



Moros y cristianos: Teaching the Islamic Presence in Hispanic Civilization in Spanish Classroom

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This curriculum unit is recommended for:
High School Spanish I, Spanish II, Spanish III

Keywords: Spanish language and culture, Islam, World Religions, African American Studies

Teaching Standards: See [Appendix 1](#) for teaching standards addressed in this unit.

Synopsis: It is important to teach history without playing into stereotypes, popular myths, and popular fringe alternate historical fantasies. Sadly, it is very easy to promote misconceptions if we teach without an acute awareness of the limitations of our students' historical and geographical understandings. In this unit, we find ways for teachers to integrate lessons about the 1,300-year interaction between Hispanic and Islamic cultures in the Spanish classroom in a manner that is both historically correct and topically relevant. We will touch on such topics as the impact of Arab technological advances in Muslim Spain on the development of Europe, the birth of modern policing in the wake of the Spanish-American war, and the hidden history behind an ubiquitous Cuban dish. Finally, students will explore the joys and challenges Muslim Hispanic chefs face in adapting traditional recipes to suit both the laws of Muslim food purity (*halal*) and the Hispanic palate.

I plan to teach this unit during the coming year to 120 students in High School Spanish II.

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Matthew Kelly

Introduction: *Moros y cristianos*, Tension at the Heart of Hispanicity

The encounter between Islam and Christianity has been a central force in the forging of Hispanic identity. We find this encounter and this tension not only in the mythic Muslim Spain, Al-Andalus of the Middle Ages; we find it in Spain's farthest-flung colonies in the Philippines, in the legacy of African slavery in Cuba, in the paper your favorite paperback book is printed on. We find it in Spain's expulsion of the *moriscos* in 1609 and in the redolent and savory foods served from strip mall cafes and food trucks in our urban centers today. In this unit, we will seek to provide teachers of all levels of high school Spanish with lessons readily scalable to different levels of Spanish.

Through the content we explore here, your students will step into the age of Spanish colonialism in nineteenth century Cuba, and will learn the surprising origins of an iconic Cuban dish. Looking back to the Middle Ages, your students will learn how the first paper mills in Europe were built by Arab industrialists near medieval Valencia, contributing to the rise of widespread literacy in Europe.

Students will learn about the centuries of armed struggle of Muslim insurgents in the Philippines that, surprisingly, gave rise to what we know as modern policing in the United States today. Finally, students will hear from some of the 8% of U.S. Muslims who are Hispanic about how they follow Muslim dietary rules while preserving the character of traditional Hispanic cooking. Most important, you will take them on this journey without reinforcing stereotypes or peddling historical myths and half-truths.

Rationale: The Ghost of Charles Martel

One of the benefits of being a sixth grader in the South raised by an English professor in 1979 was an outsider's view into the deep mythology of American history education. My dad was a medievalist, which I thought was the next best thing to being an actual medieval knight. I was a kid, and I thought the so-called Middle Ages were super, super cool.

I was appalled by my textbooks, which presented the Middle Ages as a dark interlude between the fall of the Western Roman Empire and the Protestant Reformation during which science and reason itself were lost, civil and ecclesiastical tyranny reigned and nothing notable happened except for Leif Ericsson's premature discovery of American and Charles Martel's defeat of the Moors at Tours.

1979 was not a high point for U.S. relations with Muslim-majority nations. There was the Iranian Revolution, if you recall, and an energy crisis. Charles Martel, my teacher intoned, defeated the Moors at Tours and saved Western Civilization. Without him, we would all be under the rule of the sheiks and ayatollahs who cut off our oil. I observed that if Charles

Martel had *lost* at Tours, we would all *be* the Arabs, and we would have all the oil we wanted. This did not go over well.

Moving ahead, while Charles Martel saved the West from Eastern barbarism, Martin Luther and John Calvin saved the West from Roman spiritual corruption. They introduced freedom of thought and inquiry, paving the way for the Pilgrims to seek freedom in a new land. Lo, *democracy!* Surprise.

I tried to point out that the Middle Ages were super cool, and they had universities and architects and built super cool amazing stuff. They were smart and knew how to do things. My teacher replied, “They didn’t have any new knowledge, only what they had saved from the Greeks and Romans. For a thousand years there was no new knowledge, and what little they had they wasted in the service of a dark and foolish superstition.” That was that.

My father explained that my teacher was teaching from the perspective of a particular and limited viewpoint. People want to believe their forebears achieved what they had by their own virtues, and that their path to greatness had been preordained. We learned history mixed with myth, mythic history that projected the present back into the past.

Our task here is to be aware of the pitfalls of teaching mythic history, and especially to be aware of the risks of inadvertently as well as advertently reinforcing harmful inaccuracies widely perpetuated about Spain and Hispanic culture.

Demographics

This curriculum unit is intended for Novice level students of Spanish, in other words Spanish levels I and II. I teach at Independence High School.

A large urban high school on the boundary between urban Charlotte and the community of Mint Hill, Independence High School has approximately 130 full-time teachers and an enrollment of around 2,469 students. Mint Hill, also in Mecklenburg County, is a traditionally working-class community with rural roots.

Based on 2018-2019 test scores, we rank 254th out of 510 North Carolina high schools. The school is majority non-White. Black and White enrollment is about even, 33% and 30.2% respectively. Hispanic enrollment again is nearly even, representing nearly a third (27%.) A growing cohort of refugee students, mostly from Nepal, Myanmar, and the Middle East has high visibility. 53.8% of all students receive free or reduced lunch.¹

Objectives: Teaching History, not Myth

The Problem with Pilgrims

Every year in Spanish III, we have a unit on outdoor activities. The culture component of that unit is a lesson on the pilgrimage of the Camino de Santiago de Compostela. Every year, I have

the same headaches with the unit. The problem lies in the word “pilgrim” in the students’ imagination, as opposed to “Pilgrim.”

