Identity has become a key topic of interest to modern researchers examining ethnic group boundaries, racial marginality and conflict, and cultural diversity. While personal and social identity dynamics receive most of the attention from these writers, we propose that there are much broader, overarching identity categories that stem from major socioeconomic changes. This is especially the case considering the intense and highly disruptive culture change sequences related to colonialism (Diamond 1998), post-colonial nationalism, and the growth of capitalism in Mexico and the United States (Robinson 1993). The consequences of these changes have continued to plague people to this day. Such an identity configuration integrates large numbers of people from different regions and contrasting cultural traditions into a more or less generic occupational (i.e., ascribed laboring) status. In this paper, we examine how Chicano1 and Chicana2 identities are informed by macrostructural forces and cultural change dynamics.

Social identities are historical constructs and modern Chicano identity is a result of historical processes (Balibar and Wallerstein 1991), reflecting a multiple heritage of Indian, Spanish, Mexican and Anglo antecedents. This heritage includes major changes in social and economic structures as well as the cultural reformulations that have accompanied them. The formation of this identity has been affected by various factors specific to the Chicano multifaceted background. Layered-on historical sequences, such as longterm economic, as well as cultural and racial, domination and oppression by the Spanish and, later, the Anglos, have constrained the habits and practices of the Chicano people. The interplay of such forces and their impact on Chicanos have shaped their identity (Bernal and Knight 1993; Melville 1994; Menchaca 1995).

The analysis of Chicano identity formation must begin by tracing how class, race and gender have been socially constructed within each historical period, how these social constructions have changed
through time, and how these transformations have cumulatively unfolded into the present. Macroeconomic and political forces must be tracked and dissected in ways to lay bare their effects on the formation of the various overarching identities of the Chicano. Historical changes are here divided into four major periods characterized by related structural changes:

1. INDIAN: Pre-Columbian, pre-1519.
3. MEXICAN: Mexican independence and nationalism, 1821–1846 for Mexicans residing in the United States after the 1846–48 war, but up to 1910 for those in Mexico.

Each of these historical stages has added new dynamics and dimensions to the formation of Chicano character. Our purpose is to underscore the role of these periods in shaping modern Chicanos; to show how a pre-industrial, autonomous people were transformed by outside influences and integrated into an industrial, multi-national entity (Acuna 1988). This paper offers as well a cultural record of the transformation from indigenous to peasants to immigrants, with people in each transition becoming further integrated into a broader, more complex, yet even larger political economic arrangement.3

Stage I: Indigenous Pre-Columbian Period (prior to 1519)

Many indigenous groups or tribes arose in Mexico during the pre-Columbian period. Their condition—their means of survival, distribution of economic resources, sociopolitical organization, and cultural beliefs—inform their everyday experiences and thus their macrostructural identity. Although often culturally and politically very different, these indigenous groups shared an identity based on the larger macrohistorical forces at play. Interaction and communication (not always voluntary, and often through domination and oppression) between the various indigenous groups present at a certain time led to some similarities of religious and cultural beliefs. Their identity as indigenous members of the region was formed by their hands over thousands of years of trial and error. While cultural contrasts and conflicts characterized the experiences of many of the tribal groups, it was the case that an egalitarian, communal base provided an overarching identity where resources and some degree of personal respect was available to most of the population. Upon the arrival of the first Europeans, the Spanish, the contact, conflict, and change experience functioned to more fully affirm their broadly
based indigenous identity, particularly as they became recognised as the vanquished.

The first indigenous inhabitants of the Americas are thought to have migrated from Asia, crossing the Bering Straits during the last Ice Age when a bridge of land connecting Asia and Alaska was formed. These early immigrants spread throughout the American continent, subsisting by hunting and gathering (Wolf 1959; Coe 1994). The first signs of an agricultural revolution in Mexico appear around 7,000 B.C. in the Tehuacan Valley. The plants produced were small, but after 5,500 years of gradual experimentation, the present form of maize was developed. Beans, squash and chile joined maize to form the primary staples in their diet (Coe 1994). This adaptation was reflective of the bulk of all the tribes, and overwhelmingly the basis for their far-reaching identity, religious and cultural differences aside.

Associated with agriculture is a sedentary lifestyle and more complex sociocultural and political traditions. By at least 2,000 B.C. the archaeological record begins to reflect an increasing complexity and an importance placed on religion and military practices among certain indigenous groups (Hassig 1992). Around 1,500 B.C., one group of Indians, the Olmecs, developed into a complex culture. They inhabited the lowland region south of Veracruz, along the eastern coast of Mexico, where they flourished until 300 B.C. (see Bernal 1969). Subsequent Mesoamerican groups adopted and reformulated many Olmec customs and beliefs; for this reason the Olmecs have been referred to as the Cultura Madre, or Mother Culture (Bernal 1969; Weaver 1993). Different indigenous groups have arisen in various time periods and places. The following section will focus on the Aztecs as a detailed example of one of the indigenous groups and civilizations of Mexico. However, it should be noted that the macrohistorical indigenous identity of Chicanos stem from many other tribes and experiences, each of which underwent their own contact, conflict, and change sequence.

Beginning in A.D. 900, and continuing over the following centuries, the Chichimecas began migrating from the Northwest into the central valley of Mexico. According to legend, their mythological homeland was Aztlan, now considered the southwestern United States (Townsend 1992). One of the later waves of migration brought the Aztecs to central Mexico, where the city of Tenochtitlan was founded in A.D. 1325 (Prescott 1931). Later expansion throughout the valley of Mexico, and even beyond, made for a very complicated economic and political network, with scholars still at odds whether it was a system based on conquest and empire or a larger version of communalism and confederacy. Nevertheless, the focus for this paper will be the Aztecs, irrespective of the above debate,
particularly as the subsequent conquest experience tended to firm up the indigenous macrostructural identity by lumping all Indians together.

The Aztec class system was based on land ownership. Their basic socioeconomic unit was the calpulli – a group of kin relatives (both fictive and real) who communally owned the land and resided together (Wolf 1959; Leon-Portilla 1992). There were various and many calpulli within Tenochtitlan; at least twenty, according to some experts (Coe 1994). Every eligible household head within a calpulli was entitled to a plot of land to support his family. The members within each calpulli were known as macequales, or commoners, and made up approximately 85 percent of the population, generally estimated to be over 300,000. The macequales also provided labor service for public works or for the ruling elites.

The Aztec social stratification system was initially egalitarian, but over the decades became less so, as the division of labor increased (Berdan 1982, 1989). Each calpulli had a high council with elected tlatoques (speakers). One person from this council would be designated the calpulli spokesperson (Townsend 1992). All calpulli spokespeople would meet as a council to advise the head of government. The governing body of Aztec society was made up of this council, as well as four war chiefs, a chief civil leader, and an elective monarchy. This democratic practice, however, was gradually phased out as the Aztec people flourished (Berdan 1989). The tlatoque increasingly gained control over their lands, and the macequales provided them with tribute and labor (Berdan 1982).

The ruling elite were known as pipiltin, making up between two to ten percent of the population. They claimed descent from the Toltecs, and, because of this lineage, superiority over other tlatoques, thus legitimizing their claims to dominance (Wolf 1959). They directed religious and political concerns from the center of the city. Other residents in the city were the skilled artisans, the tectecuhtin (warriors), and the pochteca (merchants).

