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# Predictors of Attitudes Toward Illegal Latino Immigrants

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*The correlates of attitudes toward illegal immigrants and responses to the well-publicized beatings of two illegal immigrants by sheriff's deputies in California were examined. In a sample of 140 university and community college students, humanitarian-egalitarian and individualistic values, stereotyping of illegal immigrants, and attitudes toward legal Mexican Americans as a measure of racism served as predictors. All the predictors, with the exception of individualistic values, were significant predictors of both anti-illegal immigrant attitudes and responses to the beatings. These findings suggest that negative stereotypes about illegal immigrants, racism toward Latinos, and a relative lack of humanitarian values are significant correlates of negative attitudes toward illegal immigrants, and that these same variables are important in explaining responses to a public event that centered around illegal immigrants.*

According to the Immigration and Naturalization Service, approximately 1.6 million illegal immigrants reside in California, and 125,000 more enter the state each year (California State General Election Ballot Pamphlet, 1994). The growing visibility of illegal immigrants over the years has created public concern about the social and economic impact of immigrants—in particular, Latino immigrants. By the 1980s, negative perceptions about undocumented immigrants were common. The perceptions included that immigrants are poor, lazy, dependent on social services, and costly for the states in which they reside, displacing native workers and driving down wages of comparably skilled native workers (Espanshade & Calhoun, 1993; Muller & Espanshade, 1985).

In the November 1994 election, Proposition 187, one of the most controversial initiatives in California history, was proposed and passed. Under Proposition 187, illegal immigrants (people residing in the United States

without legal documentation) are restricted from receiving public health care, social services, education, and welfare benefits. Proponents of Proposition 187 attributed passage of the measure to anticipated economic savings for California, whereas opponents argued that the central issue behind passage of the measure was racial discrimination, not economics. Because the majority of California immigrants are from Mexico and other Latin countries, Proposition 187 was interpreted by many as a direct racial assault on the California Latino community.

Research on college students' attitudes toward Proposition 187 (Quinton, Cowan, & Watson, 1986) found that among both Caucasian and Latino students, the more negatively illegal immigrants were rated compared to legal immigrants, the greater the support and reported vote for Proposition 187. Also, for both groups, right wing authoritarianism was related to Proposition 187 support and vote. Among Latinos, collective self-esteem was negatively related to Proposition 187 support and vote, whereas for Caucasians, collective self-esteem was positively related to support and vote for Proposition 187. In another study of attitudes toward Proposition 187 among college students (Rodrigues, Lloyd, & Pollitt, 1996), support of the proposition was related to a conservative ideology, low egalitarianism, and the perception that illegal immigrants have control over their situation, but was not associated with belief in a just world. In a study of college student attitudes toward immigrants (status unspecified) (Liu, Widjajawiguna, Shiau, & Dunbar, 1996), negative affect and symbolic opposition to immigrants were associated with negative contact with immigrants and with having a prejudiced personality profile.

Although Proposition 187 has not been put into effect (as of January, 1997) because of legal battles and challenges, discrimination against Latino illegal immigrants continues. The Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles (CHIRLA) (1995) reported that discrimination and hate events directed at Latino immigrants have increased since the passage of Proposition 187. On April 1, 1996, in a dramatic videotape aired repeatedly on television, two Riverside County, California, sheriff's deputies violently clubbed two suspected Mexican illegal immigrants after a high-speed, 80-mile-an-hour chase of a battered pickup truck filled with 21 people (Malnic & Boyer, 1996). Although the illegal immigrants were unarmed and may not have appeared to be a threat to the officers, the immigrants were beaten severely and treated as dangerous criminals.

Although many people saw this beating as cruel, unnecessary, and a violation of human rights, others believed that the illegal immigrants deserved the beatings, and that the beatings would not have happened had the illegal immigrants not been in the United States illegally. Why is there such

a split in people's attitudes toward illegal immigrants? Why are some citizens willing to help others who are less fortunate and to defend the rights of all people to basic humane treatment, whereas others see illegal immigrants only as a economic burden? Are attitudes toward illegal Latino immigrants simply an economic issue or a racial issue?