Following the ninth century discovery in of a tomb attributed to the apostle Saint James the Greater in Compostela, Galicia, the site became a major source of pilgrimage for global Christianity, rivalling Jerusalem and Rome.² There are many different pilgrimage routes, from the original Camino Primitivo marking the first pilgrimage of King Alfonso II from Oviedo to Compostela to routes extending one thousand or even 1,500 kilometers.³ European pilgrims came from as far away as Moscow.⁴ In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, African pilgrims came from as far away as Nubia, some of them stopping first in Jerusalem.⁵ Faithful Christians who made the arduous journey were (and still are) granted a plenary indulgence by the Pope, remission of temporal punishment, that is to say, punishment in this life or in Purgatory, for all sins.⁶

It is this last part that confounds my students. I tell them at the beginning of the unit that a “pilgrim” is a person who makes a religious or spiritual journey, presumably a *round trip* journey. I tell them that the medieval and modern pilgrims on the Camino de Santiago were not and are not migrants or settlers. I tell them that pilgrims, whether to Jerusalem, Santiago de Compostela, or Mecca, travel for a variety of religious motivations but that religious separatism (which the Puritans sought) and religious freedom (which my students have been taught the Puritans sought) are not among them. I tell them this at the beginning, middle and end of the unit, and again while handing out the test. I show them footage of and interviews with contemporary pilgrims on the Camino de Santiago. What do they tell me? They tell me, “I asked my history teacher and he said you’re wrong. He said the Pilgrims were seeking religious freedom and indulgences are something Catholics buy with money and maybe you should try teaching your own subject.” The students and the teachers have studied pilgrimage, pilgrims and Pilgrims, and they have learned about papal indulgences. Neither they, nor their teachers, can disentangle pilgrims from Pilgrims, nor can they disentangle the theological concept of a papal indulgence from the *sale* of indulgences Martin Luther railed against. In an essay question contrasting pilgrims on the Camino de Santiago in the Middle Ages versus the pilgrims who undertake the Camino today, a large fraction of the students will give an answer having to do with settlers or migrants seeking religious freedom. I used to think they simply just didn’t listen to my lessons or do the reading. Now, I think many of them *do* listen and *do* read, but they have a fixed idea of what a “Pilgrim” is they simply believe I am wrong. Everyone *knows* that Pilgrims seek religious freedom; who am I to tell them otherwise?

Here is where we have to be especially careful teaching about ideas that are enshrined in mythic history. In students’ minds, “pilgrim” means “emigrant seeking religious freedom,” so if I teach them there were “pilgrims” in medieval Spain, what I’ve really taught them is that people came to Spain from around the world seeking religious freedom—an absolute untruth. Likewise, if we teach students that “Moors” from Africa ruled Spain for hundreds of years, “African” inescapably means “black” to our students, and what we have taught our students is that medieval Spain was a black kingdom like Dahomey or Ethiopia. Likewise, Islam itself is racialized in the American imagination, so talking about Islam in a Hispanic context will often be taken as a conversation about Africans; at specific times, it will be a conversation about Africans, and at other times, it will not be. We want to dispel the idea that European racism roots

itself in an essential black/white binary, and we want to disabuse students of the notion of a Europe that becomes more civilized as one moves northward and westward and more superstitious and barbarous as one moves eastward or southward. To this end, I commit to the following principles: show before telling, stick to particulars, and teach from the past into the present (rather than the other way around.)

Content Research: *Moros y cristianos*

Moros y cristianos: forgotten legacy of a savory dish

Moros y cristianos (“Moors and Christians”) is an essential Cuban dish consisting of white rice cooked with black beans. Every Spanish teacher I ever had growing up assured me the dish was originally Spanish and that it was a reference to the *Reconquista*, the centuries-long reconquest of the Iberian peninsula by Spanish Christian knights (the white rice) against the Muslim Moors (the black beans.) Writers in Spanish have suggested it the dish alludes not to the historical battles themselves, but to annual street pageants in Valencia and Asturias in which richly costumed mock combatants dressed as Christian knights and Moors respectively stage processions and battles in the street. At least one Spanish chef, however, assures the dish is *not* from Valencia or Asturias.⁷ Another, from Asturias, asserts that it is widely eaten in Asturias, but is unsure whether the dish is from Spain or whether it migrated back to Spain from Latin America.⁸

The dish is widely attested in Latin America and I can find little evidence to contradict a Latin American origin. In the absence of a definitive history of Hispanic culinary tradition to lay the matter to rest, we may ask, “Does the black/white binary of black Muslims versus white Christians apply to the religious and ethnic makeup of Spain at any time? If this binary does not apply to Spain, could it apply to Cuba at any point?”

If we go back to the time of the expulsion of Spain’s ostensibly converted Muslim community, the *moriscos*, in 1609, we have good contemporary documentation, painted by or at least informed by eyewitnesses. King Felipe III, the king responsible for the expulsion, commissioned a series of highly detailed paintings to capture the mass expulsion from the embarkation at Spanish ports to disembarkation at ports in North Africa and the Levant.⁹ In one, the [*Embarkation of the Moriscos at the Port of Valencia*](#), (1616) we see in the foreground a heartbreaking scene of a *morisco* father bidding goodbye to his Christian daughter and wife (identifiable by their dress.) In another, we see a surprising scene of defiance. In [*The Embarkment of the Moriscos from the Port of Dénia*](#) we see *morisca* women, identifiable by their dress, dancing to the accompaniment of music as Christian women look on; *morisco* men in an adjoining area on the waterfront hold a Greco-Roman wrestling tournament. The *moriscos* at Dénia responded to their exile by indulging in public celebration of all the elements of their culture previously suppressed by civil edict—music, dance, sport, even weddings were celebrated at the occasion of the expulsion.¹⁰ In any event, in the all the paintings we see of the expulsion, painted contemporaneously, we see no effort to distinguish the *moriscos* by color. We know that black Africans made up part of the population of Dénia in the Islamic period,¹¹ but in

the expulsion paintings, the *moriscos* are distinguished from other Spaniards by dress and not by skin tone.