The two lowest groups in terms of social status were the mayeques and the tlacotin. The mayeques worked the fields on a permanent basis for the ruling elites, receiving just enough to maintain their households. The tlacotin were indentured servants who sold themselves to the elites for a set period of time and lived on their land as permanent laborers. Their tenure varied from a few years up to a lifetime; however, their offspring were born free. These two groups combined seldom rose above ten percent of the total population.

A person’s position in the social stratification system affected his or her social and economic reality. Along with factors such as gender and age, it shaped one’s experiences and subjective identity. Elite
groups obviously had more power and prestige than the macequales. Class boundaries were nevertheless open enough to allow upward mobility for some worthy lower-born men; although the pipiltin were the elite group, gifted and motivated macequales were often provided the opportunity to attend upper echelon schools (Leon-Portilla 1992). The Aztec status system was thus based both on ascription, or birthright, and achievement (Berdan 1982).

Race was not as significant a factor in determining relative status and identity during the Aztec period, but other forms of prejudice and discrimination, such as language and culture, were the source of distinction. Thus identified, only the enemy groups would be subject to oppression. Cultural cues also served to differentiate among the various Aztec social classes, thus affecting the opportunities a person had for social mobility.

Although individual subjective realities and identities varied according to the interconnection of other factors with class, the Aztecs were bound together by their cultural and religious beliefs. These beliefs shaped their overall identity. As a state-level society, the Aztecs developed a collective ideology supporting a unified culture and economy (Coe 1994). Religion was the primary expression of this ideology. The Aztecs believed in a whole range of deities; Huizilopochtli, the sun god, being one of the most important. Pyramids were built to honor the gods; the size of the pyramid and temple reflected the significance of the deity (Berdan 1982).

Religion permeated every aspect of Aztec life, but many other cultural traditions were also a part of their world: science, mathematics, astronomy/astrology, architecture, philosophy, medicine, education, music, stone-carving, sculpture, and jewelry-making. Information about all these cultural traditions, as well as everyday Aztec life and history, were recorded in the form of elaborate, beautifully illustrated codices, written in their native language, Nahuatl, a language still spoken by many Indian residents of the area.

Aztec macrostructural identity was thus glued together by these religious beliefs and cultural practices. Although the Aztec population as a whole did not have equal access to all of these cultural traditions, their religious beliefs affected them in a broader, deeper way to help forge and strengthen their collective mind-set. Nevertheless, this overarching identity was to be disrupted by new cultural forces and macrohistorical processes; the age of discovery and exploration which brought the Spanish to the New World.

In 1519, under Cortes, contact was made with the Mayas of the Yucatan Peninsula. From here, the Spaniards moved toward the center of Mexico determined to colonize the land, often wiping out
whole groups of Indians in their way. One person who played a key role in the conquest was Dona Marina (La Malinche), a young Indian maiden offered to Cortes as a gift (Diaz del Castillo 1956). Fluent in both Nahuatl and the Maya dialect, she soon learned Spanish and was able to freely translate for Cortes.

An Aztec legend also eased the Spanish intervention. According to myth, a tall, bearded, white god, Quetzalcoatl (The Feathered Serpent), left the Valley of Mexico several centuries earlier, with the downfall of the Toltec empire, vowing that one day he would return. The Indians thought that Cortes was the returning Quetzalcoatl. As a result, the Aztec ruler, Montezuma, misread the motives of his opponent and showered him with gifts of gold, hesitating to confront him (Leon-Portilla 1962; Padden 1967; Coe 1994). When confrontation eventually occurred, it ended with the downfall and destruction of Tenochtitlan in 1521. However, over twenty years passed before most of the other Indian groups were conquered. The Mayas, despite their defeat in a number of minor, earlier skirmishes, were not subdued until 1846. Some groups, such as the Yaquis of the northwestern region, resisted the Spanish much longer (Spicer 1962). In fact, social movements and political struggles throughout Mexican history revolved around many Indian groups' resistance and refusal to be incorporated into the new broad-based category unfolding under the Spanish.

Nevertheless, major forces brought new cultural conditions to bear on indigenous groups and affected their indigenous identity. The degree of influence from this contact varied across the country. Those Indians who fled to the mountains and hinterlands, managed to escape the worst of the contact and conflict; but even then, the process of diffusion affected them to some degree. Some willingly abetted the Spanish in taking on new roles and a different status. Native experiences thus varied according to factors such as time, people, place, as well as gender, class, and age. These factors along with larger macroeconomic forces (as capitalism gradually began to replace more mercantilist capitalist modes of accumulation) were later able to reframe and revamp the indigenous macrostructural identity. While a few Indians, especially the nobles, were able to retain some amount of authority and status, the bulk of the indigenous population underwent a major transformation (Wolf 1982; Cockcroft 1990).

Stage II: Spanish Colonial Era (1521 to 1821)

The Spanish conquest brought in changes which disrupted and transformed pre-Columbian life. First, millions of Indians died as a result of exposure to European disease. Second, land ownership
came under the control of the Spanish and the introduction of large-scale mining enterprises required the relocation of many Indians (Wolf 1982; Raat 1992). Those that did not become miners were transformed into a new peasantry and accorded 'minority' status,7 serving as a cheap source of labor. Third, the forced adoption of Christianity resulted in a religious syncretism of Indian and Catholic beliefs (Lockhart 1992). The 1531 vision of the Virgen de Guadalupe, a brown-skinned apparition of the Virgin Mary, by a recent Indian convert, Juan Diego, hastened the natives’ acceptance of Christianity (Johnson 1980; Taylor 1987). Lastly, the Spanish introduced a racist agenda (Vigil and Lopez n.d.) which they used to justify their colonial expansion.

The Spanish went through several phases to lay down the foundations for the development of a peasantry and thus a new identity for the indigenous. Adapting to and incorporating many Indian practices, the Spanish developed a new tribute system of the encomienda, whereby their military leaders (encomenderos) were granted land rights as well as Indian subjects to labor on the land (Zavala 1943). This system was short lived and was phased into a more permanent arrangement reflecting the same basic relationship between the groups. Spaniards were thus left free to pursue a non-laboring, aristocratic life as gente de razon, (people of reason) or Hidalgos (hijos de algo, or sons of something) (Wolf 1982). Many Indian leaders (former pipiltin and local caciques, or chieftains) managed to escape becoming laborers by collaborating with the Spanish, helping them to gain and maintain power through traditional practices and tribute networks. In return, they were rewarded with posts as minor colonial administrators. However, they were scorned and feared by the indigenous majority who considered them traitors. This indigenous aristocracy, nevertheless, was gradually phased out as the criollos (Spanish born in America) gained a stronger grip on power in the late colonial period (Wolf 1982; Gruzinski 1988). The bulk of the population was subjected to this type of reordering. However, many tribes and regions were able to maintain a certain amount of autonomy and separatedness as “republicas de indios” or mission-related units. Nonetheless, all still were integrated, either directly or indirectly, rapidly or incrementally, into the adjustments leading to peasantry.

To help protect the Indian population, a new program called repartimiento was introduced by the Spanish crown to curb the power of the “conquerors-turned-encomenderos” and help establish a broader Spanish ruling elite. Indians were to be considered free, and as laborers were redistributed and allowed to work for wages for a specified number of days per year. Nevertheless, the exploitation of Indian labor continued. Wages were low and most laborers wound
up working more than their specified number of days. Landowners became their creditors as goods and money were advanced to them; debt peonage was thus established whereby the natives were bonded for life to certain employers. This led to the rise of the Mexican *hacienda* (large landed-estate), which accelerated peasantization of the Indian class, reshaping their macrostructural identity (Zavala 1943; Israel 1975; Wolf 1982). Sugar, coffee, maize, pulque, rice, bananas, wheat, tobacco, chocolate, and other crops, as well as cattle ranching in the north, gradually became the mainstays of a growing economy (Florescano 1984).