The present study was designed to examine the predictors of attitudes people have toward illegal immigrants. At a distal level, attitudes toward illegal immigrants may reflect basic value orientations. Katz and Hass (1988) examined two core value orientations in relation to attitudes toward African Americans: individualism (which emphasizes personal freedom, self-reliance, devotion to work, and achievement) and humanitarianism or communalism (which embraces egalitarian and humanitarian precepts). The individualistic value orientation—or Protestant ethic—appears to be implicated in people's negative attitudes toward African Americans and is related to conservatism, negative attitudes toward the poor and public assistance programs, and reactions to equity norms in competition (Feather, 1984; Greenberg, 1978; Katz & Hass, 1988; Mirels & Garrett, 1971). Because individualism tends to place blame on individuals, rather than systemic forces, we expected that agreement with individualism as a value system would be positively associated with anti-illegal immigrant attitudes.

The humanitarian value orientation—or communalism—emphasizes adherence to the democratic ideals of equality, social justice, and concern for others' well-being (Katz & Hass, 1988). Humanitarian values are related to liberalism and empathic responses to the needs and aspirations of minorities, sympathy for minorities, and support of public efforts to improve the lot of minorities (Katz & Hass, 1988). We expected that humanitarian values would be associated with acceptance of illegal immigrants.

Along with humanitarian and individualism as core value systems that may influence responses to illegal immigrants, anti-illegal Latino immigrant attitudes may reflect racism that focuses on the ethnicity or race of the immigrant rather than on his or her immigration status (xenophobia, or hatred of foreigners). Acuna (1996) argues that Proposition 187 represents a "profound resurgence for legalized racism" (p. 156). Because the largest flux of illegal immigrants in California are Latinos, racism toward Mexican Americans may explain negative attitudes toward illegal immigrants. On the basis that, in part, negative attitudes toward illegal Latino immigrants reflect racism, we expected that negative attitudes toward Mexican Americans who are legal residents of the United States are associated with negative attitudes toward illegal immigrants.

A major component of negative attitudes toward a social group is the stereotypes or overgeneralized beliefs held about that group. Stereotypes can

exert strong effects on the way people process social information. Bodenhausen (1988) showed that stereotypes bias the processing of information received about members of a group. One basis for anti-illegal immigrant attitudes may be the stereotypes or beliefs people hold about illegal immigrants. Some of the stereotypes of Latinos are not positive. According to Feagin and Feagin (1996), some of the more modern stereotypes of Latinos are that they are lazy, criminal, and lack ambition. Women are stereotyped as flirty or as prostitutes. Men are stereotyped as fat, happy, thieving, and immoral. Those who believe that as a social group illegal immigrants are lazy, dirty, dishonest, and a burden to society are likely to express anti-illegal immigrant attitudes. Thus, we expected that the stereotypes held about illegal Latino immigrants would be related to attitudes toward illegal immigrants.

Last, we expected that people who hold a negative attitude toward illegal immigrants express and extend these attitudes in the interpretation of public events. More specifically, we expected that negative attitudes toward illegal immigrants would be related to toleration of the beatings of the illegal immigrants in Riverside County, blaming the victims of the beating, and believing that the sheriffs responded appropriately to the situation. We also expected that attitudes toward the beating would be related to the core values of humanitarianism and individualism, attitudes toward legal Mexican immigrants, and stereotypes of illegal immigrants.

In summary, we expected that core values of humanitarianism and individualism, racism as reflected in negative attitudes toward legal Mexican Americans, and stereotypes of illegal immigrants would explain both attitudes toward illegal immigrants and responses to a highly publicized event in which illegal immigrants were beaten by sheriff's officers.

