptance and a sense of fulfilling the goals of economic progress associated with migration. Yet there is no awareness of the interest increments accrued on debts, and there is great disappointment when a seasonal layoff and termination of employment mean that banks and loan companies will foreclose on the belongings for which partial payments have been made, without taking into consideration the word of honor of the buyer as a guarantee of payment at a future date.

Many services that could be obtained free in Puerto Rico have to be paid for in New York. Migrants find that any number of services that would have been deemed personal obligations and noblesse oblige in the island are not acknowledged as such here, not even by relatives. In short, they discover that they cannot rely upon the resources avail-
able to them in Puerto Rico to get along satisfactorily here.

In Eastville, or in any other neighborhood where there are large numbers of Puerto Ricans, migrants can get along in Spanish. Unskilled workers can get jobs where they need no English, for most jobs at the unskilled level require no special knowledge of English. Shopping, visiting, or carrying out other activities outside of the neighborhood can also be managed without knowing English. One may ask a friend, a relative, or perhaps one’s small child to accompany him when attending to any business requiring English. However, the person asked to accompany one for purposes of translation may know as much or as little English as the one who requests the help. Living in a place like Eastville, migrants find a certain degree of solidarity that cushions and protects them from severe cultural discontinuities. But there are also dysfunctions from living in Eastville. A slum is a threat to the attainment of the desirable life goals. The children’s recreation has to take place mostly in streets and alleys or in nonsupervised parks or schoolyards, and parents associate bad behavior with lack of supervision by responsible adults. In this area family controls are seen as breaking down very soon. Traditional techniques of enforcing good behavior “do not work any more,” threatening the very existence of family life. Recreational facilities here make it possible for a child to play with other children whose parents are not known personally to migrants. Only when one has first had personal knowledge of a person’s behavior and reliability can he allow his children to play with the other’s. Else one is risking that his child will learn bad manners and other forms of misbehavior.

Another threat posed by the slum involves interference not only with the goals of recent migrants, but in some measure with those of all who dwell there. Integrated social norms function poorly in a slum, where people are expected to behave according to the standards of more privileged social groups, which can seldom be fulfilled in the situations of life available to the underprivileged. There is a high incidence of violation of norms because of their ineffectiveness in providing the individual with suitable personal and social adaptations. The slum has a culture of its own. It is a way of life whose consistency is partly determined by the standard of living of its people and partly by their position at the fringe of the larger society. Its code for living makes allowances for behavior not necessarily tolerated by other segments of the society, and it condemns behavior considered most appropriate in other circles. It harbors many individuals who lack personal controls and whose aggression is discharged destructively. This, coupled with low protection by the police, results in a circular snare for those who live in Eastville.

Recent migrants find in addition that many of their convictions about “how to act” are not approved or just do not work either in the neighborhood, or among old Hispano residents, or when they come in contact with the agencies and personnel of the larger society. If they try to find jobs, buy goods, eat in restaurants, go to hospitals for medical care, talk to teachers about their children, and so forth, they encounter a problem in establishing relationships with those involved. This problem has been defined as a language barrier. Yet it is more than just communication of words, it is a barrier in frame of reference—a wall in cultural understanding. New learning has to be acquired, but unlike the social learning acquired to meet life in Puerto Rico, it is a cultural learning that requires insight and know-how about more highly complex and heterogeneous kinds of behavior and standards.

From their friends and neighbors they acquire the notion that in this country children cannot be disciplined as they were in Puerto Rico because the police do not permit it, and that here children “belong to the government.” Those parents who require
obedience and enforce it on their children anyway seem to ignore this “interpretation” of the law, but the interpretation is widespread and effective in shaping the views of many a frightened Hispano parent. Newspaper stories about parents being punished by the law for physical abuse of their children are used to validate the argument that parental authority and even reasonable discipline are forbidden by the law in New York City. Parents who accept this view are likely to see their growing undisciplined child as a “problem,” meaning, “he gives me trouble,” or, “he does not obey,” and they are likely to try to seek placement for the child in some colegio (“boarding school”) where he can learn good manners and be corrected for his ill-behavior. This is particularly the case among mothers who live alone with their children or those whose husbands who are stepfathers of their children are not regarded as are disciplining fathers by the children.

