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## **Maintaining the Environmental/Racial Order in northern New Mexico**

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### **Abstract**

The environmental/racial order in northern New Mexico is maintained through a process of racial triangulation in which Anglos, Native Americans, and Hispanos are valued relative to one another along axes of environmental stewardship and victimization. Both axes involve the juxtaposing of three longstanding images: 1) Spanish injustices to the Indians, 2) Mexican inability to manage their land properly, and 3) Indians being preeminent environmental stewards. In contrast to Kim's formulation of racial triangulation, however, the axes also involve imagery that contradicts these images: the debauched, poverty-stricken Indian, and European culture as a despoiler of the environment. Also in contrast to Kim's formulation, racial triangulation can involve the creation of new identities. In the 1960s Hispano activists began claiming to be heirs to a hybrid culture that included elements of both Native American and Spanish cultures. While this claim to hybridity enabled the creation of new oppositional discourses, the reconciling of contradictory imagery by historicizing them and other means undermines the new Hispano oppositional discourses as well as identity itself. Racial triangulation is thus a fluid and contested process in which identity formation and the interchange between predominant and oppositional discourses are constitutive of power relations. Contradictory imagery in the discourse facilitates the maintenance of the

environmental/racial order, even as it enables subordinates to challenge their racialized positions and effect change in the distribution of material wealth, rights and privileges.

## **Maintaining the Environmental/Racial Order in Northern New Mexico**

### **Introduction**

Struggle over land has been a feature of social life in northern New Mexico for centuries. Spanish conquest of the region in 1598 triggered struggles with Native Americans, and 250 years later American conquest triggered struggles between newly arriving American settlers and the established Hispano and Native American occupants. During the century and a half since then, Hispanos who make their home in the region have resisted land expropriation and land use change through such acts as fence cutting, arson, and, on occasion, murder. They have also worked proactively to maintain control of the direction of economic, social and environmental change through forming mutual aid societies, labor unions, committees and associations to represent their interests to government bureaucracies, and cooperatives to enhance their bargaining positions in the agricultural, natural resource, and tourism industries.

Yet, Hispano communities are still struggling. Struggles over rights of ownership to former land grants continue to this day. In addition, the use and management of land, both public and private, continues to generate fierce conflicts. In recent years this conflict has intensified as public land agencies have responded to national demands for greater recreational opportunities and faced legal injunctions against logging, as environmental groups have challenged extractive activities, and as tourism and migration to the region have both increased. Moreover, Hispano communities are still struggling with high rates of poverty and the many social problems which accompany it. Why, after more than a century of resistance and activism, are Hispano communities in northern

New Mexico still struggling to remain on the land and to regain a greater degree of control over the direction of economic, cultural and environmental change?

A key feature of the struggles over land rights and access to resources is the discourse through which claims and counterclaims are made. Protagonists in environmental conflicts all have their own visions of how resources should be used and managed, and they all frame their visions in terms that they hope will sway public opinion and persuade policy makers and power brokers to adopt practices and formulate policies that will advance their interests. The stakes are high in this game because discursive struggles are constitutive of relationships of power which materially affect, and are reinforced by, the redistribution of resources and economic opportunities among social collectivities including ethnoracial, occupational, and other groups. In this high stakes game, who wins and who loses? How do some visions, as opposed to others, diffuse into the wider discourse and become the basis for policy and practice?

Northern New Mexico offers a good example of how some visions are maintained in a marginal position. Debate over the use and management of natural resources in the region involves the evocation of mythologized imagery of relations between Hispanos and Native Americans and their relations with the natural environment. Images of injustice done to the Indians, of Hispanos as incapable of caring for the land, and of Indians as preeminent environmental stewards are long-established, naturalized images that circulate in the discourse in the region. Contending groups in environmental conflicts draw on these images in making their claims about the causes of environmental problems and in proposing solutions.

In short, the environmental and racial discourses in the region are mutually constituted. Social groups are racialized relative to one another, and that process entails evaluating the relative merits of their environmental credentials. This process of “racial triangulation” is not straightforward, however. It includes contradictions in the valuations of social groups and entails reconciling these contradictions through placing the imagery in time, either the past or the present. Moreover, racial triangulation is constitutive of power relations which are asserted through the mutual constitution of predominant and oppositional discourses, and identity. To analyze how this occurs, I will first discuss racial triangulation theory. Then, drawing on oral history and key informant interviews I conducted from 1993 to 1997 with Hispano activists and residents of mountain villages, environmentalists, and Forest Service officials in northern New Mexico, as well as field notes, archival resources, and my more recent research on representations of the Mexican-American relationship to the land in cinema, I will examine the environmental discourse in northern New Mexico to illustrate how racial triangulation maintains Hispano oppositional discourses in a marginal position. Although racial triangulation processes subordinate Native American discourses in the region as well, in this paper I focus primarily on the triangulation of Hispanos.

### **Racial Triangulation**

In an effort to move the national dialogue about race beyond the traditional Black-White dichotomy Kim (1999) has proposed that ethnoracial groups are valued relative to one another in a process she calls racial triangulation. In this process groups are positioned along axes of superior/inferior qualities, insider/outsider status, and other purported attributes. Valuing groups in this way racializes each differently and creates a

field of racial positions that profoundly shapes the opportunities and constraints that subordinates face while simultaneously sustaining White privilege and advantage (page 107). Kim argues that at least two processes are involved: relative valorization and civic ostracism. Using the example of the triangulation of Asian Americans and Blacks, she demonstrates how the two processes operate together to maintain both groups in subordinate positions. While Asian Americans are celebrated as the model minority, achieving economic success through adherence to traditional values of hard work, family, education, and self sufficiency, they are nonetheless ostracized as permanently foreign to American culture and unassimilable. Blacks, on the other hand, are considered American, but are construed as lacking the cultural values that allow Asian Americans to get ahead. Both groups are held in subordinate positions by continuously being compared unfavorably to one another on axes of relative worth.

Kim's approach has two major strengths. It captures how the processes that racialize different ethnoracial groups differently are mutually constitutive, and it affirms the existence of multiple scales of status and privilege thus moving racial theory beyond the notion of a one-dimensional racial hierarchy. Yet, her approach can be elaborated to more fully capture the dynamics of triangulation processes. Specifically, her framework is problematic in its portrayal of the axes of relative worth as consisting of rigid, one-dimensional evaluations, and in underrating the role of identity formation in the contestation of triangulated positions. Evidence from northern New Mexico suggests that the axes of relative worth are themselves multifaceted. This is important because the multifaceted nature of the axes is simultaneously a facilitator and function of the operation of power in holding oppositional discourses in subordinate positions, as well as

of the mutual constitution of domination and resistance of which identity formation is a crucial component.

Consistent with Kim's framework, Anglos, Hispanos, and Native Americans, draw on widespread images and understandings of the relationships they have with the environment as well as with each other in making claims, counterclaims, and counter counterclaims about environmental problems in northern New Mexico. In so doing they variously draw on, reinforce, and challenge the valuing of themselves relative to one another along axes of environmental stewardship and victimization.