## Method

### *Participants*

Participants were 140 college students (99 women and 41 men) from a state university in California close to Los Angeles and three local community colleges also close to Los Angeles. The self-reported ethnicity of the sample was 15% ( $n = 21$ ) African Americans, 8.6% ( $n = 12$ ) Asians, 45% ( $n = 63$ ) Caucasians, 22.9% ( $n = 32$ ) Latinos, 0.7% ( $n = 1$ ) Native American, and 7.9% ( $n = 11$ ) "others." Only 22 (15.7%) of the 140 students were psychology majors. Fifty-seven percent were community college and 43% were university students. Sixty-six percent of the sample earned less than \$20,000 a year

and 79% earned less than \$30,000 a year. The mean age was 26.76 ( $SD = 8.33$  years).

### *Measures*

The seven measures were administered in a packet in the following order.

*Demographic questions.* Respondents were asked their age, gender, ethnicity, income level, major, and whether they were currently attending a 4-year university or a community college.

*Humanitarian and individualist values.* The Protestant Ethic Scale (PE) and the Humanitarianism-Egalitarianism Scale (HE) were developed by Katz and Hass (1988) to measure the two core value systems that tend to be commonly held by Americans and that can lead to ambivalence about minority groups. The PE, measuring individualistic values, contains 11 questions, and the HE contains 10 questions. Based on alpha levels in the present study, 9 of the 10 items of the HE were retained, with an alpha level of .84. Ten of the 11 PE items were retained, yielding an alpha level of .74. The alpha levels of these two scales were significantly improved with the deletion of one item from each scale. Seven-point response options were provided ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). The possible range of scores for the PE is from 10 to 70 and for the HE is from 9 to 63.

*Attitudes toward legal Mexican Americans.* Carranza's (1992) Scale for the Measurement of Attitudes Toward Chicanos was adopted for use as a measure of attitudes toward legal Mexican Americans. The attitudes toward Chicanos measure was developed using the Thurstone method of scale construction that involves the method of equal-appearing intervals. Form A of the scale was used and contains 20 items. We changed the designated group from Chicanos to "persons of Mexican heritage who are residing in the U.S. legally; that is, they are United States citizens, either by birth or naturalization," calling our modification the Attitudes Toward Legal Mexican Americans Scale. Participants checked those items with which they agreed, and the mean scale value of the items checked provided the score. Item scale values ranged from 1.2 to 9.8. Higher scores indicate a more positive attitude toward legal Mexican Americans. Carranza reported a reliability coefficient of .92.

*Stereotypes of illegal immigrants.* We developed the Stereotypes of Illegal Immigrants Scale, which consisted of 12 items that measure stereotypes of

illegal immigrants. The bipolar adjectives were ambitious/lazy, honest/dishonest, cares for others/selfish, hard working/freeloading, contributes to society/burden to society, courageous/cowardly, likable/dislikable, clean/dirty, healthy/disease ridden, competent/incompetent, law abiding/criminal, and responsible/irresponsible. A semantic differential format was used with 7-point bipolar scales, with a possible range of 12 to 84. Half of the items were randomly reversed to control for response bias. The alpha level for this scale was .93. Higher scores indicated more negative stereotypes.

*Attitudes toward illegal immigrants.* Ommundsen and Larsen's (1996) Attitudes Toward Illegal Aliens Scale measuring attitudes toward illegal immigrants was used. This scale includes items on the effect of illegal immigration on the country's resources, aliens as an economic benefit, issues of restriction of access, the general effects on society, and whether illegal immigrants should be given services. Ommundsen and Larsen reported association between the Attitudes Toward Illegal Aliens Scale and authoritarianism, attitudes toward homosexuals and African Americans, and gender, with women more accepting of illegal immigrants than men. The Attitudes Toward Illegal Aliens Scale is a 30-item, 5-point, Likert-type scale, with a range of possible scores from 30 to 150. Split-half reliability reported by Ommundsen and Larsen was .89. In the present study, the alpha level was .95. This scale was scored in an anti-illegal immigrant direction. At the conclusion of this scale, respondents were asked which ethnic group they were thinking of when answering the preceding items (the Attitudes Toward Illegal Aliens Scale): African Americans, Asians, European Americans, Latinos/Hispanics, Middle Easterners, or others. They were also given a response option that indicated they were not thinking of a particular ethnic group.