When migrant mothers discover that their children now do not “respect” them, they claim that they try to secure “fathers” for the children. After they get them, however, they will probably find that these “fathers” are not acceptable to the children, who defy them and do not obey. In New York City such potential husbands are not the providers and the enforcers of paternal roles that the mothers hoped to find, but rather men they may have to support and care for, who will not undertake obligations toward them or their children. There will be a faster “breakdown” of familial controls in such mother-centered families than in those over which a permanent biological or sociological father, regardless of whether he is married legally or not to the mother, is the symbol of authority and respect. This may be so even if he no longer lives with the family.

Parents also find that when their children go to school, they are taught the desirable English language, but at the expense of Spanish, the language of communication in the home. The child is taught norms of behavior, unfamiliar to a parent in themselves, that are handled with techniques which are equally unfamiliar. The school does not teach what parents traditionally have accepted as education, namely the three R’s. Their educational aspirations are frustrated when they discover that the schools “don’t teach to read, write, or do arithmetic.” In addition, the school stimulates individuality in the child, self-assertiveness, means of expressing creative abilities, and other things that do not fit the parents’ conceptions of the role of the school, the status of children, or the kinds of knowledge which a child should be taught in order to become a good adult.

When the schools ask parents to let their children go on trips, picnics, and other outings, the parents find that they are expected to sign a waiver stating that they alone are responsible. This is unacceptable to parents, for they expect adults to whom they entrust their children to act as substitute parents and assume full responsibility for their safety and conduct.

The children, on the other hand, soon realize that if they learn conversational English their status in the family will improve. The English-speaking child will now be the interpreter for his father and mother. He will be a major linking factor for his family with the institutions of the larger society. He may have to miss classes to accompany his mother to hospitals and schools, and on errands that require the services of an interpreter.

As husbands, Puerto Rican migrants will find that their wives have acquired ideas about women’s “freedom” which call for the husbands’ helping with household duties and granting their wives greater privileges. Even if the ideas are not put into practice, they may affect the husband’s role as undisputed head of the family. And if the wives are employed outside the household, the husbands find that their authority over their wives is seriously threatened.
Migrant wives will find their responsibilities and obligations increased, even if they explain this in terms of having “greater freedom.” Wives who were confined “inside the house” in Puerto Rico, and were not expected to have “know-how” in shopping and dealing with schoolteachers, welfare workers, doctors, and housing agencies, in New York City are delegated these responsibilities by their husbands, unless the husbands are unemployed. In that circumstance the husbands can substitute for the wives.

Women also find that the institution of consensual marriage, a union into which they entered by mutual agreement with a man, without going through a formal religious or civil ceremony, is regarded differently in New York than in Puerto Rico. Here, such a union is considered immoral and without promise of stability. The children of it are also cast in an unfavorable light. While the institution of querida (husband’s mistress) may not be a threat to the stability of a legal marriage in Puerto Rico, here it is likely to mean desertion of both the wife and the children. Yet widely held is the belief that in New York women are less helpless, that there is more “government protection” for them and their children than in Puerto Rico, and that this gives wives power to bargain with their husbands. Wives here find it easier to take their husbands to court if they want redress.

When recent migrants arrive here, they find that the evaluations they had made of their families, which were those accepted in the barrio or pueblo they came from in Puerto Rico, are either not used or not taken into account in New York. They learn that family “connections” and social prestige classified as “poor but decent” do not count any more. Here, when migrants are called “Puerto Rican,” it is a term of derogation, so they start referring to themselves as “Hispano.” They are often told they are “ignorant”; sometimes people of the outgroup even tell Hispanics that they do not know their own names, or what those of their children are. Migrants are also told that they do not know how to live, how to bring up their children, or how to relate to their husbands or wives. They are expected to be militant Catholics, although they may well be Protestants or have never attended any church service, considering religion a system of beliefs that can be practiced either in or out of church. They are regarded as “irresponsible” if not legally married, even those who have lived in a stable marital union for years, fulfilling the basic obligations expected of them, both as spouses and as parents. They are expected to have a standard grammatical knowledge of Spanish and a large Spanish vocabulary, yet actually they will have had almost no schooling and will have learned their tongue largely from illiterate parents and friends. Migrants are expected to try to learn English, but they consider that only children are capable of learning, and that they just cannot.