In contrast to Kim's framework, however, both axes involve the juxtaposing of contradictory images. While Anglos are considered to have the greatest scientific expertise with regard to the environment and are thus typically ranked at the top on the axis of environmental stewardship, they are also decried as having introduced an unsustainable land use system from Europe. Native Americans are often celebrated as preeminent environmental stewards, and therefore may be ranked at or near the top, but may also be disparaged as debauched shadows of their former selves. As Krech (1999) and Berkhofer (1978) have observed, the images of the noble and ignoble savage have co-existed in European and White-American imaginations for centuries. Hispanos, however, are consistently ranked at the bottom. Their relationship with the environment is typically either maligned or rendered invisible. As I will demonstrate, the co-existence of contradictory images of ethnoracial groups, as well as the temporalizing of those contradictions, is crucial to maintaining the subordinate status of oppositional discourses.

Evaluations of the relationship Anglos, Native Americans, and Hispanos have had with one another throughout the history of conquest in the region are critical in this



process as well. Native Americans, having suffered through two cycles of conquest (Spicer, 1962), are represented as being the most victimized of the three groups. Hispanos, on the other hand, occupy a more ambiguous position on this axis of victimization since they have historically been in the roles of both oppressor and the oppressed.

Contradictory imagery in the axes of environmental stewardship and victimization nurture the mutual constitution of oppositional and predominant discourses as well. On the one hand, power is exercised through constructing ethnoracial groups as possessing “good” qualities that render them reformable while simultaneously affirming the need for guidance and control by the authorities because of innate deficiencies in their culture (Bhabha, 1983). On the other hand, the existence of such contradictions enhances the ability of ethnoracial groups to selectively choose imagery from the predominant discourse for crafting “autoethnographies” that re-form and reconfirm their deeply held beliefs about themselves while simultaneously seeking to change predominant modes of understanding and to alter prevailing relationships of power (Pratt, 1994, page 28).

Hispano activists in northern New Mexico engage directly with predominant themes, images, and stereotypes, appropriating ideas from them and reworking them in terms of their understandings of their own history and culture. Through this process, they simultaneously represent themselves to themselves as well as to others (Mitchell, 1990), confront prevailing power relations, and challenge predominant understandings of their relationships with the environment as well as with other peoples in the Southwest. Their autoethnographies are met with a response, which in turn, stimulate reiteration and/or modification of those autoethnographies.

Identity formation is thus a crucial component of triangulation processes. Kim (2000) affirms the role identity plays in racial triangulation, but her primary concern is to demonstrate continuities in collective action frames (explanations of a problem, its causes, and the linkages among its internal and external aspects) through time. Kim questions the applicability to subordinate groups of the notion presented by some social movement theorists (Benford, 1993) that framing is an innovative, competitive and disputatious process in which movement groups compete to produce the most persuasive collective action frame and win the most adherents. She argues that rather than frames being constructed from new cloth for every protest, movement, or phase in a movement, there are many frames that “crop up from epoch to epoch” (page 56). Kim introduces the concept of the “frame repertoire” to capture this idea. “A frame repertoire is, quite simply, a set of collective action frames that outlives specific movements, persists through time, and is continuously available to activists seeking to build a new movement” (page 56).

Yet, Kim’s account does not allow for transformations in identity through participation in racial triangulation processes. She argues further that, “each frame repertoire belongs to and is rooted in the cultural beliefs of a specific, fixed population. In other words, only persistently identified (and quite often, persistently marginalized) groups that cohere continuously over time are the bearers of frame repertoires” (pages 56-57). While collective action frames, together with forms of organizing (Tilly, 1995), do persist through time, this argument fails to account for how identity itself is formed through the contesting of triangulated positions. Evidence from northern New Mexico demonstrates that identity can change in concert with changes in the discourse, and that

new identities are constituted of deeply held beliefs that themselves become the foundation for new oppositional discourses. As I will demonstrate, Hispano activists in northern New Mexico have challenged their triangulated position vis-à-vis Anglos and Native Americans by claiming heritage to a hybrid culture that combines elements of both Spanish and native cultures.

While this claim directly challenges the imagery of Mexicans<sup>1</sup> as indifferent or incompetent land managers, contradictions in the axes of relative worth prevent Hispano activists from using this new claim to completely transcend their position in the racial order. They may, for example, be described as heirs to a European culture responsible for many environmental transgressions. In addition, imagery of Indians as having lost their traditional culture which embodied knowledge of good environmental stewardship nullifies Hispano claims to being heirs to Native American stewardship traditions. The imagery of the Spanish being as, if not more, responsible than Anglos for Native American cultural loss provides the coup de grâce to Hispano claims. These images do more than just undermine Hispano claims, however. They degrade the very basis of Hispano identity in the predominant discourse as well.

Such processes – the reconciling of contradictions in the axes of relative worth, the historicizing of contradictory imagery, and the degrading of the basis of alternate identities – are constitutive of the power relations through which elites maintain their social positioning. That social positioning in turn provides elites with additional means

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<sup>1</sup> I use the term “Mexican” to refer generally to people of Mexican ancestry. I use the term “Hispano” in the standard sense in which it is used in the literature on northern New Mexico: to refer to the descendents of people from Spain and Mexico who settled in the region prior to American conquest. The imagery of Mexicans as poor land managers typically applies to all people of Mexican or Mexican-American heritage.

for holding oppositional discourses in subordinate positions. Officials in government agencies, for example, have relatively abundant access to scientific knowledge, which they legitimate through their discourse (Dietz, Stern & Rycroft, 1989), and furthermore, they are backed by the administrative structures and legal codes of the government (Cline-Cole, 1998). They are thus strategically placed to have their interpretations of history, of environmental problems, and of the different roles of different peoples in both diffuse into the wider discourse (Fortmann, 1995).

Strategies of resistance themselves may blunt the effect of oppositional discourses or open opportunities for strategically placed individuals to manipulate them to their advantage. When competing powers occupy positions of authority, subordinates may strategically ally themselves with one or the other while simultaneously resisting the oppressive practices of both (Butz & MacDonald, 2001). In a parallel vein, subordinate groups may construct essentialized images of themselves as ethnoracial others when it is strategically advantageous to do so (Pulido, 1998). They may also willingly participate in reproducing the racial order to safeguard their collective interests (Kim, 2000). Oppositional discourses are thus located “some place other than in...subject position[s] that [are] either fully colonized, or authentically resistant to colonization” (Butz & MacDonald, 2001, page 199).

Thus, just as elite discourses offer opportunities for resistance, oppositional discourses offer opportunities for the formation of new discourses of oppression (Sharp, Routledge, Philo & Paddison, 2000). Contradictory imagery is crucial to how power operates in maintaining oppositional discourses in subordinate positions. But, it is also crucial to providing subordinated peoples opportunities for crafting new identities and

new oppositional discourses. Racial triangulation itself is a fluid and contested process, and, as the environmental/racial discourse in northern New Mexico illustrates, reconciling contradictory imagery in the predominant discourse together with fundamental assumptions about the capacity of different ethnoracial groups for cultural change, helps maintain the subordinate status of oppositional discourses and subject positions.