*Beating description and questions.* A one-page description of the incident involving the two Mexican illegal immigrants and Riverside County sheriff's deputies after a high-speed chase was presented. The information used to construct the description was taken from an article in *The Los Angeles Times* on April 2, 1996. After the description of the incident, four questions were asked about the officers and four questions about the illegal immigrants. The questions about the officers concerned whether the officers responded appropriately to the situation, used excessive force, were courageous in their efforts, and whether they should be punished. Questions about the illegal immigrants focused on whether they got what they deserved, were victims of police brutality, whether their human rights were violated, and whether they should be deported immediately. Half of the questions in each set were reversed. Responses were made on 7-point scales anchored by 1 (*strongly*



*disagree*) and 7 (*strongly agree*). These scales were both scored in a pro-police (or anti-illegal immigrant) direction. The possible range of scores for the full scale was 8 to 56 and for the separate scales focusing on the immigrants and on the sheriffs from 4 to 28. The alpha level of the combined full scale was .91, with an alpha of .87 for the officer items and .81 for the illegal immigrant items.

### Procedure

Questionnaires were taken to classes at four different colleges. Participants were told that they could fill out the questionnaire in class and turn it in that day or they could complete the questionnaire at home and turn it in during the next class meeting. Participation was anonymous and voluntary.

### Results

Table 1 presents the means and standard deviations for the full sample and the means for Latinos and Caucasians separately. Table 2 presents the correlations of the predictors with the Attitudes Toward Illegal Aliens Scale and the responses to the beating, combining officer and illegal immigrant responsibility. In response to the question of which ethnic group participants were thinking of when they answered the Attitudes Toward Illegal Aliens Scale, 53.7% ( $n = 73$ ) checked Latinos/Hispanics and 44.9% ( $n = 61$ ) checked "no particular group." The remaining choices included Asians (checked by 1 person) and "other" (checked by 1 person), with 4 not responding to the item. Thus, 98.6% of the sample were thinking of Latinos or no specific group.

Latinos and Caucasians were compared on the scales (see Table 1). Compared to Latinos, Caucasians had significantly higher negative Attitudes Toward Illegal Aliens Scale scores,  $F(1, 79) = 40.68, p < .001$ ; higher negative stereotyping of illegal immigrants,  $F(1, 79) = 21.29, p < .001$ ; blamed the police less,  $F(1, 77) = 13.63, p < .001$  (scored in the direction of exonerating the police), and the illegal immigrants more,  $F(1, 78) = 42.02, p < .001$ , in the beating incident; had lower HE scores,  $F(1, 92) = 4.37, p < .05$ ; and had less positive attitudes toward legal Mexican Americans,  $F(1, 82) = 4.18, p < .05$ . No significant difference between Latinos and Caucasians was found on the PE,  $p > .50$ . No gender differences were found on any of the scales.

As shown in Table 2, negative attitudes toward illegal immigrants were significantly related to humanitarian values, stereotyping of illegal immigrants, attitudes toward legal Mexican Americans, and attitudes toward the Riverside County beatings. Those participants who were more negative toward illegal immigrants were less humanitarian, stereotyped illegal immi-



**Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations for the Full Sample and Means for Latinos and Caucasians on All Variables**

