

Echoes of Latin American Racism Reverberate in the U.S. (excerpted)

Disparaging remarks about Oaxacans from the Los Angeles City Council president shocked a city that prides itself on tolerance. But they highlighted a history of racism within the Latino community.

By [Miriam Jordan](#) New York Times Oct 14, 2022

Latin America is one of the world's most ethnically diverse regions, and throughout its history, racial and ethnic groups have converged there — Indigenous people, white colonizers and Black people brought as slaves. Their mixing gave rise to a “browning” of Latin America, with people of different shades of skin depending on their heritage.

Many people are now of mixed ethnicity, but people with lighter skin have remained at the top of the socioeconomic hierarchy, while those with darker skin, whether Indigenous or Black, often tend to be poorer and to be shut out of elite social and political circles.

That unofficial caste system was exported to the United States, which has its own history of racial stratification and tensions. Among Latinos, who are all considered people of color, studies have found that those who are lighter-skinned are more likely to make economic strides than their darker-skinned brethren, like Black Cubans, Indigenous Mexicans and Central Americans.

Indigenous Mexicans and Central Americans typically are shorter and have darker skin than other Latinos, and their first language is often not Spanish. Prejudice against them is commonplace at workplaces in farm fields, in restaurants and even on construction sites, where subcontractors sometimes separate Indigenous crews from other Latinos on the same job to avoid conflict.

“We are regarded as dark, short people, brown people who are ugly and ignorant,” said Arcenio López, a former farmworker who is executive director of Mixteco Indígena Community Organizing Project, an organization that advocates for Indigenous field workers in California.