

Stereotypes dim but never die

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In a column in the *Express-News* a couple of weeks ago, Maureen Dowd of the *New York Times* complained that the upcoming fall television shows centered around Irish families couldn't break away from stereotypes.

Writing about the Irish and ethnic groups that arrived at the turn of the century, sociologist Andrew M. Greeley (*"Why Can't They Be Like Us?"* Institute of Human Relations) lists six steps in the assimilation-acculturation process.

These steps are applicable to Mexican Americans only in part. For one, Mexicans have come into the nation not only as immigrants but as a conquered people via American expansionism during the Texas Revolution and the U.S. War with Mexico, enduring substantial dispossession of lands.

Additionally, Mexican immigrants were restricted to South Texas and were so segregated in cities that they did not actively begin the immigrant process until after World War II.

Also, the constant flow of immigrants results in some Mexican Americans constantly beginning the assimilation-acculturation process.

Furthermore, as mestizos (Spanish-Indians), Mexican-Americans face racial discrimination.

Still, like the Irish, Mexican Americans have followed the six steps in some way:

1. **Cultural shock:** Immigrants expect to enter at the bottom of the economic scale but are shocked at the attack against who they are. The Irish couldn't understand why "Irish Need Not Apply" signs were everywhere any more than Mexicans could comprehend "Dirty Mexican" epithets.
2. **Emerging self-concept:** Once survival in the new country has been achieved, some of the newcomers organize to prevent the loss of culture and, at the same time, gain concessions from the dominant group. For the New York City Irish, this is best exemplified in political clubs; for 20th-century Mexicans, it is seen in self-help and labor organizations.
3. **Assimilation of the elites:** The initial self-hatred ingrained at immigration resurfaces. Second- or third-generation Americans attempt to hide their Irish

background, much like Mexican Americans avoided the “Mexican” label by calling themselves “Latin” Americans.

4. **Militancy:** At this point, the group overcomes self-hatred; a little ethnic pride emerges, and political and cultural activism rules. The Irish punched (not pinched) or ostracized those not wearing green on St. Patrick’s Day, and Chicanos shamed “coconuts” and pressured the establishment to gain entry into the system.
5. **Self-hate:** Now largely integrated into the mainstream, the group is again embarrassed about its immigrant origins. Ethnic names such as Fiona and Guadalupe are uncommon.
6. **Adjustment:** Fully confident with its position in American society, the group can re-examine the old culture but now with only superficial attachment. The Irish can dye the San Antonio River green, and guests can be welcomed with mariachis, but these actions mean little and do not change anything.

The actual assimilation-acculturation process is never as orderly as this.