Overall, the peasant villages that sprung up tended to be small-sized agricultural communities that were bound up with larger macroeconomic market forces (Foster 1988). Many peasant groups today have managed to maintain some social isolation from the main currents of national life; they tend to be tradition-bound and are “part societies” or “part cultures” in relation to the larger colony, urban center, or state. The peasant economic production unit is the household (either nuclear or extended). It is a productive unit which is ‘horizontally’ involved with other households like it and ‘vertically’ involved with superordinate power holders (Wolf 1966). Peasant villagers periodically come together to trade with each other on a market day. Their limited contact with the outside world usually occurs on these market days, when middlemen arrive looking for cheap agricultural products. Although in social isolation from the rest of the State, peasants are nevertheless governed by its larger macroeconomic forces, participating in an impersonal market economy where prices are driven by supply and demand. It has been argued that because of their lack of economic power, peasants are greatly concerned with social power (Colby 1967). For example, prestige and respect in the community are gained through service. This can take the form of sponsoring one of the traditional village fiestas, or by active participation in the cofradías (cargos) or “civil-religious hierarchy.” Networks of reciprocal obligation and trust are also established through ritualized ties of fictive kinship, such as compadrazgo (co-parenthood).

Peasants have often been described (and perhaps stigmatised) as having a certain ‘peasant mentality’ with characteristics such as being fatalistic, passive, distrustful, superstitious and conservative (Foster 1988). As an example, Foster maintains that Mexican peasants tend to “see their social, economic and natural universes – their total environment – as one in which almost all desired things in life such as land, other forms of wealth, health, friendship, love” exist in quantities that are insufficient to even fill their minimal requirements and to believe there is no direct way for them to increase their available supplies (Foster 1988: 124). He refers to this
belief as the “image of limited good” and holds that it forges attitudes of envidia (envy) toward one another (Foster 1988: 124).

On the other hand, accounts such as Foster’s often emphasize the harmony and reciprocity of peasant life and pay little attention to external influences and the hardships of poverty and rural life (see Hewitt de Alcantara 1984 and Kearney 1996 for further insight into the romanticization of peasants within anthropology). The term ‘closed corporate communities’ has also been used to refer to those peasant villages with land ownership and distinctive cultural traditions. This term, too, however, implies that peasant communities are closed to outside influences and are “unchanging.” Controversy and debate still surround discussions of the nature of peasant life, but few deny that resistance to change has been motivated more by deep-rooted mistrust of outsiders rather than some rigid attitudes to innovation.

The Mexican hacienda system aided the development of a peasantry by creating one of the basic macrostructural characteristics of a peasant society: the patron/client relationship, whereby the cultivator becomes subject to the demands and sanctions of power holders of a higher social level (Wolf 1966). The owner of the hacienda (the hacendado) controlled large parcels of land and, in order to survive, Indians would become tied to the hacienda under debt peonage. If their debt could not be worked off before their death, it would be inherited by their children. Thus, a permanent group of peons settled on the hacienda. Some of them were allowed to farm small plots of land for themselves. Bound to the land, the peons often bought on credit from the tiendas de raya (hacienda store), further benefiting the hacendados. Landowners, in turn, provided housing, though often of poor quality (Chevalier 1966; Whetten 1969). Some Indians became servants, residing in the master’s house. Others, although living in neighbouring villages, became dependent on the hacienda for protection, seasonal employment and often grazing rights on fallowed hacienda land. As noted, many Indians were able to escape the hardships of the hacienda system by living in republicas de indios, communal mission towns in southern Mexico (Chance 1978).

Along with the new macroeconomic system came a cultural and religious syncretism which occurred at many levels, hastening the shift from indigenous to peasant macrostructural identities, amalgamations that somewhat steadied the massive changes underway. Cultural change did not occur peacefully, but was forced through Spanish domination. Conflict was especially acute over religious beliefs (Lockhart 1992). Missionaries, beginning with the Franciscans in 1524, followed by the Dominicans and Augustinians, were responsible for the Indian Christianization policy. Although
natives resisted the Spanish program of forced assimilation, Old and New World traits did blend and evolve to produce the present cultural ethos of the Mexican people (Gruzinski 1988). Numerous social habits and cultural traits evolved through syncretism. Even the Spanish language underwent a syncretic change; Indian words were integrated to represent features of Indian reality that were alien to the Spaniards (Hill and Hill 1986). This syncretic process – or *mestizaje* – also occurred in philosophy, jewelry-making, pottery, art, architecture and music. One of the most creative offshoots was the development of Mexican food (Ortiz de Montellano 1990).

This *mestizaje* process (racial and cultural blending) unfolded unevenly and affected each group differently. There were regions and tribes that underwent a cultural syncretism – that is, fashioned a Mexican culture in a new bilingual-bicultural way. There were also many who remained culturally indecisive, leading to widespread anomie (normlessness, or nepantli, as the Aztecs referred to it). Such a person who lived in a cultural limbo was generally perceived as a cultural marginal (*cholo, from the Spanish solo, alone*). Other groups, on the other hand, continued resisting and refused to adopt Spanish customs, stressing the survival of Indian culture through nativist resistance movements, such as the caste wars of Yucatan in the 19th century (Gruzinski 1988; Fariss 1993). Some, such as the Tarahumara and Yaqui of northwestern Mexico, chose instead to retreat into wild, unsettled regions (Raat 1992).

The time and place of contact also strongly affected the direction and rate of cultural change. The colonial experience in the north, for example, differed from that of the rest of Mexico. Here, Indians and mestizos (including persons of African and Indian admixtures) came to play a key role in the further expansion of the colonial empire, and it was they who brought Spanish culture (or a hybrid version of it) to the north rather than the Spanish per se (McWilliams 1990; Conference Statement 1996). Nevertheless, many of them oppressed and exploited the Indians in the new territories. Each region in Mexico therefore has a distinct cultural tradition and worldview, based on the different indigenous and peasant histories of interactions and adaptations to external influences. Nonetheless, a peasant macrostructural identity can be recognized as a shared, overarching characteristic of the majority population, particularly since power and control of land, labor, and wealth fell into the hands of “others.”

The syncretic process was most clearly reflected in the emergence of a peasant social and cultural life in the Indian communities, especially in the highlands of Mexico. These communities are typically made up of indigenous peoples who all speak the same Indian language. The villages are generally cohesive and tend to be
self-governing through ritual and religion. They show an interesting blend of indigenous and Spanish customs and beliefs. Religious beliefs comprise a peasant variant of Spanish Catholicism, infused with pre-Columbian folk beliefs, especially in medicinal practices utilizing traditional herbal and curanderos (folk curers) ritual curing.

The diversity of cultural customs and indigenous languages spoken within different peasant communities across Mexico must also be emphasized in understanding peasant macrostructural identity. Low status was accorded to the peasant class in colonial Mexico. Social relations were structured to keep Indians and people of mixed racial heritage (mestizos) socially immobile. Social status was determined by race, as well as class (Morner 1967; Elizondo 1983). Spaniards born in Spain (gachupines) were at the top of the hierarchy, occupying the highest positions of religious, political, economic and social life. The acquisition of Spanish culture was considered the gateway to success. However, rigid class and racial biases combined to limit social mobility and help seal one’s macrostructural identity. Spaniards were credited with superior qualities, while the natives were assigned inferior traits (Wolf 1959; Kicza 1993). Indians were considered dirty, lazy, reticent, and backward. Below gachupines were criollos (Spaniards born in the New World), who adopted the attitudes and behavior of gachupines, but were mostly artisans, mineowners, parish priests, merchants and landowners.