### **The Foundations of Hispano Activism**

Environmental conflicts in northern New Mexico revolve around efforts of public land management agencies or private corporations to develop land and natural resources for commodity production or tourist or residential development. Environmental groups and local residents (Hispanos, Native Americans, and Anglos) often challenge such efforts. Although they sometimes work together as allies, they also bring separate challenges, and they often are at odds with one another. The challenges environmental groups bring are grounded in concerns for the preservation of biological diversity and the maintenance of the integrity of ecosystem functions. Efforts to protect such environmental values often entail campaigns to preserve old growth forests, maintain river flows for endangered fish habitat, curtail cattle grazing on public lands, stop mining activities, and prevent residential subdivision and tourist resort development.

Hispano challenges to both development and the conservation efforts of environmental groups, on the other hand, are rooted in concerns for preserving their way of life. Several interrelated issues underlie this concern: land loss, access to resources, poverty, economic competitiveness, and race. Land loss, past and present, is a major concern. Hispano residents of northern New Mexico have experienced a steady erosion

of their land base since American conquest of the region in 1848 (Carlson, 1990; Quintana, 1991; Westphall, 1983). The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, through which Mexico ceded the territory which is now the American Southwest to the United States at the conclusion of the Mexican War, provided for the protection of property rights of the citizens occupying the territory at the time of the transfer of sovereignty. However, implementation of the treaty was inefficient, and many Americans who came to the region in the late nineteenth century manipulated the legal system to their own advantage. As a result, many Hispano communities lost their common lands, and many of these were incorporated into the region's national forests in the early twentieth century (Ebright, 1994; Westphall, 1983). Many Hispanos therefore feel that their lands were stolen from them, and activism around the issue of expropriation of village common lands, which reached a peak in the 1960s when Reies López Tijerina organized efforts to recapture them (deBuys, 1985; Swadesh, 1968), continues to this day.

Their history of land loss informs the approach of many Hispanos to environmental issues in the region. Many consider efforts to restrict access to natural resources or to regulate land use practices to be part of a larger pattern of efforts to take the little land they have remaining and drive them out of the region (Knowlton, 1963; confidential interviews conducted in 1994 and 1995). Hispano activists interpret this as part of continuing historic patterns of oppression of Hispanos as a distinct ethnoracial group. (See Rosenbaum (1981) and Barrera (1979) for histories of Hispano resistance and oppression respectively.)

The fear of being driven from the land is nurtured by the history of steadily declining access to natural resources on public lands, as well as by concerns about rising

property taxes. Ranching families still smart over livestock reduction programs the Forest Service implemented in the early decades of the twentieth century (deBuys, 1985), as well as the rescinding of their permits to graze horses and milch cows on national forest lands in the 1960s (Wilmsen, 1997). Furthermore, families who have been in the region for many generations worry about being able to pay their ever increasing property taxes as an influx of migrants from other regions maintains an active real estate market that rapidly drives up property values.

Concerns about land loss and declining access to natural resources are accompanied by limited capital and access to credit. Although most Hispanos who live in rural areas of New Mexico's north central region own the land upon which they live (or some family member does), their cash incomes tend to be low. In many rural areas, where Hispanos make up a majority of the population (greater than 70% in many communities) per capita income falls below \$13,000 (compared to \$20,051 for the state, and \$30,413 for the nation) (University of New Mexico, 2001), and poverty rates of 20 percent or higher are not uncommon (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).

Small land holdings coupled with a dearth of well-paying jobs contributes to the low incomes and high poverty rates. Today most Hispanos who farm or ranch do so on a part time basis. Small farm sizes<sup>2</sup> make it difficult to compete with large-scale agribusiness, although some farmers are successfully producing for niche markets such as the organic produce market. To make ends meet, therefore, most farmers and ranchers

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<sup>2</sup> In north central New Mexico the majority of farms are under 500 acres (202 hectares) in size. In counties along the northern Rio Grande Valley, more than half of all farms are less than fifty acres (twenty hectares) (National Agricultural Statistics Service, 2002).

must earn wages in off-farm employment. Tourism is a major industry offering opportunities for employment, and in recent years Indian gaming has developed significantly, offering additional employment opportunities. Many Hispanos, however, do not welcome tourism, retail shopping, and residential subdivision development. Because they feel they will be offered only low-level, low-paying jobs in the service sector, they would prefer additional opportunities in farming, ranching, or wood products production – occupations that allow them to maintain their connection to the land (Brown & Ingram, 1987; KBDI-TV, 1991; Wilmsen, 1997).

The combination of high real estate values, increasing taxes, small land holdings, high poverty rates, and scarcity of well-paying employment applies significant pressure on many families to sell their land and move to Albuquerque, Los Angeles, or elsewhere in search of better economic opportunities. Selling one's land, however, is tantamount to losing one's culture. Since maintaining a connection to the land is a central feature of Hispano identity (Deutsch, 1987; Rodríguez, 1987), to sell one's land means much more than simply engaging freely in a market transaction to improve one's financial situation. It, along with other means of land loss, is seen as a major part of the erosion of Hispano culture, identity, wealth, and way of life.

### **Environmental Discourse in Northern New Mexico**

Hispano perspectives on environmental issues are thus deeply imbued with concerns about staying on the land, earning a decent living in land-based occupations, and maintaining cultural identity – all of which are constitutive of their way of life. Because of the centrality of maintaining that way of life, Hispano environmental activism, whether targeting corporate-sponsored economic development or the actions of



environmental groups, springs from a desire for a greater degree of control over the direction of economic, cultural, social and environmental change; in short, for a greater degree of self-determination.

Understandings of that way of life – its history, its traditions of working and caring for the land, its material culture and language, its relationship with Native peoples, its precarious position in the contemporary world – are constitutive of Hispano autoethnographies, environmental advocacy, *and* subjectivity. In contrast, the claims of environmental groups, government agencies, industry and others, spring from different understandings of history and different notions about traditional access to and use of land and resources of long-term residents of the region, whether Anglo, Native American, or Hispano. These understandings are indelibly shaped by a privileging of modern ecological science (Allen, Tainter, Pires & Hoekstra, 2001) as well as of contemporary economic theory. They form the basis of counter-challenges to Hispano autoethnographies and oppositional discourses.

Together, Hispano, Anglo, Native American, and other understandings of the region's ecology and history and the roles of different social groups in them are constitutive of environmental/racial discourse in the region. Three longstanding images are central to that discourse: 1) the image of Spanish injustices done to the Indians, 2) the image of Mexican inability to manage their land properly, and 3) the image of Indians being preeminent environmental stewards. These three images, along with contradictory images (e.g. the debauched and depraved contemporary Indian), are constitutive of the field of racial positions in northern New Mexico in which Anglos, Native Americans, and

Hispanos are placed relative to one another on axes of environmental stewardship, victimization and other purported attributes.