Recent migrants regard these expectations of behavior as yardsticks of the larger society to appraise and judge them. In principle, the expectations of Americans are considered sound and good, but it is also admitted that there are ways of behaving that are proper for Americans but not for Hispanics or their children. There are times when a migrant cannot help but say that this is a crazy country; yet conscious efforts are exerted to understand and accept demands made by the larger society. It is particularly in relation to gaining approval for one’s growing family that approval from Americans seems most important, for the future of one’s children is seen as closely related to this approval. Nonetheless, a person cannot accept everything that “the Americans” say, for “they just don’t know.” At home one should keep trying to teach the children to speak Spanish, to count, and to appreciate songs and music from Puerto Rico and other Latin countries.

Important also is striving to be accepted by Hispanics, in many more areas than in which the approval of Americans is sought. It is not important to keep up with the
Joneses, but it certainly is important to keep up with the Menderos or the Perezes of one’s home town and of the Hispano ethnic group. Feeling approved by Hispano standards acts as a bulwark to self-evaluation and is a reflection of how good and proper (correcto) one can be. It is also a yardstick of how well or how badly one has done in New York. Sociologically, the Hispano ethnic subculture merges migrants into the culture of the city while sheltering them from many of the stresses and strains inherent in migration and in the social system of the city. But the Hispano subculture is not a stable system. It is also characterized by conflicting values and norms of behavior, so within it, too, migrants will find themselves in situations of conflict.

The high value that the larger society assigns rapid assimilation and the low value that it assigns “looking and acting different” place Hispanos, particularly recently arrived ones, at a disadvantage. While enjoying certain psychological comforts, such as a feeling of belonging in the Hispano group, and finding norms and social values that are compatible, migrants also discover that this kind of adaptation paves the way for conflicts, disapproval, and other discomforts in the New York community. In addition to this, they also find themselves in the midst of the conflicts of the Hispano group itself.

One of the pivotal areas of conflict within the Hispano group and in the relations of Hispanos with the larger community is manifested in the field of racial issues. These are of major importance, for they have a strong impact on the life-careers, self-evaluation, interpersonal relations, and eventual assimilation of Hispanos. In Puerto Rico, as in the United States and other societies of the world, people are classified for certain social purposes into ethnic, racial, or nationality groups. Such classifications are used to group people on the basis of what appear to be physical, linguistic, or cultural characteristics. Social relations, the ways men will be expected to behave toward each other and think about each other, are permeated with the beliefs they hold about their race, nationality, or language.

One of the outstanding contributions of American anthropology has been to point out the lack of real or logical connection between racial, cultural, and linguistic groups. Still, in many scientific circles, as well as in popular thought, conceptions about race involving cultural and linguistic elements are presented without recognizing that these lack scientific reliability, and are assumed to be unquestionable truths and correct statements. The term “race” means something, but it means one thing to modern biologists and physical anthropologists, and something else to those who speak about race in any other sense. From the point of view of modern biology, a race is not a group of people who speak a common language; nor is it a group which shares a common cultural or religious tradition; nor is it a group of people who seem to look alike or to have similar body shapes and skin color. Race is a classificatory device used with reference to certain aggregates of inherited characteristics of living organisms, plant or animal. To biologists, races are based on differences in gene inheritance. The inherited genes of any population of plants or animals are not visible; they cannot be recognized by the naked human eye; that is, they are not necessarily manifested in the physical appearance of individuals. While this does not deny that physical types, based on appearance, can be established in human or other populations, it also means that physical types per se are not races in a genetic sense.

Human beings with a common physical appearance do not necessarily speak the same language, nor must they adhere to the same culture, or vice versa. Human beings who may resemble each other in a number of physical characteristics may be placed in different racial groups, in accordance with how and with which characteristics are con-
considered as criteria for race. This concept of race, then, is relativistic; it reflects cultural definitions, but not necessarily genetic attributes.

