

Critique

Vazquez's psychosocial model for understanding ethnicity and the ethnic process in American society and how this model could be used by practitioners and researchers to further expand their own work is noble. Vazquez fulfilled his purpose. However, the underlying assumption is somewhat misleading, i.e., practitioners and researchers, generally, are not employing the ethnic matrix model. Vazquez states that the absence of ethnic content and concern with ethnic issues in professional training programs was seriously questioned.

President John F. Kennedy proposed, and Congress passed, in 1963 a law establishing community mental health centers (PL 88-164) on an experimental basis.¹ As these centers were set up, mental health professionals became increasingly aware of, and appreciative of, the need for diagnosis and treatment based on cultural, racial, and ethnic differences. Consequently, the center for Minority Group Mental Health Programs was founded with the National Institute of Mental Health in 1970.

In 1975 James Banks, an eminent scholar in education and ethnic studies, wrote that a sophisticated understanding of our society cannot be grasped unless the separate ethnic communities which constitute American society are seriously analyzed from the perspectives of the various social sciences and humanities.² In southeast Los Angeles, a culturally diverse and medically underserved area, the Charles R. Drew Area Health Education Center was established in October 1979. In conjunction with the Charles Drew Postgraduate Medical School, the Area Health Education Center Program focuses on directing minority youth, the educationally disadvantaged and others through the health careers pathway. One could cite many other examples which demonstrate that the psychosocial or ethnic matrix model has been, and continues to be utilized in various professional training programs.

Vazquez should focus more clearly on three particular areas as he pursues the relevance of the ethnic matrix. First, that black Americans effectively launched a movement for *ethnic pride* and maintenance of cultural heritage is questionable. The movement had nothing to do with *ethnic price*. Rather, it focused on *racial pride*. Race and ethnicity are not always synonymous.

Second, that the black middle class is notably different and will continue to distinguish itself from the white ethnic middle class in America might be true. However, Vazquez fails to show how (1) blacks constitute an ethnic group; (2) nor does he provide examples of how the black middle class is different from the white middle class. Showing the Chicago Jewish community as an equivalent model for the black middle

class is a definite weakness of the article.

Third, that the history of education in this country demonstrates how the prevailing thrust has been in favor of a pedagogical philosophy which is not about the business of preserving culture is inaccurate. American education has traditionally focused on the preservation of culture—European and Euroamerican.

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Notes

¹Charles L. Sanders, ed. *Mental Health Programs for Racial Minorities*. Institute for Urban Affairs and Research. (Washington, DC: Howard University Press, 1977) 2.

²James A. Banks. *Teaching Strategies for Ethnic Studies*. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1979) 7.

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The main subject of Jesse Vazquez's article is clearly the ethnic matrix, although several related issues are also covered. While any of the latter could be discussed here, my comments will focus on the matrix itself.

The ethnic matrix deals with a problem of obvious importance, the need to better conceptualize the nature of ethnicity given what we have learned about this phenomenon over the past two decades. The ethnic matrix is an insightful approach to this problem which has the potential for becoming a significant perspective. It provides a fresh point of view which is good because fresh views often encourage or directly contribute to the work of other researchers and they serve as reminders of the inadequacies of earlier conceptions of ethnicity such as the assimilation paradigm. Beyond this, I especially like how the matrix builds upon the common but useful notion of behavior choices and that it emphasizes the adaptability of racial minorities and other groups, the fluidity and complexity of ethnicity, and the influence of the larger societal context.

Vazquez, however, presents only the barest outlines of the ethnic matrix. The matrix must be conceptually developed beyond this initial