In the American West the triangulation of Anglos, Hispanos and Native Americans has been occurring for over one and a half centuries. The process is evident in historical documents from the early to mid- nineteenth century. For example, Paredes (1977) cites Mary Austin Holley writing in 1833 that American settlers in Texas assert that “five Indians will chase twenty Mexicans, but five Anglo-Americans will chase twenty Indians....” (page 9). Paredes points out that with this passage, Holley establishes “a hierarchy of bravery in Texas; first, Anglos, then Indians, and finally Mexicans—a ranking with which later Anglo observers would not quarrel” (page 9). Paredes also quotes historian Francis Parkman who wrote in 1857 that in the American West the human race “is separated into three divisions, arranged in order of their merits: white men, Indians, and Mexicans; to the latter of whom the honorable title of 'whites' is by no means conceded” (page 20).

The reproduction of this field of racial positions through triangulation is still occurring in northern New Mexico. In 1968 John Bodine (1968) referred to this field, and the devaluing of Hispano culture it entails, as the “tri-ethnic trap.” Bodine argued that Anglo Americans in Taos created a hierarchy of cultures in which their own culture was the pinnacle, Native American culture was second, and Hispano culture was valued the least. More recently Rodríguez (2001) has observed that the yearning of amenity migrants<sup>3</sup> to the region, past and present, for transcendence and redemption has bourgeois whiteness as its organizing principle and involves a privilege that “entails the

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<sup>3</sup> People who move to the region to live amidst its natural and cultural amenities.

power to construct a fanciful racial order in which the downtrodden Indian is elevated to a quasi-supernatural position of spiritual superiority, while Mexicans are relegated to the unclean lower class” (page 196). In environmental conflicts, triangulation is evident in the juxtaposing of stereotypes of Native American and Hispano relationships with the land and their relationship to one another.

### *Emphasizing Spanish Injustice to the Indians*

The triangulating of Native Americans and Hispanos relative to one another along an axis of victimization is evident in the way in which imagery of Spanish injustices perpetrated on the Indians is invoked in discourse. Native Americans are often depicted as greater victims than Hispanos and other Mexican Americans. For example, in movies it is common to depict atrocities committed against Indians, by both Anglos and Spanish or Mexicans alike, while eliding or playing down the violence and genocide perpetrated against Mexican Americans (Wilmsen, forthcoming). This imagery simultaneously derives from and reinforces the mythology surrounding Indians as a vanishing race (Lyman, 1982), as well as the ambiguous position Mexican Americans occupy as a result of having historically been both oppressors and the oppressed.

In northern New Mexico the history of Spanish injustices to the Indians is often invoked in relation to the issue of the status of former Spanish and Mexican land grants. A common counter argument to Hispano claims to former land grant lands is that the Spanish stole the lands from the Indians in the first place. There is truth in this claim. The Spanish did acquire their lands through theft, fraud, and manipulation of their own legal system. Although Spain was the only European power which enacted laws to protect indigenous property rights (Ebright, 1994), in practice administrators and settlers

throughout New Spain consistently broke these laws to take native lands for themselves (Spicer, 1962).

After U.S. conquest of the Southwest, Anglo Americans, and their Hispano collaborators, routinely manipulated the legal system and/or engaged in fraudulent practices to acquire Hispano lands (Ebright, 1994; Van Ness & Van Ness, 1980; Westphall, 1983). Thus, in failing to obey their own laws, American settlers and land speculators repeated what the Spanish had done to the Native Americans in their acquisition of Hispano lands.<sup>4</sup>

Yet, despite the fact that scholars have demonstrated that Hispano lands were taken through fraud and manipulation of the legal system (Ebright, 1994; Van Ness & Van Ness, 1980; Westphall, 1983), the story of Spanish theft of Indian lands is used to justify the history of American expropriation of Hispano lands. Indeed, this is a theme of longstanding in the American Southwest and is currently very much a part of both the regional and national environmental/racial discourse.

The idea that injustices the Spaniards perpetrated on the Indians justified contemporary prejudices and practices has a long history in the Southwest. Weber (1979), for example, has documented the way in which English and American travelers to Mexico and New Mexico during the early nineteenth century depicted the Spanish as authoritarian and tyrannical in their dealings with native peoples in contrast to the English whom they depicted as coming to the New World in search of liberty or better homes for their families.

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<sup>4</sup> The same can be said for the way in which Anglo Americans acquired Native American lands. They routinely broke the treaties with native nations that established native territorial ownership (Brown, 1970).

By the middle of the twentieth century, this notion was still firmly entrenched in the discourse. It is clearly evident, for example, in the 1948 movie “Red River” directed by Howard Hawks (1948). In this movie John Wayne plays the role of Tom Dunson who establishes a large cattle ranch in Texas, and whose herd of 10,000 head is the first to be driven over the Chisholm Trail. When first claiming the land for his ranch, Dunson argues with a *vaquero* in the employ of one Don Diego about who owns the land. When the *vaquero* explains that the King of Spain granted the land to Diego, Dunson replies, “You mean [Diego] took it away from whoever was here before – Indians maybe.” Dunson then declares that he is taking the land from Diego and shoots the *vaquero*, killing him. This scene suggests that the fact that the Spanish stole land from the Indians, together with the notion that Mexicans did not use their lands productively (I will discuss this aspect of the scene in the next section), is all the justification needed to take Mexican lands.

Today this justification is still very much a part of the environmental discourse both regionally and nationally. It has been expressed in recent postings to Hispanics Online, for example. Several reactions to Samuel Huntington’s (2004) article about Hispanic immigration in *Foreign Policy*, expressed both the claim that Anglos stole the land from the Spanish and the counterclaim that the Spanish stole it from the Indians in the first place. One writer, for example, stated, “...that huge piece of land is ours, we don’t need to ‘claim it’.” Another included the suggestion that Hispanics are native peoples: “The Anglo didn’t ‘create’ the land they ‘immigrated to’ (North America); they conquered it, and many times by using violence, from the North American Natives (which originally included Hispanics).” In response to these claims another writer

asserted, “The Spanish (Europeans) STOLE the US southwest lands from the United States Native American Indian tribes, NONE of which were ever called ‘Latino’, ‘Hispanic’, ‘Aztec’ ‘Mayan’ or ‘Mexican’.” Another writer justified the American conquest in terms of the logic of war: “Remember, to the victor belongs the spoils” (Hispanics Online, 2004).

In northern New Mexico the discourse includes the same claims and counterclaims. Frequently in my casual conversations with Forest Service officials, environmentalists, and other Anglo residents of the region when the discussion turned to the land grant issue, the comment would be made that “they [Hispanos] took it [the land] from the Indians.” One retired Forest Service official, in my interview with him, also invoked the logic of war, suggesting that the conquering of lands and peoples is just part of the march of history. He put it this way, “The Spaniards took it from the Indians. The Greeks took it from the Phoenicians” (confidential interview, 1993).

Thus, the notion that the Hispanos stole their land from the Indians is advanced as an interpretation of history to counter the Hispano claim that Anglos stole their land from them. The longstanding image of Spanish cruelty and unjust behavior toward the Indians strengthens this interpretation when it is advanced as a justification for maintaining the status quo in land tenure.