Further back in time, in the twelfth century Andalusí Arabic manuscript *Qissat Bayad wa Riyad*, we see Moorish (that is to say, Spanish Muslim) illustrations representing Moors.¹² When we look at an image of a musician serenading courtly women in a courtyard, we see one brown face—the rest are all fair, or represented as such. Perhaps two centuries later in the *Cantigas de Santa María* by King Alonso X we find many illustrations of encounters between Christians and Moors.¹³ [Folio 92R](#) from this volume is typical: we can identify the Moors by their clothing, not their skin tone. The Muslims here as elsewhere in contemporary illustrations of encounters between Christians and Moors are shown as having a range of phenotypes, from blonde Visigoths to swarthy Berbers, with an occasional black African face appearing. It is problematic to rely on medieval, early modern and modern illustrations of Moors to type the Muslims of Spain, as we will see later.¹⁴ However, I think it very fair to say that based on literary¹⁵ and historical¹⁶ sources the “Moors” (who did not call themselves “Moors”) encompassed several diverse demographic groups. If we were to choose a bean dish to represent the Moors of Spain, it would have to be seven-bean soup.

Where we do find a white and Christian versus black and Muslim binary is in Cuba, the country most closely associated with the dish *moros y cristianos*. In the first half of the nineteenth century, over 20,000 enslaved African Muslims were brought to Cuba, nearly half of all Muslims captured by the transatlantic slave trade.¹⁷ Most of them were Mandinga. We have ample records of Islamic or Islamized names among slaves brought to Cuba. At this date, we have little surviving evidence of communal religious expression or Muslim practice.¹⁸ This favorite dish of the Cuban table may be a reminder of a Muslim past in Cuba historians are just beginning to recover.

A question that Spanish teachers always get when novice learners are first learning adjectives to describe people is about the word for “brunette,” *moreno* or *morena*. In Spain, *moreno* refers to a person with dark brown to black hair, but in Latin America *moreno* refers to a person of African descent. My students have always asked why this would be and I have never had a satisfactory answer. I believe this gives us a historic justification. The word *moreno* of course means ultimately “like a Moor” which is to say, “like a Muslim.” In the Iberian context, this would refer to Berbers from Morocco—at least in the earliest days of Muslim Spain; we have seen that by the thirteenth century Spanish Muslims were very diverse and by the seventeenth century they were distinguishable by dress, not by phenotype. In the American context, Muslims would have been overwhelmingly West African—and they were indeed present in significant numbers. All of this suggests that the name of this staple rice and beans dish carries a history of the intersection of religion and race in Hispanic civilization, and a history of how Spanish colonists transformed Iberian racial and religious hierarchies as they used them to structure their lives in the Americas.

How the Moors gave us paper (and made the West possible)

Of all the advances of the early modern Europe and the Protestant Reformation celebrated by the textbooks I grew up with, none drew such praise as Gutenberg and the invention of the moveable

type printing press. The printing press made the exchange of ideas and freedom of thought possible. What my textbooks paid less attention to was the invention of paper, for which they thanked the Chinese. That is well and good, but they left a large and significant ellipsis between the Chinese mulberry bark paper and the existence of a paper industry in Europe that would make the printing press a viable concern. In the age when it took 250 goatskins to print a small Bible, mass production of books would have been impossible. Paper made the printing press possible.¹⁹

The Abbasid Caliphate led Europe by more than half a millennium in the promotion and creation of mass literacy.²⁰ The Arabs had captured the technology for making paper from China, building paper mills in Iraq by the eighth century.²¹ By 1035, paper was cheap and common enough in Damascus that merchants in the market used it to wrap vegetables and spices.²² By the middle of the eleventh century, we know of a paper mill in Xàtiva, Spain owned by a certain ‘Abu Masafaya in 1056.²³ While this is the earliest verified paper mill in Europe, the craft was certainly highly advanced by this time. We have contemporaneous records from the Cairo Genizah, a repository of medieval Hebrew writings. In one letter dated to the same decade as the founding of the Xàtiva paper mill, a Daniel ben Azariah Gaon of Palestine writes to his correspondent in Cairo asking him to hire a scribe and to purchase high-quality large-format Andalusí (Spanish) or Tripolitan paper—not Egyptian.²⁴ This raises the suggestion that the Spanish paper industry was already well known and had acquired a reputation for quality.

Paper took a while to take on in Europe, largely because Christian authorities saw it as a manifestation of Muslim culture and perhaps because of the interests of landowners who profited from the trade in animal skins for vellum and parchment. In 1221, the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II issued an edict invalidating all official documents written on paper. While the printing press could not have thrived without paper, the European paper industry did not truly thrive until the invention of the printing press.²⁵ It would take nearly six and a half centuries from the founding of the Xàtiva paper mill for Europeans to enjoy cheap, plentiful single-use paper as was employed in Damascus of the eleventh century.²⁶ From chemistry to mathematics to astronomy, the contributions of Islamic civilization to the West are numerous. When we think of all the things paper makes possible, and all the ways paper orders our daily lives—from traffic citations to greeting cards, from toilet paper to paper currency—it is hard to imagine a single contribution to Western civilization that has transformed our lives more thoroughly.

How the Spanish-American War gave us the police

Most people do not think too often about the Spanish-American war, and less about the Philippines War that followed. America brought a lot home from that war we do not realize—chinos, for example. These plain-front trousers were first made as part of American military uniforms sourced from Chinese cotton twill for troops in the Philippines in 1898.²⁷ That is not all we brought back from the war. We also brought the police.

Think about how often you see the police, especially the police employed off-duty as security at public and private venues. They are everywhere, in our hospitals, our schools, our movie theaters and supermarkets. They are on our highways and on our block. The police as we know

them in the United States (and, indeed, in much of the world) began in the Philippines as part of the occupation that followed the Philippines war.