When people speak about races as if these were something they see, they are speaking about race in an altogether different way from the modern biologist. Race, however, makes sense to them in terms of their common life experiences, regardless of whether the term is employed in its correct scientific sense or not. For example, the term “race” is used conventionally in the United States and other Western societies to describe and evaluate individuals and groups in connection with what are assumed to be their innate characteristics and behavior. Assumptions or mistaken facts or both can be examined as if they were objective and verifiable phenomena only in terms of what they are—that is, the ideas and beliefs of a society concerning how people are grouped either as races or ethnic groups, or that part of the society’s culture which governs rules of behavior that guide interpersonal and intergroup relations with such groups. Within this framework race is a social phenomenon, which can be appropriately called “social race.” Because these are aspects of social behavior, they are subjects for study by sociologists and related social scientists.

Both in Puerto Rico and in the United States social race is an important aspect of social life, but race is looked at, defined, and appraised in different ways in the two countries. Racial attitudes, ideas of racial equality, superiority, or inferiority, are all learned behavior. They are neither inherited nor a product of human instinct. Regardless of how deep convictions about race may be, racial attitudes are acquired. They are part of the lore or social learning of individuals in any society where they appear.

When ideas about social race in a society convey the notion that people assigned a certain race share behavior characteristics on account of it, racism is the result. To describe what happens when individuals who are members of the same linguistic community or the same cultural group are judged to be characterized by the same personality or behavior responses, we shall use the term “culturism.” Both racism and culturism are forms of prejudice, each using a different point of reference for its justification, regardless of whether the members of a group are all considered to be “good” or all “bad.” Culturism involves the assumption that each individual is representative of his whole national or minority group culture, and that regardless of the uniqueness of his personality, of changes in the circumstances of his life, and of the learning situations available to him, he will continue to be immutably attached to the standards of behavior of his ancestors and to the cultural traditions of his group. The basic error in racism is repeated in culturism: both ignore the fact that social behavior is learned and not an inborn quality or an instinct. Nor are individuals replicas of their fellow group members. As members of a society individuals learn standards of behavior and roles to enact prescribed ways of action. This makes it possible for the social order to operate and for individuals to act normally or in conformity with their society’s standards.

Some social groups in a society may have acquired greater prestige and power than others. Those at the top of the heap may consider themselves better, and those underneath may agree. These are value judgments rather than proof of inborn superiority or inferiority. Some mechanisms such as social discrimination may be resorted to for maintaining power groups in their position (social discrimination excludes others from joining their ranks). Discrimination may be practiced against members of groups even when the characteristics associated with those group members and used to discriminate against them have disappeared. That is individuals may have learned how to speak American English, just like a native speaker, yet they may be considered
“Italian,” “Puerto Rican,” or “Jew.” Individuals may be born in this country and have experienced their whole lives here, and still, they may be discriminated against for being foreign. Persons having some African descent may look as if they conform to the standard of being white in physical appearance, and yet they are still discriminated against as Negroes.

Hence one can speak of the grounds for discrimination as being inconsistent and unrealistic, to say the least. The social consequences of discrimination are a waste of human resources for a society, as by it, the society is deprived of developing the creative forces of individuals, either because their opportunities are cut down, or because both those who discriminate and their victims utilize energies in an irrational struggle that could be used more fruitfully otherwise. Members of a group against whom discrimination is practiced, tend to stay in enclaves of their own to protect themselves from the trauma and rejection of discrimination. They become partially isolated from other segments of society, while consolidating and retaining their own group distinctiveness. Furthermore, as the discriminated group is part of the larger society, it is affected by it, and particularly those individuals who adopt overt symbols of the larger society are likely also to adopt the same discriminatory attitudes as the larger society toward their own group, and hence reject and dislike their group wholesale and themselves for being part of it. These factors make for a great deal of personal and social dissatisfaction, for they involve conflicts and dilemmas which often have no resolution. As a minority group New York Puerto Ricans exemplify these processes to a remarkable degree.