Mestizos were next in the social status hierarchy, and introduced a racial variation which among them complicated peasant macrostructural identity. The gradual increase in the mestizo population (by the end of the colonial period they constituted 11 percent of the people in Mexico) demonstrated that interracial unions did occur despite Indians (and Africans) being credited with undesirable characteristics (Raat 1992). Nevertheless, many social class subdivisions based on various combinations of Spanish, Indian and African descent existed within this hybrid category. The success and fortune of mestizos depended in great measure on how close their skin color and racial features matched those of their European parent. Those who had an Indian or African heritage, however, preferred to conceal the fact in order to gain acceptance (Knight 1990). Nevertheless, to maintain this rigid caste system, the Spanish kept detailed baptismal records indicating racial heritage through a racial classification system: Spaniard and Indian beget mestizo; mestizo and Spaniard beget castizo (pure blood); castizo and Spaniard beget Spaniard; Spaniard and African slave beget mulatto; Spaniard and mulatto beget morisco; Indian and African beget zambo, and so on (Morner 1967; Forbes 1993). During the colonial period, the majority of light and medium hued mestizos found work as mineworkers, vaqueros (cowboys on northern cattle
haciendas), craftsmen, soldiers, and small-store owners as well as hacienda peons. A few had lower clerical positions.

Indians were below mestizos, and thus more assured of remaining within the peasant macrostructural category. Although colonial law set a high legal status for Indians, social practices were another matter (Morner 1967; Kicza 1993). The majority worked on haciendas or in enterprises owned by others. High positions in any realm of society were rare, with the exception of those individuals who migrated to the cities and became part of the craft and obraje (woolen cloth workshops) system (Gibson 1984). The few relatively higher-class positions open to Indians (although low by Spanish standards) gave rise to competitive spirits (Wolf 1959; Foster 1988). Peons, in fact, sometimes censured those who attempted to assimilate.

Africans were at the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder; they had no legal rights and remained peons or slaves throughout this time. This new African cultural and racial element was introduced to Mexico during the colonial period. With the sharp decline of the Indian population, Africans were brought in to maintain the size of the labor force, especially in the tropical lowlands where European diseases had wiped out the indigenous population. Coastal regions today, particularly Veracruz, Guerrero, and Oaxaca, strongly reflect this African influence in the physical appearance of the people as well as in the culture, food, and music (Aguirre Beltran 1946).

The various intersections of factors such as racial characteristics, class, gender, and ethnicity thus brought differing socioeconomic realities for the population. As discussed above, those who were lighter skinned and who adopted European cultural traits were more socially and economically mobile than the darker skinned, indigenous majority (Graham 1990). The shaping of peasant macrostructural identity is best understood in the context of Spanish class and racial attitudes. The evolving peasant identity was bolstered by many Indians who were ashamed of their racial countenance, internalizing feelings of racial inferiority. Coupled with the low status of their position as peasants, this insecure self-image further oppressed and hindered the advancement of Indians. Peasants often claimed a Ladino heritage if they strove to be accepted as mestizos and rid themselves of the stigma of race, even if it meant that they were exchanging only cultures and not faces.

The macrostructural identity thus became increasingly complex during this period, with multiple historical and cultural factors and forces coming into play. A diversity of cultural styles arose from the merging of Spanish and Indian as well as, in certain regions, African traits. The resultant blend depended on the particular indigenous group in question, as well as where and when contact and change
occurred. This diversity can still be seen in Mexico today, and is also represented in the multiple experiences and identities of the Chicano people. The solidification of the peasant identity was secured during the next phase (Mexican independence and nationalism) when powerful economic and political forces incorporated the peasantry into a larger network.

Stage III: Mexican Independence and Nationalism (1821 to 1846/1910)

Inspired by Enlightenment thought and revolutionary movements in the United States and France, criollos in Mexico began to seek home rule (Simpson 1967). They were tired of oppressive colonial rule and of having to make increased payments to Spain to help with financial crises stemming from costly European wars (Cockcroft 1990). The criollo challenge to gachupine rule ignited a full-scale conflict, but initially brought only minor changes (some of them retrogressive) in the peasant macrostructural identity. Later, however, the whole system broke apart in the modern period.

The independence movement in Mexico was particularly divisive. Two opposite sectors worked toward different objectives. With the separation from Spain, one side wanted to continue the same system apart from the motherland (the conservatives) and the other side (the liberals) desired to wipe out the colonial order and establish an entirely new one. Liberals favored a federalist plan that catered to provincial chieftains and the nascent middle class – which increasingly included many mestizos (Cockcroft 1990). Their objectives entailed leading Mexico on a path to agrarian capitalism. This, in turn, would promote a more rapid conversion of the Indian and mestizo population into a different type of peasantry. Some liberals wanted to fulfil quickly their objectives (the puros), while others wanted to proceed with less haste and at less cost (the moderados).

The independence movement began with the famous proclamation, El Grito de Dolores (The Cry of Pain), made by Father Miguel Hidalgo on September 16, 1810 (Archer 1989). Insurgent armies called chusmas (mobs) were mobilized. Everyone participated: men, women, children as well as the elderly. Participants of African descent hoped for a social revolution as well as independence (see Vincent 1996). Soldaderas (female soldiers) contributed to the upheaval by purchasing and preparing food for the guerilla warriors, as well as the Federal army. Those working for the Federal army were usually forced to do so (Salas 1990). Prohibited from taking part in the actual warfare, some women disguised themselves as men to join the fight.
By 1820, Mexico had gained independence from Spain. However, the ideological conflicts between liberals and conservatives continued throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, disrupting economic and political systems and practices (Rodriguez O. 1989). A primary goal of the nationalist program was the granting of citizenship and other rights to all residents of Mexican territory to facilitate the formation of a national Mexican culture (Cline 1963). This primarily meant the Indian population. Independence, however, produced little change for the masses as the nature of social relations remained the same, with criollos replacing gachupines within the socioeconomic structure. Mexican leaders became more concerned with shaping a national identity and establishing an entrepreneurial class than with improving socioeconomic conditions for the masses. Indians and mestizos were still mostly barred from joining the mainstream, despite the redefinition of the status of Indians by granting them citizenship. As a result, the Latin American elite flourished during this period, while the situation for peasants and the working mass deteriorated (Morner 1967). Class differences, along with the hacienda system and debt peonage, remained much as they had been one hundred years previously as Mexico still belonged culturally, politically, and economically to the few (Cumberland 1968; Lomnitz-Adler 1992).

From 1820 to 1855, the republicas de indios still managed to maintain some self-rule and autonomy, but during the years 1855 to 1876 (the period known as *La Reforma*), they began to lose out to liberal reform laws initiated by the president Benito Juárez. With *La Reforma*, Mexico had become a secular state in which the privileges of the Church were abolished and the power of conservative landowners were weakened. However, *La Reforma* also meant that the largely Indian peasant communities lost land to the haciendas. Benito Juárez’s well-intentioned initiative for the sale of Indian communal and mission lands to promote reform and individual ownership by the peasants, instead wound up with the holdings falling into the hands of wealthy private buyers (Whetten 1969; Friedrich 1977; Miller 1989). The peasantry continued to lose out during the *Porfiriato* (the reign of president Porfirio Díaz, 1876–1910). Hacendados retained control over about 57 percent of Mexico’s land. As a result, approximately fifteen million people were left without land (Cockcroft 1990). However, the Indians did not surrender their land without a fight; they actively resisted. Throughout the 1840s and early 1850s, peasant uprisings took place in Michoacán, in Oaxaca, in Puebla, and in the state of Mexico (Cockcroft 1990; Hu-DeHart 1993; Taylor 1993).