While this interpretation helps to justify continuation of the present distribution of property rights and helps prevent serious consideration of redress for Hispano communities that claim to have lost their land, recent events and discourse in northern New Mexico indicate that Hispano oppositional discourse, in combination with changes in the political landscape that have opened opportunities for the Republican party to

increase its presence in a traditionally Democratic region, has garnered the attention of influential people. In the late 1990s several unsuccessful bills were introduced in Congress to deal with the land grant issue, and in 2000 Congress directed the General Accounting Office (GAO) to conduct a study of New Mexico's land grant history and to recommend action on any injustices found (Neary, 2001).

This recent congressional activity was widely considered an attempt by Republicans and Democrats alike to win the Latino vote in the region (Gugliotta, 1998), and the GAO's report suggests that this may not be an inaccurate interpretation. The report, released in June, 2004, concludes that the federal government met its legal obligations to conduct due-process review of land grant claims in the late nineteenth century. It also concludes, however, that Congress may find compelling policy or other reasons to address the grievances of land grant heirs. For example, it notes that the process of reviewing land grants was inefficient and created hardships for many land grant claimants. It therefore proposes five possible options for congressional action ranging from no action to making payments to heirs, claimants or other entities, or returning some land to communities that did not receive all of the acreage they originally claimed (Sawtelle, Kasdan & Malcolm, 2004).

The report thus provides Congress with reasons for preserving current land tenure arrangements while simultaneously opening possibilities for addressing the concerns of its Hispano constituents. In its finding that Congress met its legal obligations, the report grants Congress the freedom to maintain the status quo. Yet, since it is based in part on interviews with land grant scholars, land grant heirs and land grant organizations, the report is a response to Hispano autoethnographies. As such it is significant that it

acknowledges that the settling of land grant claims in the late nineteenth century was a tedious process that caused hardship for many land grant heirs. In so doing, it provides an opportunity for Hispano activists to reiterate and reconfirm their autoethnography of being a dispossessed people. The report is neither a strong rebuttal of land grant claims, nor a sweeping endorsement of Hispano interpretations of history. Rather, it leaves room for parties on all sides of the issue to reiterate, reconfirm, or modify their positions.

Reaction to the congressional bills and proposal to conduct the GAO study revealed another feature of the discourse as well. Consider Sam Hitt's (of Forest Guardians, a Santa Fe-based environmental group) analysis of one of the bills:

“We believe the principle of no net loss of public lands should guide efforts to administer justice in this case. Two wrongs don't make a right. The privatization of millions of acres of public lands would deny public access, hasten the degradation of resources and deny future generations their heritage. However, if injustices can be well documented and the only way to address grievances to the satisfaction of land grant claimants is to transfer ownership of public lands, then such actions should only be taken to the extent that private lands of comparable or greater ecological value be acquired for inclusion on the public domain” (Hitt, 1999).

The *Santa Fe New Mexican* has similarly editorialized:

“This may be just the beginning of a quest for long-delayed justice; Indian treaties also were violated with great regularity during America's era of 'Manifest Destiny.' As it considers remedying wrongs of a century and more in the past, Congress must be prepared for far more than the arduous work than [sic] the



Spanish land grants entail. Our senators and representatives also must consider our nation of today: Would they put vast stretches of America's public lands back in private hands and open pristine parts of the country to commercial development?" (Editorial, 2001).

In stating that "two wrongs don't make a right", Hitt acknowledges that the expropriation of Hispano land was wrong, but suggests that committing the additional wrong of privatizing public land will not correct the errors of the past. Moreover, his suggestion that doing so would deny future generations their heritage reveals an assumption that the current arrangement of property ownership is fair.

The *New Mexican's* editorial similarly implies that current land tenure arrangements are fair. Moreover, its mention of Indian treaties is notable. While it does not cast Native Americans as greater victims than Hispanos (which is consistent with the history of Hispanos as both the oppressors and the oppressed), it does use the victimization of Native Americans to deflate Hispano (and Native American) claims. It does so in two ways. First in stating that the injustices were committed a century or more in the past, and suggesting that Congress must consider our nation of today, it implies not only that current land tenure arrangements are just, but also that our nation (the predominant culture) has evolved beyond the point of committing the kind of injustices it committed in the past, and moreover that present inequities are not rooted in the past. Second, it points out that there is another group that has suffered injustices, and that Hispano claims must therefore be carefully scrutinized in the context of other, often competing, claims.

Sparring over the rights of Native Americans and Hispanos to former land grant lands is not unprecedented in northern New Mexico. In the 1930s, then Commissioner of Indian Affairs John Collier zealously pursued an effort to purchase former Native American lands and return them to Pueblo Indian tribes. In response, Hispano activists and their supporters argued that if the government were to do this for the Pueblo Indians, it ought to do it for Hispano communities as well. In arguing for such action, Hispano supporters sometimes cast them as greater victims than Indians since the latter were the beneficiaries of many government assistance programs. Ultimately several former land grants were purchased and either managed exclusively for Hispano use by federal agencies, or actually returned to Hispano communities (Forrest, 1989).

That land was returned to Hispano and Native American communities is evidence that the oppositional discourses of both groups can, and do, lead to measures that benefit them. What will become of the contemporary General Accounting Office's study remains to be seen, however. Whether any more land is returned to Hispano communities is still an open question. What is certain is that Hispano land activists will use the findings of the report in pursuit of the return of lands, compensation, or both. Indeed, in September, 2004, a group of activists submitted a proposal to Congress to establish a trust fund for compensating land grant heirs (Salazar, 2004).

These efforts will, of course, be met with a response. Both Hitt's and the *New Mexican's* analysis contain hints as to the shape this response might take. It is significant that both raise the specter of environmental degradation. It is also significant that in doing so, both assume that Hispano and Native American land use would entail commercial development that is indistinguishable from the current development practices

of Anglo-led industries. This, in fact, is consistent with the other major images in the environmental/racial discourse in northern New Mexico. It construes contemporary Native Americans as no longer being good environmental stewards, thus contradicting and relegating to the past the image of Indians as preeminent environmental stewards (I will discuss this later), and it invokes the image of Mexicans as poor land managers.

### *Devaluing Hispano Environmental Knowledge*

The notion that Mexicans and Mexican Americans cannot manage their land is of old vintage in the Southwest. Recall the scene in “Red River” I discussed earlier in which Tom Dunson and the Mexican *vaquero* argue about the ownership of Don Diego’s land. When the *vaquero* reveals that Diego’s holdings span some 600 kilometers, Dunson’s sidekick, Nadine Groot, exclaims that it is “not decent” for Diego to own so much land because the land is “aching to be used [and] it never has been.” The implication of this remark is clear: Diego, and Mexicans in general, lack the desire or the skill, or both, to use land as it should be used.