The Spanish began the colonization of the Philippines in the mid-1500s in the wake of the conquest of Granada and Mexico. By 1578, they began military expeditions against Muslim forces in Mindanao, beginning a conflict that would last 320 years off and on. Muslim islands of the southern Philippines were neither subjugated nor pacified. Long interludes of uneasy coexistence between indigenous Islamic and Spanish colonial authorities were interspersed with sporadic outburst of jihad and slave raids by Moro raiders. The so-called “Moros” of the Philippines were of course not related to the Berbers or the Moriscos of Al-Andalus but were so known by the Spanish for their Muslim faith. This untenable state persisted from the dawn of the Spanish colonial presence in Asia to the American occupation of the Philippines in 1898.²⁸

The Spanish intransigence towards the Muslim faith bred a uniquely Filipino brand of holy warrior, the *juramentado*. The *juramentado*, or “oath taker,” could be any ordinary Muslim man. He might have marital problems, he might be depressed, or he might have an unavenged relative killed by the occupying forces. He would take leave of his parents, ask permission of his sultan, and engage in ritual bathing and shaving of his head and body.²⁹ The *juramentado* would tie his limbs and extremities with heavy cords that would act as tourniquets and prevent him from succumbing to injuries before inflicting a mortal blow.³⁰ He would then conceal a bladed weapon on his person and proceed to a public place where he would encounter representatives of the occupation and attack them by surprise, attacking until he himself fell in battle. He might act alone or in concert with a suicide squad of *juramentados*.³¹ The *juramentados* forced the Spanish to retreat artillery range of Muslim areas and leave them alone. When the Americans arrived in the Philippines this type of *juramentado* asymmetric warfare tied up full 20% of the United States Army for the better part of a decade.³²

After the end of organized Filipino nationalist insurrection against U.S. forces, the United States occupying forces found a baffling array of opponents in the islands. The north was beset by brigands and warlords, who contemporary chroniclers such as Philippines veteran Vic Hurley dismissed as criminals and fantasist pretenders. The threat from the south, by an entrenched and intransigent Islamic resistance, drew no such disdain. In the face of a new kind of low-intensity asymmetrical warfare, the American forces organized a new kind of paramilitary police force under the command of American officers, the Philippine Constabulary. While the officers were American, the rank and file were recruited from the natives they patrolled.³³ They developed techniques of counterinsurgency that would have as great an impact at home as in America’s subsequent adventures abroad.

Many influential American lawmen began their careers in the States following their experiences in counterinsurgency in the Philippines. For example, Jesse Garwood, who established the Pennsylvania state constabulary, established himself in the Philippines Constabulary offering bounties for the ears of enemy combatants.³⁴ Ralph Van Deman, who pioneered the FBI profiling of radicals in the United States, was also a veteran of the Philippines Constabulary.³⁵ The most famous and influential veteran of the Philippines conflict was undoubtedly August Vollmer.

August Vollmer was a veteran of the Philippine conflict, and he returned from the war in 1904 and soon applied lessons learned in island combat and pacification to policing at home. He transformed the local police department in Berkeley from an undisciplined and corrupt group of racketeers to a disciplined, uniformed paramilitary force. The elements of policing we take for granted—an armed, uniformed professional force that combines mobile patrols with techniques such as data management and networks of clandestine informants—all came out of the counterinsurgency experience in the Philippines.³⁶ Although he himself only had a few years of schooling, he introduced educational requirements for police and began the requirement of a college degree. He promoted the hiring of women and people of color to police forces, inviting whites and males who disapproved to check their guns and badges at the door. He outfitted police with radios and made them mobile with bicycles, motorcycles and radio-equipped police cars.³⁷ He is the original promoter of the widespread use of fingerprinting in American crime fighting.³⁸ Vollmer promoted the most regressive practices in American policing, especially the systematic use of racial profiling.³⁹ Paradoxically, he also promoted the most progressive ideas in American policing, such as the promotion of women and people of color in the ranks of police and advocating for the total decriminalization of drugs and prostitution, along with lenient treatment for nonviolent offenders.⁴⁰

Halal hispano: the flavors of the American Hispanic Muslim kitchen

In family kitchens and in trendy food trucks, there is a new fusion cuisine gaining attention in the United States: halal Hispanic. In Atlanta, Georgia, dentist and chef Farhan Momin serves up Paneer Chorizo Tacos and Malai Boti Enchiladas with pico de gallo and coconut curry queso.⁴¹ Just down the street from my home in Charlotte, Khuram and Damaris Bashir run Mi Barrio Halal Latin Grill, serving up traditionally rendered Dominican favorites like oxtail stew and *chivo guisado* with halal meat from Asheboro.⁴² For some, halal Hispanic food means simple substitutions, like the way Halal Tacos in Garden City, Michigan makes *tacos al pastor* with chicken instead of pork.⁴³ (Fittingly, *tacos al pastor* or “shepherd’s tacos” are so called because they were originally made with lamb. Lebanese immigrants brought döner kebab-style vertical rotisserie cooking to Mexico in the 1930s; Mexicans adopted the cooking style and adapted it to the Mexican palate with the use of pork.⁴⁴) Elsewhere, creators serve up enticing blends of regional cuisines. At *¿Queso Ho?*, a Pakistani-Mexican fusion restaurant in Austin, Texas, the customer favorite is Fish Masala Tacos and Quesadillas.⁴⁵ In this final chapter, students will engage with Hispanic Muslims through technology to learn about how the 8% of American Muslims who are Hispanic navigate the intersection of faith and culinary tradition.