The transformations in the haciendas and republicas de indios meant that some of the dispossessed peasants who had been
uprooted had to seek work elsewhere. Indian peasants were now turned into part-time laborers dependent upon their wages. Employment opportunities were available in the haciendas as hacendados required cheap labor for their expanding haciendas (Wolf 1965). Economic difficulties during this period also drove more and more peasants into the city in search of work. The decision to emigrate was an outgrowth of new economic, political and technological forces. While the decision to migrate, even if only temporarily, was an individual one, powerful forces often worked to force one’s hand. Many peasants became nearly landless or lost all their property in the volatile capitalist rural economy. As a result, large numbers of them became attracted to urban areas, the prospect of better wages and consequently a higher standard of living. The first signs of a new macrostructural identity were in the offing as migration and immigration began to rule the day.

Episodic employment of these new rural immigrants led to the creation of urban slums and poverty. Under a peasant economy, females shared many of the productive activities of the household. Migration to cities undermined these patterns. Women in households were often left in the rural towns to manage the household economy on their own, while the men became temporary migrants (Stephen 1991). Those peasant women who joined their partners in migrating were increasingly forced to find work in the cities to contribute to the family income. Employment, however, was not an emancipating experience; the working woman was widely stigmatized. Jobs available for women were mainly in the line of domestic work, which was considered degrading (Arrom 1985). Women also worked as spinners in the textile mills, cooks, waitresses, and as vendors on the streets and in the marketplaces (Meyer and Sherman 1987).

The macrohistorical revampsments of this period developed in fits and starts and inexorably incorporated the peasantry into larger regional and, later, a national political economic network. This also meant that large numbers of them were transformed into migrants. That transformation, moreover, affected even those who did not relocate. The beginnings of an immigrant macrostructural identity were formed, as peasants had to cope with acculturating to urban life. Indians nevertheless still maintained certain customs and language habits as broader economic networks were being introduced (Nutini 1995). This further hindered their social mobility as racist practices still continued. “Indianness” was not defined in purely somatic terms; a range of other characteristics determined racial identification, including language, dress, religion, social organization, culture and consciousness (Knight 1990; Lomnitz-Adler 1992). Those who thus maintained their peasant/Indian
worldview, dress and customs in urban areas were subject to discrimination and marginalization. The use of the term Indian became synonymous with a combination of material poverty and cultural ‘backwardness’. Poor peasant mestizos were often called Indians by the upper classes (Lomnitz-Adler 1992). Indians and peasant mestizos, therefore, could only move up the social scale if they changed their social habits, which transpired with education and occupational shifts; an extreme example was the assimilated Indian Benito Juarez who became president from 1861 to 1872 (Knight 1990).

With enlightened philosophical viewpoints becoming fashionable, many criollos and some mestizos who passed for white began to challenge racism. As a result, legal distinctions as to race were abolished in 1822. However, racial terminology continued to be used in many official documents until 1940, especially in marriage statistics (Navarro 1970). Although criollos started to re-evaluate the effects of racism and seek improvements, they were still too bound up with the past to break with it completely. They maintained that the lower classes prevented full national development. Indian peasants were thus still last in the social structure. In addition, some mestizos who attempted to pass for white became repressive fixtures of the social order, often mistreating Indians in order to obtain more favorable positions for themselves (Van den Berghe 1967). Despite continuing racist beliefs, inter-racial unions still occurred and were, in fact, more common in Mexico after independence than during colonial times. According to census figures, mestizos rose from 27 percent of the population in 1824 to 53 percent in 1900, becoming the majority group in Mexico (Navarro 1970). A good part of this increase might be due to Indians “passing” as mestizos, but that is probably true of the colonial statistics as well.

The period between 1821 and 1910, the beginning of Mexican nationalism, was a rather short-lived moment for those in the Mexican north; it lasted only until 1846 when the Mexican-American War broke out. The socioeconomic system was different in the north than in the rest of Mexico. While most of Mexico was caught up with ideological conflicts following independence, the north saw an increased American immigration into the Mexican frontier provinces. ‘Manifest Destiny’ became the catchword for the Americans, who believed that their nation should spread from the Atlantic coast westward to the Pacific (Meier and Ribera 1993). It became the creed for American expansionism westward and the incorporation of a vast territory and its resources and natural harbors with sea lanes to the Far East.

The arrival of Anglos into the north of Mexico affected class relations from the beginning. In Texas, Anglo settlers first arrived in
1821 when the Mexican government granted colonization rights (De Leon 1983; Raat 1992; Gomez-Quinones 1994). The Anglo ideal was to rescue Texas from a primitive lifestyle. The first Yankees to arrive in New Mexico were merchants, mountain men and pioneers (Gomez-Quinones 1994). Some of these early Anglo settlers were readily accepted by the upper classes, and much intermarriage took place (Cotera 1976; Blea 1992). In California, as a result of intermarriage, many Yankees inherited large parcels of land that gente de razon had willed to their daughters. Assimilated Anglos became the social equals of Californios, with the cholos and Indians remaining in the lowest position (McWilliams 1990).

In time, these initial encroachments led to open warfare despite fierce, if disorganized, resistance by Mexico. Even though there was forceful opposition in the United States Congress to American annexation of these territories, the Anglo settlers eventually wrested control over the north from Mexico (Gomez-Quinones 1994). In 1836, Texas declared itself independent, and thus the Lone Star Republic was born (Meier and Ribera 1993).

In 1846, the United States admitted Texas to the union. This annexation occurred despite congressional opposition based on fears for trade relations with Mexico and on northern antislavery sentiment, the latter a constant struggle pitting north against south, early capitalism versus nearly moribund landed estates. The Mexican government regarded the annexation as a declaration of war. The Mexican-American War thus broke out and was brought to a conclusion in 1848 when the United States forced its version of the disputed Texas boundary on Mexico and seized additional Mexican lands extending beyond the Rocky Mountains and to the Pacific Ocean. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848) established the political boundary (Griswold del Castillo 1990). Through it, a huge region that was formerly the northern-most province became the Southwestern province of the United States. In short, after the Mexican-American War, Mexico lost some 20 million acres of land (Taylor 1934). The Treaty also set down that the land grants and tenure rights established during the Mexican period would be respected on the basis of international law.

The annexation brought a new but complicated macrohistorical influence (Anglo), which was the last significant cultural determinant in the formation of the modern Chicano identity. Along with this cultural influence came a new layer of oppression. Chicanos were accorded a minority status initially as natives (peasants!) and later as immigrants. This minority status has had severe implications for Chicano social, economic and political life, as well as the nature of their macrostructural identity.
Stage IV: Anglo-American Period (1846 to 1990s)

The Anglo-Americans ushered in a new set of changes that affected Chicanos, not least of which was how a new identity was forged for an immigrant category that was continually replenished by waves of immigration even as many in the first settlements gradually joined the urban work force (Gonzalez and Fernandez 2001). It was an incremental and uneven identity transformation spurred and slowed by the dynamic industrialization and urbanization underway in the United States. Nonetheless, Mexican traditional lifeways were reshaped, and the rate and direction of these changes varied in place and time period. Many decades after the War of 1846–48, continuing Mexican immigration insured that a critical mass would remain in this identity before they could (or would!) be integrated into the United States. The initial contact period and the racial and ethnic conflict in its aftermath colored subsequent Anglo-Mexican relations. Anglos viewed Mexicans as a culturally inferior and ‘backward’ people, and at the outset this helped justify their aggressions and take-over of Mexican land. As a result, the Mexican people were largely stripped of access to resources, and a cycle of exploitation soon began as Mexican labor was sought and secured. With administrative, trade and cultural activities also coopted by Anglo-Americans, Chicanos were left with a greatly reduced voice in government policy (Gomez-Quinones 1994). To protect their interests, many of the gente de razon, former elites, joined Anglos in countering resistance taken by the Mexican masses (McWilliams 1990). Nevertheless, they too lost out in the end as their lands were slowly taken away from them (Montejano 1987).