Among Puerto Ricans there are those who are white and range from blonds, with blue eyes and reddish Complexions, to brunets, with light olive skin colors and curly or straight hair. At the opposite pole are those who have the dark brown skin color, kinky hair, broad noses, and thick lips associated with Negroid characteristics. In between are a great variety of combinations in physical appearance and characteristics. Names are no clue either. While most Puerto Ricans have Spanish names, it is not uncommon to be a Puerto Rican and have an English, Irish, French, German, or Italian name. In Puerto Rico being Puerto Rican means having been born on the island; it carries no implication of being a member of an ethnic or a minority group.

As in the United States, however, in the island two major racial groups are recognized socially; they are white and Negro. But the recognition of these two groups does not result in the formation of two distinct subgroups of caste-like separation as it does in the United States. In Puerto Rico the number of categories recognized between the two extremes of Negro and white mark degrees of racial departure from both, but mobility in this continuum is possible even within the lifetime of a particular individual. Much social interaction takes place and many interpersonal relations of an intimate and warm nature occur among individuals regardless of whether or not they have Negro ancestry and whether they look Negroid or white, though there is a stated preference for being white. All other things being equal, it is a social advantage to look white rather than Negro. This is particularly true in the upper and middle classes and is a factor in social mobility. In classifying individuals by race the main physical indices selected are those of skin color, hair type, and width of lips and nose. Having immediate Negro ancestry does not necessarily peg an individual as Negro, for race is more a matter “of appearing to be” than of ancestry. When ancestry is taken into consideration as a criterion of race, reference is made to “being of the white race” or the “colored race.” In socially mobile groups, and in the upper classes, a marriage between two white-looking persons known to have Negro ancestry may be discouraged by parents
on the grounds that “the race should not be spoiled” by taking a chance on having offspring that may not look white. A white person who has no known Negro ancestors, a hijo de españoles (child of Spaniards), may use his whiteness to gain social mobility by marrying someone who is better off and hence in a higher socioeconomic position, whether his appearance is white or Negroid. Children born to parents who appear to be white and yet have Negro ancestors may be considered white and not necessarily Negro, as they would be in the United States.

The existence of intermarriage between people of different racial heritages has long been recognized in Puerto Rico. Since early in the days of Spanish colonial domination, the strongest barriers separating the people of the island have been those of a class system based upon wealth. Complementing the many combinations of complexion shades, features, and hair forms that are seen among the people of the island, a number of intermediate categories indicating degrees of either whiteness or “color”3 are used to classify individuals. The term trigueño (brunet) is applied both to white persons who have brown or black hair and tan or light olive skin color and, by extension, to persons whose physical appearance would place them as Negroes if that were the only criterion of race. This not being so, trigueño is used to avoid the term “Negro” for persons of respect, because, besides race, there are other social and personal factors, such as wealth and education, which determine a man’s worth and social position. It is not proper to call persons of respect “Negro.” If used in that context, it is considered quite blunt, or even insulting. Yet, the term “Negro” may be used to address a person in a friendly and loving manner, and in this context it has no manifest reference to social race.

Other terms used to describe or classify individuals racially are indio, grifo, and “mulatto.” An indio (literally, Indian, but not to be confused with individuals of East Indian or American Indian ancestry) is characterized by his thin or medium nose and lips, and has either straight or curly hair. The children of indios are indios only so long as they look like indios. Those who want to lower the rank of an indio would refer to him as Negro. The main index of the classification grifo is hair. Grifos may have very light skin color, thin noses and lips, but their hair is kinky, which is synonymous with “bad.” Mulatto refers to a person who has kinky hair and dark olive skin.

Whether an individual is to suffer discrimination for not being “white” will be tested on the social ladder. Racial discrimination is one of the many tools used to limit the chances for upward mobility in the society. For poor whites, however, the obverse can be true. They may use their “whiteness” as a technique for achieving upward mobility for themselves by marrying persons who are not considered white but who are in a higher socioeconomic position. For the wealthy who do not look white the society usually overlooks their race, unless they fall within the extremes of darkness of skin color, and often no reference is ever made to their color. But for lower-class persons who do not look white reference to their race or color may be quite open. The term “Negro” is used to describe with contempt a Negroid person considered to have a lower social position, or even to belittle the social importance or rank of a person who is socially white by his wealth but not by his appearance or ancestry. Thus racial attitudes in Puerto Rico involve ambivalences that rotate around the cultural ideal that there is no racial prejudice among Puerto Ricans while social class is strongly associated with race.