Instructional Implementation

Strategies

At this point, we should pause to talk about the framework of race in Christian Southwestern Europe in the medieval through early modern and modern epochs. From at least the twelfth century on, and probably earlier, Spain and France had a fully articulated framework of systemic racism that presaged every hallmark of systemic racism in North America. There was forced social segregation marked by separate entrances and partitions in public places, such as churches.⁴⁶ There were separate fountains for drinking. There were “sundown towns” and

residential segregation.⁴⁷ There was forced sterilization of racial undesirables.⁴⁸ There were restrictions on occupations for members of racially inferior groups.⁴⁹ All of this was in the framework of a system where differences were predicated on what we would recognize as a “racial” basis—that is, based in essential physical characteristics and phenotypic differences. Color did *not* enter into these calculations. The physical differences attributed to these groups, and regularly confirmed by the examinations of learned experts, ranged from attached earlobes, to one ear larger than the other, to extreme bodily odor or excessive bodily heat.⁵⁰ The children of some races were said to be born with a tail the parents would pinch off.⁵¹ One particular phenomenon chiefly attributed to the Jews was male menstruation.⁵²

These “accursed races”⁵³ of Southwest Europe persisted into the modern era, but had largely vanished by the beginning of the twentieth century;⁵⁴ only the *vaqueros de alzada* of Asturias are still a recognizable discriminated social group today.⁵⁵ We can divide them into two main groups: Jews and their descendants, like the forcibly converted *Chuetas* of Mallorca, and groups identifiable by occupation. Most prominently in this group, we have the race of pauper artisans known as *Cagots* in Southern France, *Caquins* in Brittany, *Agotes* of Northern Spain, and *Marans* of Auvergne.⁵⁶ In Spain, we have a separate group, the *vaqueiros de alzada*, seminomadic cattle herders who still exist as a distinct social group today.⁵⁷ While we know today that these groups are physically and linguistically indistinguishable from their neighbors, we must remember that their compatriots *believed* them to be essentially physically different. Another group, the *gitanos* or Gypsies, now commonly known as Roma, actually was distinguishable by darker color and by language (and still is.) These, however, while disadvantaged and at times persecuted generally suffered lighter restrictions and faced policies intended to settle or assimilate them, rather than exclude them as undesirables.⁵⁸ Questions of color were outside the traditional racial scheme of Europeans. Indeed, when Gaston Méry finally coined the French word *racisme* in 1892, it was to describe the resistance of the “authentic” Frenchman, the Celtic Gaul, to the races of Jews and “Latins” (Southern French)—groups we classify as “white” in the contemporary North American context.⁵⁹

An important element in this unit is helping students look at historical particulars in order to break down myths and generalizations. We want to break down the idea that medieval Europe, for example, was exclusively white or exclusively Christian. It is not a political or pedagogic issue of “diversity and representation”; it is a question of historical accuracy and the pursuit of factual truth.

Moros y cristianos: The Unrecognized Legacy of a Favorite Cuban Dish

In a unit on food, tell students about the dish *moros y cristianos*. Explain that Spaniards serve the dish in parts of Spain, but generally regard it as a Cuban dish. It consists of white rice (representing the *cristianos*) cooked in black beans (representing the *moros*) seasoned with cumin, onion, bell pepper, oregano, bacon and bay leaf. It is an essential and representative Cuban dish. The usual explanation is that the dish is a reference to the Moorish conquest of Spain in 711 or to the Catholic *Reconquista*.⁶⁰ But is it?

Explain to students that *moreno*, in Spain, means “dark-haired” and in Latin America means “dark-skinned” or “Afro-descendant” and in either case is a reference to the *moros* or Moors of

North Africa. Share with students contemporary illustrations of Moors and Christians together, such as [illustrations from the *Cantigas de Santa María*](#).⁶¹ The illustrations are highly detailed, down to details such as the henna decorations on a Muslim woman's fingers. It is interesting to note that notable contemporary illustrations of Moors and Christians together depict the Moors as being very diverse in appearance—[some look European, some look Levantine or Middle Eastern, and some are black](#).⁶²

Madhi Blaine, a Moroccan-born student of Moorish history, points out the problems with using artwork, even contemporary artwork, as a way of phenotypically categorizing the medieval Moor. Illustrations by Muslim artists tended to reflect the background of the artist and audience: Turkish illustrations represented the Moors as Turks, while Levantine illustrations represented the Moors as Levantine Arabs. Moreover, European painters representing the Moor render increasingly racialized portrayals from the seventeenth century onwards, representing the Moor as more and more Black African by the 19th century as the European colonial power climb to ascendancy in Africa.⁶³

For comparison or contrast, we can compare the medieval illustrations to descriptions by medieval Arab chroniclers like Ibn Hazm (d. 1064), who attested to the prevalence of blue eyes and blonde hair among the Umayyad caliphs and their children.⁶⁴ Jessica Coope points out that the Muslim population of Umayyad Al-Andalus was made up of many disparate groups: Arab Muslims, Berber and *muwallad* (converted Iberian) Muslims who were treated as Arab, non-elite converts, and non-elite Berbers.⁶⁵ Literary and historical sources, then, do point to an understanding of the “Moors” of Muslim Spain as reflecting a diversity likely akin to what we see represented visually in the *Cantigas de Santa María*, whether or not the artist or artists of the *Cantigas* self-consciously sought to render an accurate portrayal.⁶⁶ You may wish to show students all or part of *Time Team* Season 7, Episode 1, which touches on the diversity of the population in the Islamic port of Dénia, Spain in the 12th century, in addition to highlighting the technological advances of Muslim Spain.⁶⁷ To show the end of communal Muslim life in Dénia, you may share with them the painting [Embarcament dels moriscos al port de Dénia](#) by Vicent Metre, 1613.⁶⁸ (If you want to explore the status of the *morisco* in Spanish society, you may wish to introduce students to the painter Juan de Pareja, a student of the painter Diego Velázquez originally inherited by Velázquez as an enslaved servant. For more on the life and renown of Spain's most famous *morisco* of African descent, see [Appendix: Materials for Classroom Use](#).)