The introduction of a racist agenda by the Anglo-Americans only added to the previous burden of racial and cultural oppression experienced by the Mexican people (Almaquer 1994). To anchor Mexicans in the lowest positions, the dominant group prejudged their behavior negatively, and most affected were Mexicans with the darkest skins and “Indian” facial features. Prejudicial attitudes gave rise to discriminatory behavior. Social barriers (separate schools, substandard housing, and so on) were soon set up to impede their social mobility. The use of racial standards as a justification for economic exploitation caused many individuals to suffer severe psychological hardship and stress (Bernal and Knight 1993). A new set of racist standards and practices now joined the deeply entrenched Spanish colonial ones.

The history of transnational migration from Mexico into the United States began at the end of the Mexican-American War. The Gold Rush of 1848 especially drew many Mexicans into California, along with hundreds of thousands from other parts of the world. It opened
up job opportunities in mining, although Mexicans who took those jobs were often lynched, robbed and taxed in the nearly lawless towns which sprung up in the mining region. When the mining enterprises dwindled, many Mexican mineworkers joined the farm labor force (Moore and Pachon 1985). At this time in Mexico (the beginning of the twentieth century), during the late phase of the Porfirio Diaz regime, significant events were unfolding. Indians and mestizos, mostly peons and low-paid urban workers, remained in a neocolonial state and the hacendados, comprising approximately 1000 families, controlled ninety percent of the land, while eighty-five percent of the rural population was landless (Cumberland 1968). Thus, conditions were ripe for revolt (see Katz 1988 for a review of peasant movements and rebellions).

The peasants led by Emiliano Zapata and other military leaders – Pancho Villa, Obregon, Calles, Amaro, and others like them – united to fight for the lands that had been taken by the hacendados. Many women also both fought alongside the peasant warriors and led contingents of their own (Cockcroft 1990; see Salas 1990 for a full review). The 1910 Mexican revolution lasted throughout the decade and even into the 1920s. Agrarian reform was the key issue for the masses, and as a result of the revolution, many of their demands were granted. However, many unresolved questions remain to this day. Few would disagree that the Mexican masses generally benefited from the upheaval. After the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) became entrenched in the late 1920s, political turmoil subsided.

The 1910 revolution also had a significant impact on the United States. Social unrest in Mexico and the destruction of human ties to the land brought internal and external migration (Gamio 1969 [1930]). A significant number of middle- and upper-class Mexicans also joined peasants in migrating to the United States during this time (Moore and Pachon 1985). Middle- and upper-class Mexicans in particular resisted Anglicization and followed events in Mexico with great interest; many hoped to return to Mexico once the turmoil wound down.

Immigration continued for decades, increasing when it became clear that the Mexican government had little interest in assisting peasants with communal land development (Hinojosa-Ojeda 1994). Initially, American demand for labor came from mining, railroad, and commercial farm interests and industries:

Typically, the immigrant of earlier years was bound for a company town, an agricultural work camp, or perhaps an urban enclave somewhere in the border states. From 1910–1929, Texas was the most popular destination. Slowly, California became more attractive” (Moore and Pachon 1985: 26).
Migrant families involved in agricultural labor especially suffered great exploitation (Alvarez 1987). Some landowners preferred Mexican tenant sharecroppers as this meant cheap wage labor could be secured throughout the year when needed. Some would rent to large tenant families to ensure the continuing supply of a cheap and stable labor force in the form of other family members, especially children. Child labor sustained many farming enterprises such as cotton production in Texas. The Great Western Sugar Company also favored recruiting families (Gonzalez 1983). As a result, “[s]chool authorities often looked the other way in the enforcement of school attendance, as both the large growers in their greed and the Mexican families in their poverty relied on child labor” (Gonzalez 1983:66). Childbearing was thus a significant way in which a rural woman could economically contribute to her family.

American immigration policy has been greatly affected by the influence of agribusiness on state and federal legislation. Even as immigration quotas were imposed in 1924, sharply curtailing southern and eastern European immigration, farm owners continued to recruit cheap labor from Mexico. This practice competed with periodic outbreaks of anti-immigrant populism in affecting the ebb and flow of Mexican immigration, and government reactions to it; in fact, the Border Patrol was created because of these competing forces (Weaver 1994). “The movement of Mexican workers to the United States was [also] inextricably linked to the economic development of the American Southwest,” as landowners sought cheap labor to expand their agribusinesses (Reisler 1976: 3). This migration system thus fit well into the expanding capitalist market and international transportation system (Hinojosa-Ojeda 1994).

The seesaw experience of Mexican immigrants persisted and at times turned ugly. Deportation and repatriation, for example, characterized the lot of many during the Great Depression (Hoffman 1974). During this time, women were generally the first to be laid off. However, in some circumstances women were hired to replace men because they were cheaper. In the 1930s, the Los Angeles garment industry relied primarily on migrant Mexican female labor (Gonzalez 1983). On the other hand, during World War I and WW II, the United States needed a ready and cheap labor source; so, for example, the Bracero program was initiated during World War II as a contract labor agreement.

Even as these rural struggles unfolded, Mexican workers (along with other residents of the United States) began gradually leaving (or combining) agricultural occupations for those in the city (Galarza 1964). By 1930, 57.5 percent of the Chicano population lived in urban areas (Sanchez 1993). This trend continued and increased throughout the 1940s. Chicanos sought employment in factories
where wages were more favorable than on farms, especially given the seasonal nature of agriculture. The previously self-sufficient Mexican peasantry was thus successively changing into an industrial, as well as agrarian work force. Modern technological systems brought peasants into the mainstream of urban growth. In 1930, nearly half of all employed Chicanos had worked in agriculture; by 1982, this figure decreased to less than 7 percent, with many more immigrants filling urban job slots. To help protect themselves from social abuse and discrimination as well as maintain ethnic traditions, Chicanos founded urban barrios (ethnic enclaves) or rural colonias (colonies) (Camarillo 1979).

For a few, the economic expansion, industrialization, and growth of cities brought great wealth; for others, a comfortable living; but for many it meant only more poverty. The Chicanos, along with other minorities, were more often found in the last category. Chicanos (both men and women) were often paid lower wages than other local labor and suffered great discrimination (Taylor 1934; Galarza 1964). As Mexicans became increasingly urbanized, they were additionally affected by the problems of urban life, including pockets of poverty plagued by health problems and crime (Vigil 1988; Moore and Vigil 1993). Living conditions for these workers were poor, with no appreciable changes forthcoming for many years. Many social problems that originated with the first groups of immigrants became rooted and, in turn, were passed on to the new arrivals. In addition, with the passage of time and the development of second and third generation Mexican Americans, new Mexican migrants were not readily welcomed by Chicanos. For some, the immigrants represented competition for jobs. Also, “their alien status made it easy for Anglos to brand all mexicanos as foreigners and deny them the rights of citizens” (Rosenbaum 1981:148). Intraethnic competition and conflict thus revolved around “new” immigrants and “old” immigrants, even affecting united and concerted social action that would possibly benefit all. The split between the two groups also entailed differences in their occupations, with first generation Mexicans filling farm labor positions and third generation ones finding employment in the cities.