This notion can be found in official documents from the 1940s as well. For example, in a 1943 memorandum to Forest Service Associate Chief Earle H. Clapp, signed only with the initials C.L.F., the author states:

“What to do with the underprivileged Spanish-American groups like those in northern New Mexico presents a problem that better heads than mine have failed to crack. These people, like the people in Puerto Rico and in some at least of the Latin-American countries, are like deer in certain respects; i.e., they will “overgraze” their environment to the point of starvation even though there is good under-used resources over in the next watershed. They do not migrate in

sufficient numbers when their home locality becomes overcrowded” (C.L.F., 1943).

This statement does more than simply demean Hispano land use practices. It simultaneously constructs Latin Americans, Puerto Ricans and Hispanos as a particular ethnoracial group with the essential qualities of exercising poor land use practices and furthermore not knowing how to look out for their own good. The paternalism in this comment clearly shares a lineage with past discourses about the White man’s burden. In making the comparison to deer, the author suggests that Latinos are unable to determine when their resources are being overused, and that they will blindly go on destroying their resource base just like unthinking animals. The overall implication of this comment is that Latinos need the White man’s superior knowledge and expertise to manage resources and to look out for their general welfare.

Today, the discrediting of Hispano land use occurs in an entirely different social context than it did in the 1940s. The civil rights movement succeeded in rendering overtly racist discourse unacceptable. While this facilitated Hispano activists’ claims to racial hybridity, it has also led to shifting the discourse from explicitly racial to cultural terms (Omi & Winant, 1994). The expansion of tourism as a major economic activity in northern New Mexico has also changed the discourse to include the romanticization of Native American *and* Hispano cultures. Finally, preservation of biological diversity and managing for outdoor recreation have become much more important land management objectives than they were in the 40s.

In these changed circumstances, Hispano activists have created a new identity for themselves and have crafted new oppositional discourses, and other players in

environmental conflicts in the region have responded with new variations on past characterizations of Hispano land use and environmental knowledge. Hispano land activists draw on two major aspects of their history in the Southwest in making their claim to being good environmental stewards: their lengthy settlement as an agricultural people in the region, and their intermarriage with Native Americans. They point out that they have been in the Southwest for 400 years and that widespread environmental degradation did not occur until the late nineteenth century. They thus claim that they are the “true environmentalists” who, by virtue of having learned about the land through maintaining a working relationship to it for the past four centuries, know how to care for it (confidential interviews conducted from 1994 to 1997). For example, writing in support of Hispano sheep grazing, María Varela asserted that “healthy environments will happen when people who practice agriculture are recognized as front line environmentalists: peers of those who profess to care for the land” (Varela, 1996, page 3).

Hispano activists further argue that they have an intimate knowledge of the land that enables them to care for it properly. As one rancher put it, “Who knows better than the one that's taking care of the sheep if you can graze it there or not? ... You're over there everyday with the sheep” (confidential interview conducted in 1994). Another rancher stated it this way, “The way I look at it is that the Forest Service people need me, not that I need them ... because I'm part of the community. I'm part of this area here and I know what's going on. They need my inputs. I don't need theirs. ... If I have something going on here, and I see something, I can help them. Not the other way around” (confidential interview conducted in 1994).

These claims are met with a number of characterizations of Hispano land use and environmental knowledge which bear direct linkages to past representations or to other discursive devices for maintaining White privilege. To be sure, some scholars and others have extolled the virtues of the Hispano land management system (Rock, 1976; Van Dresser, 1972; Van Ness, 1987), and others are now documenting Hispano environmental knowledge to make it more widely known and accepted (Peña, 1998). But discrediting Hispano land use and environmental knowledge as a means of justifying either the present land management system or proposed (non-Hispano) alternatives to it remains firmly entrenched as a discursive strategy in the broader discourse.

The notions that Hispanos are somehow lacking in their ability to manage land sustainably, and that Whites have shouldered the responsibility for doing so, have endured to the present day and are expressed in ways which reflect current social relations in northern New Mexico while simultaneously maintaining continuities with the past. This is apparent in published literature which Pulido (1998) and Peña and Martínez (1998) have summarized, as well as in current everyday discourse. For example, an Anglo leader of one environmental group I interviewed characterized Hispano villagers as unsophisticated in their understanding of basic biology and indifferent to its importance. He argued that leaders of Hispano activism have little respect “for the notion of the basic biology that underpins sustainability” and that “they don’t have the respect for the big, old yellow pines that I do, for the most part” (confidential interview conducted in 1995). While this speaker may not harbor any racial animus toward Hispanos, his remarks nonetheless essentialize Hispano activists as lacking respect for the

environment. Furthermore, his sentiments are rooted in the privileging of science as the knowledge system needed to manage resources sustainably.

Another way in which Hispano land use and environmental knowledge is discredited is the idea that Hispanos are bound by a “traditional” culture that is incapable of innovation and change. One assertion I encountered in my interviews with both environmentalists and Forest Service officials is that Hispanos are clinging to an outmoded way of life and that they need to go where the jobs are. Kenneth Weber (1991) argues in a similar fashion that traditional Hispano culture is not suited to commercial agricultural production, and implies that Hispanos are incapable of innovating in ways that will preserve their land base while simultaneously achieving sustainable agricultural production. Such assertions are founded on the notion that capitalism as it currently operates subjects everyone to immutable laws of the economy and that certain ways of life, and attributes such as attachment to place, are incompatible with these laws. Such beliefs simultaneously privilege the Anglo-derived economic system as the most highly developed and as based on universal norms of human behavior, and cast Hispanos and other non-Whites as culturally, rather than racially, deficient.

Even environmentalists sympathetic to Hispano causes may unwittingly contribute to the devaluing of Hispano environmental knowledge. This is evident in the remark an environmentalist I interviewed made in response to my question about cultural diversity in the environmental movement. He replied that “for some reason Anglo Americans are the ones who have been doing the job” of conservation and preservation of natural resources (confidential interview conducted in 1997). This comment embodies the notion that Anglo conservation and preservation practices are the standard against

which the land use and resource management practices of other racial and ethnic groups must be measured. While not vilifying any specific land use system, this point of view fully accepts the dominant story of American conservation arising with Gifford Pinchot, John Muir, and Teddy Roosevelt -- a story that excludes the many contributions of people of color and the working class (Anthony, 1999).

Yet, Europeanness is no guarantee that land use and resource management practices will be valued either. This is evident in the casting of Hispano environmental history in terms of European environmental transgressions. When I asked another environmentalist what he thought about historic Hispano impacts on the land he exclaimed, "They were Europeans!" (confidential interview conducted in 1995). This statement is a construction based on essentializing race, but it is a reversal of racial stereotypes made possible by the general critique of Western civilization and its relationship to nature that has been a major component of the environmental/racial discourse for several decades.