Inform students that one country that did have a split between black African Muslims and white Christians was Cuba in the nineteenth century. Of the myriad enslaved Africans forcibly taken to Cuba, twenty thousand African Muslims were taken to Cuba in the first half of the 1800s. Indeed, half of all the Muslims taken from Africa by the transatlantic slave trade ended up in Cuba.⁶⁹ It is possible the dish *moros y cristianos* got its name from association with the *Reconquista* in Spain, but equally likely if not more so that the identification with Spanish history was attached to the dish because people forgot the Muslim heritage of so many of the Africans brought to Cuba in forced servitude. Inform students that the study of Muslim Africans in the history of the Americas is an area of growing inquiry and interest.

As an assignment, give students recipes of common Latin dishes in English and have them create a recipe (or a cooking video) using informal commands. In addition, have them provide a

history of the dish to accompany the recipe. *Moros y cristianos* would be a good one to start with.⁷⁰ Other recipes with colorful histories might be the original Ignacio Amaya nacho recipe,⁷¹ *gazpacho*,⁷² or *fufú cubano*.⁷³ Beware of specious etymologies and origins, even from well-regarded sources. *Gazpacho* does not come from an Arabic word; how many Arabic words have a hard “p” in them? *Fufú* is a West African dish and did *not* get its name from an English plantation overseer handing out bananas saying, “Food! Food!”⁷⁴ There is a lot of bad information out there and so it is good to point students in the right direction.

Tying it all together, there is a *lot* going on in this chapter. I can think of a number of conversations I would want to have with my students. First, depending on where we live our students may have a very limited view of the range of Latin cuisine represented in their own communities. Where I teach, students name mostly dishes from the Tex-Mex and California repertoire when I ask them to identify favorite Latin foods. This unit should help expand their perspectives. Another conversation to have about food is about history. All of our favorite foods come from somewhere. They are rooted in history, like the grilled cheese sandwich, tied to the endless “American cheese filling sandwiches” served by Navy cooks in World War Two,⁷⁵ and in national myth, like the traditional American Thanksgiving dinner. Some dishes, like *moros y cristianos*, are rooted in both—in the national myth of a Christian Spain reconquered from “foreign” invaders, and in the history of tens of thousands of African Muslims taken in chains to Cuba.

A harder conversation, but one worth having, is about how societies construct race and belonging. You could do a deep dive into the history of the construction of race in medieval and early modern Europe. It may be enough to show them a medieval France divided by race, such as [the low door on the side of French churches](#) that forced the “accursed race” of *cagot* carpenters to stoop low when entering,⁷⁶ alongside the medieval Islamic cemetery of Dénia⁷⁷ where rich and poor, black and white lay side by side without distinction. At the same time, while medieval Islamic Spain did not have tension between blacks and whites, per se, there was strife between Berbers and Arabs.⁷⁸ It is complicated.

The First Paper Mills in Europe: How the West Finally Caught Up

In a unit on food, or a unit on stores and shopping, share with students the painting [Naturaleza muerta con vegetales y ensures de cocina 1651](#) by Antonio Salgado y Pereda. The painting comes from the era of the Spanish Counter-Reformation when the Church banned all allegorical painting, thus popularizing the kitchen still life and other domestic scenes.⁷⁹ Ask students to identify which products in the painting the Moors brought to widespread use in Spain. (Explain who the Moors are if you have not already!) Students will probably identify, by process of elimination, the orange and the lemon. Roman Spain probably knew lemons,⁸⁰ but the Moors definitely brought the orange and introduced widespread citrus cultivation by improving on Roman systems of irrigation.⁸¹ Encourage students to keep guessing until someone notices the loose pages from a worn-out book, in the kitchen to for use as kindling or to wrap food. (Probably an allegorical reference musing on the fleeting nature of fame and renown to skirt the Church’s censors, but who knows?) Yes, the Moors brought paper to Spain!

Explain to the students that literacy was widespread under the Abbasid Caliphate⁸² and that paper was so plentiful in the medieval Arab world that merchants in Iraq and Syria used paper as single-use disposable packaging much as we use it today.⁸³ Meanwhile, in Europe people still wrote on animal skins. A small Bible took the skins of 250 sheep to make!⁸⁴ Explain that Arabs built the first European paper mills in Spain roughly a thousand years ago but that the product took another four centuries to win universal acceptance in Christian lands, gaining widespread acceptance only after the invention of the printing press.⁸⁵

You may initiate a conversation with students about all the things the widespread production of paper made possible, from wallpaper to toilet paper to paper money to paperback books. Have students brainstorm and make a list, in Spanish, of everything in their homes or classrooms made of paper.

Things We Brought Home from the War: Legacy of the Spanish-American War in the Philippines

For the United States, the Spanish-American War of 1898 made the nation into a world superpower with colonial holdings in the Caribbean and the Pacific. For Spain, it was a disaster marking the end of the country's position as a world power. The war of 1898 was the beginning of eighty years of national decline and isolation that would not end until the end of the Franco dictatorship in 1978.⁸⁶ The Philippine peoples, for their part, suffered immensely during the period of war and subsequent pacification and colonization, losing some 200,000 Filipinos to the war and subsequent counterinsurgency.⁸⁷

Most Americans do not think at all about the ways the Spanish-American War shaped this country. In this part of the unit, I recommend using the Spanish-American War and its impact as the Culture lesson for one thematic unit. Depending on the level of the course, you may pick the unit that deals with professions and occupations. I recommend spreading the lesson content over three days.