The 1970s witnessed the largest influx of undocumented Mexican workers yet, anywhere from 2 to 12 million (Cornelius and Bustamante 1989). Known disparagingly as mojados (wetbacks) because “many wade, swim or float on rafts across the Rio Grande hoping to get into the United States” (Anzaldua 1987: 12), these workers fill the low-paid, unskilled jobs no one else desires and, indeed, provide important services. They have nevertheless become a focus of concern for many people, including government officials, and some of the solutions to the ‘problem’ have betrayed continuing
ethnic discriminatory attitudes. Since the 1970s, attempts have been made in Congress to control the tide of immigration; for example: the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986. However, such legislation has not been able to turn back the flow of immigration. Anti-immigrant sentiments are still prevalent today. The passage of state and federal initiatives, such as proposition 187 which curtailed services to noncitizen immigrants, reflect the predominance of these sentiments.

Early immigrant struggles to improve living and working conditions were spontaneous and sporadic. As early as 1929, Chicanos farm workers began striking; for example: the cantaloupe workers in 1929, the berry workers in 1933, the pecan shellers in 1938 and the De Gregorio farm strike in 1947 (Arroyo 1975; Rosenbaum 1981). These strikes erupted because Chicanos were unhappy that they received a lower wage than whites for similar work. Strike activity soon spread to other occupations, especially after urbanization (Gomez-Quinones 1994). The issues debated were based mainly on class interests: better wages, improved housing and sanitary conditions, a decent education for children, and many other improvements. This resistance aroused outrage among Anglo employers (and often the general public). In many instances, it brought even more repressive counterattacks. The so-called pachuco riots of the early 1940s in Los Angeles, one of several major incidents of “race riots” in American cities during that time period, provide one vivid example of how the Chicano population reacted to such racist treatment.

Later, more informed and organized resistance evolved, bringing public attention to and sympathy for the plight of the Chicano population. What has become known as the Chicano Movement became widely recognized in the 1960s. A variety of organizations arose in an effort to attack the social conditions that blocked Chicano development. Some groups narrowed their efforts to single sectors, such as education, land, labor conditions or politics. The United Farm Workers Union, co-founded by Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta, initiated strikes and boycotts against farm growers, singling out lettuce and grapes as the products to avoid. Reis Lopez Tijerina’s land-grant activities of 1966 onward was a collective demand for the return of ownership based on communal land grants, as outlined in the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe (Nabokov 1969; Oboler 1995). The Crusade for Justice, led by Corky Gonzales in the mid-1960s, was a broadly based thrust for community control, mainly economic and political. Angel Gutierrez’ La Raza Unida Party political venture in Texas (which later spread throughout the Southwest) is another example of the Chicano goal to gain a political voice.
It is difficult to speak of an aftermath of the Chicano Movement and the conflict surrounding it, for both the movement and the conflict continue in abated fashion. Chicanos increasingly realize that their past is a complex one of multiple heritages both ancient and new, made up of Indian, Spanish, Mexican, and Anglo elements. Much of this regeneration of cultural awareness has aided the growth of Chicano political influence and maturation, and much of the symbolism and rhetoric revolves around indigenous, peasant, and immigrant events and experiences. Bilingual education programs, youth and student organizational efforts, pride in Mexican customs and traditions, labor and professional organizations, and other developments aiding social action are reflective of this awareness.

The diversity of experiences within the Chicano population are thus becoming acknowledged as new social movements arise along gender, class, sexuality and ethnic lines. This politicization based on subjective identities is a reflection of the multiple heritage experiences of the modern Chicano population.

Conclusion

There are Spanish-speaking, Spanish-surnamed Chicanos who today can speak English, Spanish, and an indigenous language. In the United States today, especially in southern California, there are tens of thousands of Maya, Zapotec, and Mixteca immigrants – and poised just across the border, hundreds of thousands more ready to enter the United States and become integrated into the Chicano or Mexican American (or Hispanic, if you will) population. Third or fourth generation Chicanos may no longer speak an Indian language or even Spanish. However, most of them still adhere to certain rituals or ceremonies, eat foods prepared a specific way, and practice a type of Mexican Catholic ideology (increasingly, a Protestant evangelism that combines rural values and customs to their new urban situations is spreading among today’s immigrants). Cultural customs and beliefs of earlier eras still prevail in an attenuated form today. Similarly, in the mind-sets of the same third and fourth generations, elements of the macrostructural identities of the past are present. This is especially the case for elements stemming from the peasant era that began to be transformed less than a century ago and still operates for many today. With the shift to an immigrant identity, a large-scale process that will continue into coming decades, at least, it is rare to find contemporary Chicanas or Chicanos, even of the third or fourth generation, who cannot relate tales concerning their families’ immigrant past. Among Chicanos, it is common to conduct conversations in which some indigenous
characteristics are mentioned along with elements associated with working the land and having to move and resettle to find a better life. In short, among Chicanos many cultural practices are alive as are features from an occupational category or shared overarching identity.

As bounded peasant communities dissolve, their members become increasingly transnationalized (Kearney 1996) and join the urban workforce. Globalizing processes and forces affect these peasant communities as immigrants in the United States maintain transnational ties and links to their kinfolk back home (Chavez 1998). The transformation of the peasant identity into an immigrant identity reflects the further fragmentation of identities that has accompanied the rise of industrial capitalism and more complex economic arrangements. Indeed, perhaps the category of ‘peasant’ should thus be abandoned and a “postpeasant perspective” (Kearney 1996) adopted considering the rural changes in Mexico which increasingly undermine the peasant community (Rus 1994).

Tracing the processes of a macrostructural immigrant identity allows for such a rethinking. To achieve a higher standard of living and a certain degree of class mobility, many Mexicans have become immigrants; either migrating, permanently or temporarily, to urban areas or across the border to the United States. For the peasant immigrants, the experience of acculturating to urban life and new cultures, sometimes within complex settings, has led to the formation of complex and interpenetrating identities. Essentially, the immigrant experience is embodied in movement and adaptation to new ecocultural settings, whether Denver, Chicago, or Los Angeles.

Despite great setbacks, increasingly Chicanos have moved out of the barrios and into the working and middle class bracket (Moore and Pachon 1985). These individuals and groups no longer were represented in the immigrant category, and some even took special care to avoid “remembering” this past. Unlike the very land-bound and medieval-like peasant experience, an immigrant identity allows for more fluidity and movement both horizontally and vertically. However, the socio-economic gap between the Chicano population and the Anglo-American one remains a large one. Modern life has incorporated more and more people into a larger political economy system, and in the process has opened more and more doors through public education and training programs for a broader array of occupations. Close to one-half of the Chicano population is first generation and although the descendants of earlier immigrants’ descendants forge new identities as part of the urban workforce, they are still entrapped in the immigrant identity.
With socioeconomic changes came cultural ones. Ethnic identity became problematic, as a spectrum of acculturation styles produced another source of estrangement and conflict for the Mexican population. After decades of such generational changes and ethnic identity transformations, a new and stronger influx of Mexican immigrants in the contemporary period has pushed the cultural style spectrum in a Mexican direction, thus making the immigrant macrostructural identity a continuing, viable category. This dual process of Americanization and Mexicanization has been referred to as nativist acculturation, or additive rather than subtractive acculturation: learning a new culture but not discarding the old one (Vigil 1997). 