### *Indians as Preeminent Environmental Stewards*

This critique of the European relationship with nature brings up the third key image in the environmental discourse in northern New Mexico: the image of Indians as preeminent environmental stewards. This image has a long pedigree as part of a prescription for overcoming perceived excesses of the European utilitarian approach to land and natural resources. Benton and Short (1999) note that nineteenth century romantics such as George Catlin viewed the Indian as a part of wild nature that could serve as a counterpoint to industrial civilization. Cornell (1985) suggests that the writings of George Bird Grinnell and Ernest Thompson Seton around the turn of the



twentieth century established Indian approaches to the environment as fundamental to the growth of modern conservation. While the image competed with the image of Indians as poor land managers for the first half of the twentieth century (and occasionally still does), by the 1960s and 70s it became a popular symbol of an ideal of life in harmony with nature for which American society should strive (Benton and Short, 1999). Indeed, there have been many calls for adopting Native American philosophies and practices to guide contemporary resource management (Booth & Jacobs, 1990; Nelson, 1989; Nerburn, 1999; Plant & Plant, 1990; Swan, 1991).

Evidence that this image predominates today is not hard to find. Witness the Walt Disney movie *Pocahontas* and its theme song “Colors of the Wind” (re-recordings of which continue to be played on the radio) in which Pocahontas urges John Smith to consider the intrinsic value of nature and not to see it solely as a source of resources for financial gain. Consider also the continued use of the image of television-Indian Iron Eyes Cody as the logo of Keep America Beautiful, as well as the logo’s appearance on the packaging of Green Forest recycled-paper tissue products. The logo not only indicates that the company contributes to Keep America Beautiful campaigns, but enhances the overall effect of the packaging to convey to consumers a sense of the company’s environmental responsibility.

Further evidence of the image’s predominance is the frequent quoting of words wrongly attributed to Chief Seattle. Although the version of the speech that included remarks about the sacredness of the earth and humankind’s responsibility to it turned out to be the creation of movie script writer Ted Perry (Egan, 1992; Furtwangler, 1997), the speech is still cited on radio talk shows, is still quoted in books, and quotes from it still

adorn the walls of the offices of environmental organizations. The powerful appeal of the image of Native Americans as preeminent environmental stewards is evident in the words of Susan Jeffers, the creator of the children's book that popularized the spurious rendering of Seattle's speech, who said, "Basically, I don't know what [Seattle] said – but I do know that Native American people lived this philosophy, and that's what is important" (Egan, 1992).

The ascendance of the image of Indians as preeminent environmental stewards in the 1960s and 70s coincided with the emergence of a new Hispano identity. During this same time period, leaders of the Chicano movement were embracing their people's history of intermarriage and cultural exchange with Native Americans. In northern New Mexico in the 1960s, land grant activist Reies López Tijerina described new world Latinos as a "new breed" of people whose race and culture included elements from Native America and Europe (Swadesh, 1968, page 169).

This was a significant development in the crafting of Hispano autoethnographies. Prior to the activism of the 1960s many Hispanos denied any connection with Native Americans and instead argued that they were the direct descendents of original settlers from Spain (González, 1967; Oboler, 1995), and some Hispanos still make this claim. This claim to whiteness was (is) an attempt to elevate Hispano social status in the racial order of the United States (Oboler, 1995; Rodríguez, 2001).

In contradicting the older claim, Hispano land activists created a fundamentally different way of conceiving themselves, and this in turn produced opportunities for developing a new oppositional discourse. Forging this identity enabled land grant activists to strengthen their claim to former land grant lands by virtue of having ancestry

whose presence on the land extends back several millennia. It also enabled them to co-opt the discourse and claim a heritage of good environmental stewardship by virtue of their history of intermarriage with Native Americans, thereby directly challenging their triangulated position vis-à-vis Anglos and Native Americans.

Here is how people I spoke with put it. “One of the things that has happened in northern New Mexico that a lot of people don't know, or if they know, they don't realize the importance of it, there was intermarriage between the Spanish people and the Indian people.” Another interviewee told me that his great, great grandmother was an Apache who was stolen from the Indians in a raid. He said “A lot of that went on” (both quotes from confidential interviews conducted in 1994).

That such avowal of Native American heritage has become quite widespread is evident in the comments from Hispanics Online I quoted earlier in which one writer referred to Hispanics as indigenous people. Indeed, the notion has even spread to some sympathetic non-Hispanic activists who now refer to New Mexican Hispanos as “Indo-Hispano” people (Anthony, 2002).

The fundamental link between Native American heritage, good environmental stewardship, and claims to the land is evident in the public and private statements of Hispano activists and others. One man I interviewed, for example, stated,

“My ancestors have been here for so long already. They have taken care of this area longer than what you and I can think of. They would make a living off of this land here.... We have a lot of native people here that have roots as Native Americans – Indians. I am part of one. I'm part of a tribe. I can't claim myself as an Indian, but I do have a whole bunch of Indian blood in me. I think that this

area belongs to me. Not belongs to anybody else; it belongs to people here. They settled here. They put their roots here. They cleaned the forest; they had everything” (confidential interview conducted in 1994).

Another example of the connection between Native American ancestry and good environmental stewardship comes from Truchas, New Mexico. While leading a tour (which I attended) of a cooperative management arrangement between the Forest Service and a Hispano community-based organization in October, 2000, the leader of the organization, Max Cordova, claimed that the community members have knowledge of environmental stewardship and have roots in the land dating back thousands of years. Yet another example are the words of Santa Fe-based activist Erwin Rivera who, while speaking at a rally in Santa Fe in December, 1995, in support of sheep grazing and other land-based occupations in northern New Mexico, asserted that Hispanos have knowledge of the environment that enables them to take care of the land. Rivera concluded his speech saying, “Tenemos sangres de Indios. Tenemos raices en la Tierra. Somos indígenas” [We have Indian blood. We have roots in the land. We are indigenous people. (from my December, 1995, field notes. My translation)].

Although such claims are indicative of a fundamental reshaping of identity for many Hispanos, the contradictory imagery in the axes of relative worth facilitate the continued subordination of Hispano oppositional discourses, autoethnographies, and, indeed, identity itself. Despite European culture being decried as having introduced an unsustainable land use system from Europe, the discourse still privileges scientific knowledge as the knowledge needed to manage the environment correctly, and establishes Whites as the arbiters of that knowledge system (Guha, 1997). Moreover,

when Hispanos are considered European, it is often in the context of Spanish injustices to the Indians or European environmental transgressions. Anglos are thus still placed highest on the axis of environmental stewardship.

The image of Indians as preeminent environmental stewards is also undermined in a number of ways, which, in turn, undermines Hispano claims to environmental legitimacy by virtue of their Native American ancestry. First, to the extent that Indians are construed as part of nature, they are considered to rightfully fall under the management prerogatives of Whites.<sup>5</sup> Second, to the extent that Indians are considered to have knowledge or skills to offer in the area of environmental stewardship, the predominant discourse establishes Whites as better able to learn that knowledge and those skills than other people, often including the Indians themselves. Consider, for example, depictions of Anglos in the Southwest in artistic creations. As Rodríguez (2001) has pointed out in the past, on those rare occasions when Anglos were the subjects of artistic creations, the preference was to depict them as romanticized mountain men or cowboys. Rodríguez points out that while the mountain men are “Indianized” in the art, cowboys are depicted as “the quintessential gringo hero” even though cowboy culture derives ultimately from borderland *vaqueros* (page 197). The depictions of mountain men as adopting Indian ways, and the erasure of any identifiable trace of the Mexican origins of the cowboy reveals the assumptions that Whites have a superior ability to learn from the Indians, and that Mexicans have nothing to offer.