If in Puerto Rico social race is subordinate to social class, in New York it is central to Hispano life. As a social factor, race becomes acutely manifested among migrants early in their New York stay, and it continues to be embedded in the matrices of the
Lower-class persons in Puerto Rico are not very much involved in the racial aspects of social mobility, since their mobility is quite limited, but in New York lower-class Hispano society is socially mobile. Struggling for acceptance and accomplishment in New York, Hispanos acquire new meanings for their ideas and beliefs about race, which now assume greater importance and have stronger emotional content.

Among old migrants and individuals who grew up in New York, the term “Hispano” itself is often used to indicate the social race of an individual. This is particularly true if the person is liked and respected. Among recent and old migrants, the terms trigueño, indio, and grifo, as well as white and Negro, are used with reference to both Puerto Ricans and members of the outgroup. So an Italian may be described as un Italiano trigueño, or an American Negro who is a friend, may be spoken of as un Americano trigueño. An individual who appears to be white is considered white by Hispanos even if his father or mother looks Negroid, and vice versa. Mulatto is seldom used in New York. Instead, it is Negro or trigueño, depending on whether the person referred to is being approved of or belittled. Persons who are being talked about in their absence may be referred to as Negros, but they will probably be described as trigueños in their presence. The term indio is also used in Eastville, and as in Puerto Rico, with reference to persons who have brown skin and straight or curly hair.

The chart which follows compares the various terms used by the larger society, the Hispano ingroup, and individual Hispanos referring to themselves.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>REFERENCES OF OUTGROUP</th>
<th>REFERENCES OF INGROUP</th>
<th>REFERENCES OF INDIVIDUALS DESCRIBING SELF</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trigueño Hispano</td>
<td>Grifo</td>
<td>Hispano</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grifo</td>
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<td>Trigueño</td>
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<tr>
<td>INTERMEDIATES*</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Puerto Rican or “Mixed”</td>
<td>Negro</td>
<td>De Color (of color)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trigueño</td>
<td>Indio</td>
<td>Trigueño</td>
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<tr>
<td>Indio</td>
<td>Grifo</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hispano</td>
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<td>Indio</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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* A category to include the numerous racial terms used by Puerto Ricans, introduced by C. Wright Mills, Clarence Senior, and R. Kolsen, in *The Puerto Rican Journey* (New York, Harper, 1950).

Hispanos can be grouped with reference to how they regard race and with reference to the social race they are assigned by the larger society in New York. There are those individuals considered Negro in Puerto Rico, “Puerto Rican,” or “Spanish,” by the outgroup in New York, and Negro by the Hispano ingroup; those considered white in Puerto Rico, white by the ingroup and the outgroup in New York; those considered to be in intermediate categories in Puerto Rico and by the Hispano ingroup, Negro by
the outgroup in New York; those considered white in Puerto Rico, white by the ingroup, and Negro by the outgroup; and those considered to be in intermediate categories or to be Negro in Puerto Rico and by the Hispano group, white by the outgroup in New York City.

Among recent migrants are found those who had some prior awareness that race in New York is a different matter than in Puerto Rico, particularly with reference to Negroes. Through letters, conversations with returning migrants, and newspapers in the island, it has become common knowledge that there is prejudice here against Negroes and that Negroes are located in separate districts from whites. To many migrants these practices do not seem discriminatory, but rather are often justifiable when exercised against American Negroes, but not so when they are extended to Puerto Rican Negroes. Thus, being identified as Negroes is often a major threat for Hispanos.