Although retaining a distinctly Mexican flavor, the culture that developed among Mexican-Americans nevertheless was a hybrid one reflecting a wide range of elements from both Mexican and American backgrounds, as well as forging unique patterns through a fusion of features from both traditions. Mexican culture has been extremely heterogeneous because of mestizaje, and the waves of immigrants who brought varied cultural styles to the United States. The demographic makeup of the migrant population today is diverse and a reflection of the regional and tribal variation that exists in Mexico. Time, place, people and a host of settlement patterns and variable adjustments to American society characterize the population, but the changes they have been subjected to have also engendered the fragmentation of identities. Although coming from different regions of Mexico, these immigrants who, in the early period were mostly rural peasants, are now increasingly representative of the urban. Afro-Mexicans have also been part of twentieth century Mexican migration to the United States (Meza Herrera 1996; Vigil and Lopez n.d.). In some ways these racial and cultural contrasts, more properly referred to as personal and social identity, have tended to make people more aware of their differences rather than their similarities, especially their broader socio-economic identity category as immigrants. While making this distinction, however, it is important to acknowledge how cultural differences are real.

Today, individual Chicanos have incorporated these cultural influences differently (see Vigil 1997), a process mediated by variables such as age and gender. Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that massive changes under oppressive colonial rule of whole regions and peoples created a larger overarching identity. A whole people were inscribed with the effects of these overwhelming changes even as personal, age, and gender manifestations unfolded. These changes have made for important similarities among Chicanos, particularly in light of the class, culture, and racial subordination experienced by so many in different time periods.
Each of these time periods signalled a new era, but involved overlapping processes. Some peoples and regions remained indigenous or peasant longer than others because they were either beyond the sphere of change or successfully resisted external forces. Nevertheless, the sequence of indigenous to peasant to immigrant is a salient influence on the life and the identity of large numbers of people. These processes and identities need to be considered by social researchers seeking to address the roots of the problems and social ills which are often residues of the past. Issues such as poverty, marginalization, discrimination, institutionalized racism and self-inferiority are better assessed within a longer time period and examined on a broader canvas. Under such situations and conditions, even social movements, either of peasant or immigrant origin, make more sense if one considers them to be periodic cycles, ebbs and flows – and to turn back the clock and alleviate the pressures of a forced accommodation and integration into economic units of someone else’s making.

Notes

1 Originally derived from the term ‘Mechicano’ used by the Spanish to refer to the conquered and subjugated Indians, and then later to dispossessed lower-class peons. Chicano is a label of identification that has been appropriated by people of Mexican descent in the United States, who have subverted the term’s original negative connotations into a political and ethnic label which reflects the desire to end their subordination. Although people of Mexican descent in the United States identify themselves differently according to context; for example as Mexican Americans, Tejanos, Hispanic, Californios, Latinas and so on, the term Chicano will be used here to refer to all persons of Mexican descent in the United States.

2 Chicana refers to all women of Mexican descent in the United States. The term will only be used in the text when referring specifically to women, otherwise the term Chicano will be used (which refers to both men and women).

3 This underlying theme of the transformation from indigenous to peasants to immigrants is a reality that has been experienced by many Chicanos, and will thus be emphasized here. However, this should not be taken to mean that all Chicanos underwent this transformation. Not all Chicanos are, for example, from the peasant class, nor were all indigenous peoples transformed into peasants with the arrival of the Spanish, nor are all Chicanos immigrants (the American Southwest was historically part of Mexico, and many Mexicans became Chicanos not by choice but through colonization). Nevertheless, this framework provides a useful guideline to uncovering a significant part of the diverse complexity of modern Chicano identity.

4 There is controversy over the timing of these events; figures range from 30,000 B.C. to as recent as 12,000 to 14,000 B.C. Some archaeologists hypothesize an immigration by sea at an earlier date.

5 The term ‘Indian’ is a postcontact, colonial term first used by Christopher Columbus to refer to all native inhabitants of the American
continent; it should be noted, however, that these same natives never before referred to themselves in such homogenizing terms, but with terms that reflected their ethnic diversity.

6 See Vigil 1998B for a further discussion of how time, people and place contributed to the multiple experiences of Chicano people.

7 Numerically, however, they were the majority (Wagley and Harris 1958).

8 Many Indians in highland communities do not speak Spanish: only those who have had to learn in order to find work in urban areas. There are, in fact, over 50 indigenous languages spoken by more than 100,000 people (Encyclopaedia Britannica 1994). These include Maya, Huastec, Nahualtl, Tarastec, Totongan, Otomi, Mazahua, Zapotec, Mixteca, Mazateca, Tezeltal and Tzotzil.

9 Ladino, a term that originally meant Hispanicized Indian, later became synonymous with those mestizos (and Indians) who had acculturated and "risen above" the Indian masses (de la Fuente 1967).

10 One of these developments is the quest for equal opportunity for Chicana women. Since historical conditions have relegated Chicanos to the lowest positions, Chicanas are even more disadvantaged than other women (Melville 1980). They have typically been relegated to low-wage, low-status jobs, such as domestic and agricultural processing work, which offer little opportunity for promotion (Segura 1990). In time, however, many Chicanas have assumed a more assertive posture as they became involved in efforts to improve and advance their cause. However, the Chicano movement as a whole has been hesitant to address gender issues and strive to end male domination. When Chicanas raised the issue of gender, movement leaders responded by arguing that feminist concerns diverted attention from the ‘real’ issues of racism and class exploitation. Feminism was also viewed to be Anglo, middle-class and bourgeois, and Chicanas were thus denounced as being traitors to la causa (Oboler 1995). Although such denunciation resulted in many Chicanas initially being reticent in voicing their demands, others did fight vigorously for equality and justice within their community organizations (Oboler 1995).

11 Pheland and Davidson (1991) have referred to these people as “border crossers”.

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Chicano literature (and, more generally, the Chicano identity) is viewed as starting after the Mexican–American War and the subsequent 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. In the treaty, Mexico ceded over half of its territory, the now the U.S. Southwest, including California, Nevada, Utah, and much of Arizona, Colorado, and New Mexico. Chicano literature tends to focus on themes of identity, discrimination, and border culture, with an emphasis on validating Mexican-American culture or Chicano culture in the United States. It is often associated with the social justice and cultural claims of the Chicano movement. Other notable themes include the experience of migration and living between two languages. Chicana/o identity embodies elements of ethnic, political, cultural and Indigenous hybridity. These qualities of what constitutes Chicano/a identity may be expressed Chicanos/as differently, although they are still Chicano/a. As Armando Rendón wrote in the Chicano Manifesto (1971), "I am Chicano. What it means to me may be different than what it means to you." Similarly, writer Benjamin Alire Sáenz wrote "There is no such thing as the Chicano voice: there are only Chicano and Chicana voices." The identity thus may be understood as somewhat ambiguous (e.g. in the 1991 Culture Clash play This is more evident in the case of Chicano and African-American cultural identities. Their migratory tradition, and the combination of different cultural influences in their history has forced these ethnic groups to engage in a constant relocation and a questioning of their identities. Migration amplifies change: cultural change, change of references and, on occasions, the fact of trespassing limits. Many Africans were brought from their continent and sold as black slaves to different parts of the country throughout the 17th century. Later, in the 20th century a massive black exodus took place.