Again this is a longstanding assumption that has been reflected in Hollywood movies. In the opening scenes of the 1962 movie *How the West Was Won* (Ford, Marshall & Hathaway, 1962) the narrator describes mountain men as “more Indian than

the Indian.” Cementing the notion that Whites have a superior ability to learn from the Indians that this narration conveys is the fact that in the movie the mountain men are depicted as White even though historically there were African American mountain men. The purported unique ability of Whites to learn from Indians has also been portrayed in the movies in the theme of the White man who is adopted by a tribe. Examples of movies that use this formula include “Hombre” (released in 1966), “A Man Called Horse” (1970), “Billy Jack” (the top grossing film in the United States in 1971), and “Dances with Wolves” (1990). The ubiquity of this theme is remarkable in light of the fact that the frequent intermarriage and cultural exchange among African Americans and Native American groups throughout the nation (Katz, 1997) is rarely, if ever, mentioned.

Of course cinema and the graphic arts evolve and change, reflecting and reinforcing changes in the discourse. Today the tendency is increasingly to omit Anglos from Southwestern art altogether as a means of further exoticizing the region (Rodríguez, 2001). A parallel tendency is evident in the movies. Today cinematic representations have changed such that Whites are often depicted as socially clumsy and misunderstanding in the context of alien cultures. Nevertheless, because they are able to learn enough, or because, it is assumed, they do not really need to know very much about the alien culture, the White protagonists still manage to achieve their objectives and pull through their encounters with an alien race and culture internally strengthened (see for example *The Mexican* starring Julia Roberts and Brad Pitt (Verbinski, 2001)). The effect is similar to Rodríguez’s “vanishing Anglo” because in both cases the “normalness”, strength, and adaptability of White culture are taken for granted, and the alien culture is exoticized for facile consumption.

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<sup>5</sup> I am indebted to Brinda Sarathy for this insight.

A third way in which the predominant discourse devalues the image of Indians as preeminent environmental stewards, and thereby also devalues Hispano claims, is through historicizing the imagery. The imagery is of a mythologized past (Berkhofer, 1978). As such, it does not apply to contemporary Native Americans who are more likely to be thought of in terms of imagery of the debauched Indian. There is thus a deep, lingering skepticism about the ability of present-day Native Americans to manage their resources sustainably. While Native Americans may, in some instances, be able to use this mythological history to their advantage, non-Indian experts are still largely accorded the authority to determine what features of Native American resource management systems are worthy of resurrection or preservation.

It is telling, for example, that despite the construction of Indians as preeminent environmental stewards, stories of modern-day Native Americans managing their lands sustainably are conspicuously scarce in the wider environmental/racial discourse (although there are some). This translates into extreme caution in giving land back to Native American groups or conferring responsibility on them for managing and caring for land. In instances when land is returned to specific tribes, conservation easements and other conditions of use may be placed on the parcels in question. Some tribes are amenable to such conditions while others chafe at being subjected to White claims to authority in environmental management that such a practice represents (Rosen, 2000).

### **Conclusion**

The undermining of Hispano claims and recently formed identity is an instance of the constitution of power relations through triangulation processes in which the reconciling of contradictions in axes of relative worth is central. These contradictions

enable power to adapt and change and continually assert itself, while simultaneously enabling subordinates to challenge their positionality.

This raises the question of the degree to which Hispano and other activists are historical agents who can, through the formulation of new identities and oppositional discourses, lift themselves out of their subordinate status. Earlier Hispano claims to Whiteness not only failed to do so, but were predicated on a denial of a particular aspect of Hispano history: intermarriage with Native Americans. Hispano activists' claim to racial hybridity is, thus, a significant change. It arises from a fundamental reexamination of their history and acceptance of a particular aspect of that history as part of an attempt to claim the right to define themselves and to escape their triangulated position in the racial order in the United States.

But does this new subjectivity enable Hispanos to escape their subordinate status? Their oppositional discourse, which is deeply rooted in that subjectivity, has effected change. It has, for example, helped them effect some change in national forest policy on the local level through negotiating changes in forest planning documents (Wilmsen, 2001). Moreover, some Hispano communities have had land returned to them in the past, and more land could be returned or reparations of some other kind could be awarded in the near future.

Yet, triangulation provides opportunities for reassertion of the power relations constituted through the interchange between predominant and oppositional discourses. Consider the changes wrought by the social movements of the 1960s and 70s and the subsequent response. The widespread censure of racism ushered in by the civil rights movement facilitated the emergence of Hispano claims to hybridity. At the same time,



environmental activism brought the celebration of Indians as good environmental stewards to the fore, reinvigorating one aspect of the noble savage imagery. These developments in turn allowed the creation of new Hispano oppositional discourses: having rights to the land that extend back millennia, and being heirs to Native American environmental stewardship practices.

Yet, the predominant discourse itself changed in response to these developments. While overtly racist discourse and behavior are unacceptable in today's society, the marking and denigrating of difference is now done in cultural terms (Kim, 2000; Omi & Winant, 1994). Hispano culture is thus seen as static and unchanging and as an impediment to Hispanos adopting sustainable land use practices. White culture, on the other hand, is seen as dynamic, able to adapt and change, and notions such as Whites being better able to learn from the Indians are taken for granted and barely given a second thought. Similarly, the predominant discourse undermines the new Hispano oppositional discourses and autoethnographies by historicizing Native American environmental stewardship skills, continuously questioning of Hispano environmental legitimacy, and casting Hispanos as heirs to unsustainable European land use practices as well as to the Spanish oppression of Native Americans. Hispano and Chicano activists, in turn, have continued to challenge this undermining of their hybrid identity by, for example, exploring more deeply the artistic heritage they share with Native Americans (Toomey, 1996), as well as what it means to be Native American-Chicano in a technological world (Payan, 1999).

The efforts of subordinate groups to escape their subordinate status are thus themselves constitutive of triangulation processes. While their oppositional discourses are

rooted in deeply held beliefs about themselves and their history (Kim, 2000), that subjectivity itself does not preexist and is not external to the material world (Mitchell, 1990). Rather, identity and discourse (predominant and oppositional) are constituted through the unfolding of power relations. Kim (2000) is justified in arguing that there are continuities across time in oppositional discourses, but the unfolding of power relations also allows for the creation of new identities. Benford (1993) is also justified in arguing that oppositional discourses are negotiated through intramovement competition, but oppositional discourses are rooted in identity and are as much the product of deeply held beliefs as they are of political strategies. The positioning of subjects in the environmental/racial order is thus accomplished through continuous negotiation, adaptation, and reassertion of imagery in the evaluating of ethnoracial groups relative to one another. Rather than the almost monolithic process Kim describes, racial triangulation is a fluid and contested process in which contradictory imagery in the discourse facilitates the maintenance of the environmental/racial order, even as it enables subordinates to challenge their racialized positions and effect change in the distribution of material wealth, rights and privileges.

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