In Eastville conflict resulting from the social racial situation arises primarily in those individuals considered intermediates by the Hispano group and Negroes by the outgroup, those considered intermediates by Hispanos and white by the outgroup, and those considered Negroes by the Hispano group and “Puerto Ricans” by the outgroup. Those who were Negroes in Puerto Rico and are still Negroes among Hispanos and Negroes according to the outgroup, and those who were white in Puerto Rico, are still white according to Hispanos, and are white in terms of the outgroup find straight bridges to social race adaptations that conform to the demands of the larger society. Intermediates, on the other hand, occupy ambiguous positions in New York, and though they may learn American orientations, they are likely to remain unassimilated for a longer time than those who are either white or Negro according to the Hispano group itself. In this way concepts of social race operate to halt or to foster assimilation, that process whereby individuals lose their identity as members of ethnic or social racial groups.

Yet social race does not deter Puerto Ricans from learning adaptations to American society. Intermediates have more difficulty finding a place for themselves in the larger society because it divides itself into only two parts, Negro and white, and intermediate Hispanos continue to emphasize the desirability of whiteness in a society where many are not considered white.

They do not want to be identified as Negroes, and this is where the larger society is likely to place them. One finds in Eastville individuals who were born in New York and educated in the city’s public schools, who have no loyalties toward, knowledge of, or social relationships with Puerto Rico, and who express strong dislike for Puerto Ricans, but who have continued to live within the context of New York Hispano society. These are generally intermediates, and this is their adaptation to American society.

Ralph Santos, for example, an intermediate young man born and reared in New York, was sitting one day on a stoop when a fieldworker approached him and asked him in Spanish if he were Puerto Rican. Ralph laughed and replied that he was, adding, “You thought I was a Negro, didn’t you? Yes, because I look like a Negro.” Trapped in his desire not to be identified as a Negro, Ralph speaks of the “colored people” and the “Spanish” as different groups. Describing his feelings about the Puerto Rican migration to New York, however, he says:

“It reflects on me this way . . . the majority of people coming from there are illiterate and, well, the various things that people have to say about them, such as they are coming from Puerto Rico and not wanting to work, they work for such wages as thirty dollars a week, making it hard for guys like me who have been brought up and raised
in this country to obtain work at the wages we are used to getting.”

Ralph’s ambivalences concerning group identification are not atypical of others in his position. Being classified as “Puerto Rican” by the outgroup is preferred to being classified as Negro, even if the term “Puerto Rican” carries undesirable connotations in the larger society which have been adopted by Hispanics themselves. Angela Elias who was a Negro in Puerto Rico, and is a Negro among Hispanics, but a Puerto Rican according to the outgroup, helps to explain this preference. She regards being considered Puerto Rican by the outgroup as an outlet to a better status. “If you are dark,” she says, “you can’t go near [white society in Puerto Rico]. It is not like that here. There it is all like that. . . . If you are light and you don’t have the right kind of hair, then you can’t go [participate with the whites] unless you rich.” In Puerto Rico she was neither light nor rich.

Mr. Lenk, a teacher in an Eastville public school, informed a fieldworker with surprise that he had asked Mary Ramos, a nineteen-year-old girl, what she wanted most in the world. She replied, “To be white.” “But you are white,” he told her. “No, I am not,” she insisted. Mary is a light brunette with curly hair and thin facial features, yet she does not consider herself white because of her hair. She told a fieldworker that once she had been coming down the street when she met Jack Velez, a Negroid Hispano, who told her to straighten her hair because it was “bad.” This, she added, embarrassed her very much because “there were other people [not Hispanics] present who heard it.”

Mary Tomez, a Negroid woman born and reared in New York, related that the first time she ever felt “racial prejudice” was when she was eleven years old. She met a girl in the street, recently arrived from Puerto Rico, who told her that she did not speak to Negroes. And, said Mary, “She was only four shades lighter than me!”

Sylvia Ornes, an old migrant woman who is defined as white and considers herself as such, speaks about race in a somewhat neutral vein. “My sister in Puerto Rico, she is very poor, but such a clean woman. She is prieta, black like a piece of coal.” Nina Lugo, an old migrant who is white in New York, though not among Hispanics because of her kinky hair, once volunteered to a fieldworker that she came from a good white family, but that her neighbor, Angela Solon, had done a “work” (used witchcraft) on her and made her hair “bad.” Alicia Olineca, a white woman who has lived in Eastville for over fifteen years, called her son’s fiancée and told her that she wanted them to break up because the girl had bad hair.