On the first day, share with students the basic details of the Spanish-American War. The United States went to war with Spain in 1898. Spain lost most of her remaining overseas colonies, Cuba and Puerto Rico along with Guam and the Philippines. America also annexed Hawaii (not a Spanish possession) as part of the action of the war.⁸⁸ Share with students that the pants they know as chinos were popularized in the United States directly because of the conflict in the Philippines, as cotton twill fabric sourced from China was used to make tropical weight uniforms for the soldiers stationed there. Share with students an article in Spanish about the origin of chino pants.⁸⁹

On the second day, ask students if they knew that the Philippines had once been a Spanish possession just like Cuba and Puerto Rico. Ask if they have any Filipino friends or family members. Share with them the story of Filipina nurses in the United States. You may wish to use a video or podcast as part of your presentation.⁹⁰ As part of the colonization and pacification of the Philippines, the United States promoted English-language education and training to the people of the Philippines. Nursing schools on the American model promoted the notion that nursing was a women's profession.⁹¹ Filipina nurses began coming to the United States mainland as early as 1911 and the United States government began actively to recruit Filipina nurses to

work in the U.S. in 1948. Changes in United States immigration law in the 1960s opened the door for Filipinos to live and work permanently in the United States. 150,000 Filipinos, mostly women, have immigrated to the United States to work in medical professions.⁹² Unfortunately, the Philippines have a nursing shortage, as nurses trained in the Philippines can earn much higher salaries abroad than at home.⁹³

On the third day, ask students how often they see a police officer in uniform. They will probably tell you they see one every day. Ask about some of the places that they see police: do they see police in their neighborhoods? Do they see police at the supermarket or at the mall? Do they see police at sporting events or at the movie theater? Tell students that the United States did not always have universally uniformed police.

During the occupation of the Philippines, American forces faced a Muslim insurgency that did not follow the traditional rules of war. Attackers were members of the civilian population, not a regular armed force, and could appear out of nowhere to attack American troops. To counter them, the Americans created a force that was part army, part intelligence agency, and part law enforcement agency: the Philippine Constabulary. Many US troops had very hard racial attitudes against the Philippine people,⁹⁴ but the Americans realized they could not effectively establish order in the islands without a force that could communicate effectively and understood the local culture. To that end, they recruited a force of Filipino regular troops led by American officers and waged a fifteen-year campaign to break the insurgency and establish American control.⁹⁵

American veterans of the Philippines counterinsurgency returned to the United States and applied what they had learned in the islands fighting insurgents to fighting crime in the United States. They changed American policing into the modern force we know today. They introduced uniforms and paramilitary organization and training, and instituted minimum educational requirements for recruits. Following the lessons learned in the Philippines, even in the 1920s police began to recruit immigrants, Blacks and women to better liaison with the communities they patrolled. The new modern force emphasized mobility, with bicycle, motorcycle and automobile patrols, along with radio communication. Above all, collection and management of data, including fingerprinting, became an important part of police operations and planning.⁹⁶ Unfortunately, the hard racial attitudes shared by many US officers in the Philippines counterinsurgency survived the trip back home.⁹⁷ New “modern” police training curricula in the early age of modern policing in the 1920s included training on eugenics and racial profiling.⁹⁸

Use an infographic to share the information with the students. You may assess the students by including the material in a culture question on the unit test. As another option, in a unit on professions, you could give students a blank infographic to fill in using pictures of various professions: lawyer (*abogado/a*), chef (*cocinero/a*), nurse (*enfermero/a*), and police officer (*policía/mujer policía*). Title the infographic, “¿Cuales son las características de un/a buen/a...?” Students would fill in space provided with adjectives for personality traits or complete sentences, depending on the level and advancement in the course.

Halal hispano: a new fusion cuisine takes root in America!

Depending on the survey, as of 2015 there were anywhere between 52,000 and 198,000 American Muslims who identify as Hispanic or Latino. A majority are converts to Islam of Mexican or Puerto Rican descent. Latino Muslims are overwhelmingly US citizens (84%) and fairly highly educated (41% have college degrees and 81% have some college or vocational training.) 95% are as or more comfortable using English than Spanish. Interestingly, 73% of these Latino Muslims are female.⁹⁹ This group is not only poised to be influential, but has also traditionally taken on a strong role as carriers of culinary tradition in their households.

I would cover this segment in a thematic unit about food, if you have one, depending on the level of the course. On the first day of this segment, ask students to define fusion cuisine. Ask if they have ever had a Hawaiian pizza and ask them to describe it. Hawaiian pizza, created by an immigrant Greek chef living in southern Ontario, is a great example of fusion cuisine.¹⁰⁰ Ask the students about some of their favorite examples of Latin fusion cuisine from the United States and North America. These might include burritos, which took their current form in San Francisco, or nachos, which come from Piedras Negras, Mexico, a small town on the edge of a military base in Duncan, Texas. (“Nacho” is the nickname for Ignacio; these are named for chef Ignacio “Nacho” Anaya, who created the recipe in 1943 and died in 1975.)¹⁰¹

On the second day of this unit, share with students some of the many kinds of taco from Los Angeles alone. There are the Neo-Seoul Kogi BBQ tacos of famed chef Roy Choy.¹⁰² There is the “Compton taco” or “Black taco,” a staple of African-American eateries stretching back decades: a corn hard shell filled with turkey or beef and piled high with lettuce, tomato, and plenty of cheese, no onions.¹⁰³ Ask if they have ever heard of halal tacos made with deep-fried naan bread instead of a tortilla, or topped with coconut curry instead of pico de gallo. Find menus online and share them with your students.¹⁰⁴

On the third day, try a video call or record a podcast with a local home chef or restaurant owner on his or her experience with halal Latin cooking. There are two main themes in American Latino halal—the chefs who do their best to blend culinary traditions, combining flavors and ingredients, and the chefs who strive to deliver the most traditional Latin flavors using halal ingredients. Does your chef have one approach that predominates? What is a typical dinner your chef would create?

As a final project, have your students present a Latin fusion dish that reflects their own culture. It may be something traditional and simple, like the original Nacho Amaya recipe for nachos.¹⁰⁵ It could be something from their own culture, like tacos topped with watercress and Burmese fish sauce. Have students compose a video or slide show photo essay with pictures of the steps they used to create the recipe. They should caption or narrate their presentation using the preterit tense. This would be a good project for the conclusion of Spanish Level Two in my district.

Appendix 1: Implementing Teaching Standards

NM.COD.4.1 Compare tangible products related to the home and the classroom from the students’ and the target cultures.