Consciousness of race is an important element in the appraisals Hispanics make of themselves and others. When people are being gossiped about or even just mentioned casually, their color and whether they are white or Negro may be brought up spontaneously. Individuals are often characterized by their color, and associations about their character and their looks, approval or disapproval are likely to involve racial affiliations. Close personal relationships with persons considered Negroes are discouraged, particularly by those defined as white by the outgroup but not by the ingroup.

Isidro Velez, a distinctly Negroid man, had lived for twenty years in Eastville when he discovered that a childhood chum, Damian Toro, was also living in the neighborhood. Damian and his family are considered white in New York. Isidro went to visit Damian, and they sat in the living room to reminisce about their home town and their childhood. Isidro continued to visit the Toro family and once came while Damian's daughters were alone in the house. Julia, Damian's wife, told a fieldworker that this made her angry, because she had told her daughters never to let anyone into the apartment when trusted adults were not present. After a while she claimed that her oldest daughter, Inez, was also very angry. “That daughter of mine,” Julia said, “is so proud,
she does not like to see Negroes here upstairs in the living room.” Isidro, then, gradually discontinued his informal visits with Damian, and he was not mentioned again. He did not even attend parties at the Toros’ any more. However, when Charlie, the youngest child of the Toros, was baptized, about a year after this incident, a number of distinctly Negroid persons were at the house party that followed the baptism. One of them was introduced to the fieldworker as a sister of the host. Her husband, who was darker, was also introduced, but his identity was not revealed. A teen-aged American Negro boy, a classmate of one of the Toro children, came to the party accompanied by a Sunday school teacher. He was referred to by the hostess and her daughters as “that Negro,” or “the Negro,” yet no reference was made to the race of the cousin who looked just as Negroid. Mrs. Toro, on another occasion, was telling a fieldworker about her past life and mentioned how at thirteen she fell in love with a very handsome man. “He adored me,” she remarked, “and used to tell me he would never marry anybody else but me. I had to break up with him because my family did not want him. Imagine, just because he was a colored man.”

In New York whiteness continues to be regarded as an important social attribute, a more important one here than it was in Puerto Rico. Among recent migrants who were of intermediate racial categories in Puerto Rico, the fear of being associated with Negroes generally seems stronger than among those who have lived in New York for a number of years. Children, adolescents, and adults who have had their homes in the neighborhood for most of their lives associate with each other regardless of color or social race. The barriers of race, however, operate to separate recent migrants from the older groups of Hispanos in the city and from those who are born and reared in New York. Nonetheless, there is a tendency for white girls of recent migrant parents to marry intermediates who were born and reared in New York, particularly those who have well-paying jobs.

Prejudice on the part of Hispanos and core tensions related to race center in those considered Negroes and those “mixed.” Prejudice works in terms of affecting close interpersonal relations, but it is not extended to justify discrimination in employment, housing, or casual friendships.

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From Up from Puerto Rico by Elena Padilla ©1958 Columbia University Press. Reprinted with the permission of the publisher.
Stateside Puerto Ricans (Spanish: Puertorriqueños de Estados Unidos), also ambiguously Puerto Rican Americans (Spanish: puertorriqueños-americanos, puertorriqueños-estadounidenses), or Puerto Ricans in the United States, are Puerto Ricans in the United States proper (the 50 states and the District of Columbia), who were born in or trace family ancestry to the U.S. territory of Puerto Rico.

I'm not a Puerto Rican woman but I am a white man who dated a Puerto Rican girl for several years so let me give you my take, if I may. On both how I felt and what she told me in regards to how she felt about it. First of all as someone has already mentioned just in skin type alone there are vast differences between different Puerto Rican's. My neighborhood at the time contained many ethnic groups, but Puerto Ricans were among them. Like my ethnic group (Greeks), Puerto Ricans are loud, festive people. They really are no different than any other full-of-life ethnic group: most are very good people, and some are criminals (just like Germans, Swedes, Irish, etc.). Not like Puerto Ricans and Dominicans?

Which is weird because in retrospect, the 3 of them are all actually cousin countries....So the real question is: shouldn't they ban together in this already f-ed up world?