NM.COD.4.2 Identify information about target culture perspectives and practices.

NM.CMT.4.1 Recognize aspects of the target culture and language in the students' culture and language.

NM.CMT.4.2 Identify products made and used by members of the target culture and the students' culture.

I wrote this unit with Spanish Level II (Novice Mid target proficiency) in mind, but themes and activities should be readily scalable to higher or lower levels of Spanish. Topics covered are intended to address the Connections to Other Disciplines (COD) and Communities (CMT) standards.

Materials for Classroom Use

Graham Dixon. *Time Team Season 7 Episode 1: Dénia, Spain*. BBC, 2000.

In this episode of the long-running BBC archaeology hit series, a team of British archaeologists works with local experts to excavate various sites from the Islamic period in Dénia, Spain in Valencia. We learn about Muslim burial customs in an 800-year-old cemetery with black African and Caucasoid Muslims buried side by side, and we learn how archaeologists identify a skull's ethnic origin by its facial features. We learn about the advanced state of medieval Islamic ceramic technology relative to northern Europe. We also learn about many of the foods Muslims brought to Europe through Muslim Spain, including carrots from Afghanistan and eggplant from India.

Elizabeth Borton de Trevino. *I, Juan de Pareja: The Story of a Great Painter and the Slave He Helped Become a Great Artist*. Square Fish, 1965.

Elizabeth Borton de Treviño and Enrique Treviño-Borton (translator.) "Yo, Juan de Pareja." Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1996.

"The Glencoe Literary Library Study Guide for I, Juan de Pareja by Elizabeth Borton de Treviño." The McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc., n.d.
http://www.glencoe.com/sec/literature/litlibrary/pdf/i_juan_de_pareja.pdf.

Winner of the 1966 Newberry Award, this book and its Spanish-language edition remain top sellers in the realm of art-related fiction for teens and young adults. The book novelizes the story of Juan de Pareja, a Spanish *morisco* slave of African descent. Spain's greatest artist, Diego de Velázquez, inherited Juan de Pareja from a family member. Velázquez eventually manumitted Juan de Pareja, who became a successful painter in his own right. Handle this one with some care. Elizabeth Borton de Treviño published the book in 1965, and the book still wins praise for the author's sensitive treatment of her subjects, unflinching portrayals of the harshness and cruelty of the seventeenth-century setting, and research into the period. Nonetheless, the author's attempt to render the institution of slavery through the eyes of a devout seventeenth-century persona, and not through a more contemporary lens, may be off-putting to some readers and a

teacher would be wise to address these considerations up front. Moreover, the book depicts both Juan de Pareja and the painter Diego de Velázquez as conventionally devout Catholics. This may indeed have been the case, but both painters shared a family legacy of forced conversion. Juan de Pareja's *morisco* status came from his descent from Spanish Muslims forcibly converted in the sixteenth century following the fall of Granada; Velázquez himself was almost certainly of *converso* descent, from a lineage of forcibly converted Jews.¹⁰⁶ It is an aspect of the characters' backgrounds that begs to be explored more fully.

Resources for Students

Ali. "Authentic Gazpacho Recipe." Gimme Some Oven, 2020.

<https://www.gimmesomeoven.com/authentic-gazpacho-recipe/>.

Maru Caamaño,. "Moros y Cristianos a La Asturiana." Cocinando con Maru Caamaño, 2018.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TEkowaJmHP8>.

Adán Medrano. "Nachos: Original Recipe Created By Ignacio 'Nacho' Anaya," 2016.

<https://adanmedrano.com/nachos-original-recipe-cinco-de-mayo/>.

Lourdes Castro. "Rice Cooked in Black Beans (Moros Y Cristianos) Recipe." Epicurious, 2011.

<https://www.epicurious.com/recipes/food/views/rice-cooked-in-black-beans-em-moros-y-cristianos-em-364829>.

Marta Darby. "Fufú Recipe - My Big Fat Cuban Family." My Big Fat Cuban Family, 2016.

<https://www.mybigfatcubanfamily.com/2016/07/fuf-recipe/>.

Clara Gonzalez. "Mangú Dominicano - The Authentic Recipe with Video." Simple, by Clara,

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Students don't know what they don't know. When giving students a project where we ask them to select, prepare and comment on traditional recipes, I find it best to offer them a selection of recipes we have already vetted. This saves students hours of getting lost in unreliable sources and misinformation. Students have a very limited frame of reference for Latin cuisine and are unlikely to meet any exposure to the wide array of Afro-Latin cuisine without help. Another consideration is to give students recipes of a variety of levels of complexity. Not all students have the resources to go out and buy a bunch of unfamiliar ingredients. Ignacio "Nacho" Amaya's original recipe for nachos will be a boon to students who need to keep things simple.

Resources for Teachers

Espinosa, Gaston, Harold Morales, and Juan Galvan. "Latino Muslims in the United States."

Journal of Race, Ethnicity, and Religion 8, no. 1 (2017): 1–48.¹⁰⁷

When I first started learning Spanish, Spanish teachers in the United States taught students that Hispanics were mostly Catholic, and left it at that. When I first started teaching Spanish, increasing segments of Spanish-speaking populations in the United States and

abroad were evangelical Christians. Now, eight percent of U.S. Muslims identify as Hispanic or Latino. This article is indispensable reading for Spanish teachers and others who teach Muslim or Hispanic students to better understand the shifting cultural and demographic landscape.

Maytorena Taylor, Jennifer. *New Muslim Cool*. U.S.A., 2009.¹⁰⁸

New Muslim Cool tells the story of Hamza Perez, a young Puerto Rican from Pittsburgh who encountered Islam and over 12 years transformed himself into a rapper, family man, religious leader and community builder. Available for streaming for free on Tubi as of this writing, this is one not to miss. This is the perfect companion piece to put a human face on “Latino Muslims in the United States.”

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