Scale	Full Sample			Latinos	Caucasians
	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>M</i>
Attitudes Toward Illegal Aliens Scale	134	98.94	23.88	83.17	115.06**
Beating Scale: total score	131	26.32	11.63	17.00	30.00**
Officer Exoneration scale	132	12.11	6.38	7.89	13.29**
Immigrant Blame scale	132	14.13	6.02	8.93	16.71**
Attitudes Toward Legal Mexican Americans Scale	139	6.71	1.78	7.26	6.49*
Stereotypes of Illegal Immigrants Scale	135	41.27	14.89	31.21	47.02**
Protestant Ethic Values Scale	139	42.64	8.25	42.78	41.98
Humanitarian-Egalitarian Scale	139	46.12	7.87	47.41	43.87*

NOTE: On the Attitudes Toward Legal Mexican Americans Scale, the Humanitarian-Egalitarian Scale, and the Protestant Ethic Scale, higher scores indicate more positive attitudes or values. On the Stereotypes of Illegal Immigrants Scale, the Attitudes Toward Illegal Aliens Scale, and the Beating Scale, higher scores indicate more negative attitudes toward illegal immigrants.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .001$ .

grants more negatively, were less positive toward legal Mexican Americans, and were more accepting of the sheriffs' behavior and intolerant of the immigrants in the beating incident than participants who were less negative toward illegal immigrants. The PE was not associated with attitudes toward illegal immigrants. The correlation between the response to the sheriffs and to the illegal immigrants in the beating incident was  $.76, p < .001$ .

Similar correlations were found between the predictors and the overall response to the beating. The response to the beatings that tended to hold the immigrants responsible for their beating and to excuse the police was associated with negative stereotyping of illegal immigrants, negative attitudes toward legal Mexican Americans, lower humanitarianism scores, higher PE scores, and stronger negative attitudes toward illegal immigrants. Responses to the beating were significantly associated with the Attitudes Toward Illegal Aliens Scale, with those more negative toward illegal immigrants more

**Table 2. Correlations of the Predictors With the Attitudes Toward Illegal Aliens Scale and the Beating Scale**

Predictor	Attitudes Toward Illegal Aliens Scale	Beating Scale
Attitudes Toward Legal Mexican Americans Scale	-.29**	-.48**
Stereotypes of Illegal Immigrants Scale	.66**	.53**
Humanitarian-Egalitarian Values Scale	-.41**	-.33**
Protestant Ethic Values Scale	.03	.17*
Total Beating Scale	.49**	—
Officer Beating scale	.36**	—
Illegal Immigrant Beating scale	.58**	—

NOTE: On the Attitudes Toward Legal Mexican Americans Scale, the Humanitarian-Egalitarian Scale, and the Protestant Ethic Scale, higher scores indicate more positive attitudes or values. On the Stereotypes of Illegal Immigrants Scale, the Attitudes Toward Illegal Aliens Scale, and the Beating Scale, higher scores indicate more negative attitudes toward illegal immigrants.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .001$ .

excusing of the sheriffs and more blaming of the illegal immigrants than those less negative toward illegal immigrants.

Among Caucasians alone, the same relations held as for the entire sample, except that the PE was not related to either of the beating scores. Among Latinos alone, because of the small sample size ( $n$ s ranged from 27 to 32), the correlations were similar in magnitude, but some were not significant (e.g., attitudes toward illegal immigrants and responses to the beating,  $r = .35$ ,  $p = .08$ ). A strong relation between the Attitudes Toward Illegal Aliens Scale and the responsibility of the illegal immigrants in the beating was found,  $r = .59$ ,  $p < .001$ , but no relation between the Attitudes Toward Illegal Aliens Scale and the responsibility of the sheriffs in the beating was found,  $r = .08$ . Similar to Caucasians, responses to the beatings were unrelated to PE scores.

Two multiple regressions were performed with total responses to the beatings and the Attitudes Toward Illegal Aliens Scale as criteria. For the Attitudes Toward Illegal Aliens Scale, the predictors were the HE, the PE, the Stereotypes of Illegal Immigrants Scale, and the Attitudes Toward Legal Mexican Americans Scale. The predictors were entered simultaneously, and the equation was significant,  $F(4, 127) = 27.05$ , multiple  $r = .68$ , and  $r^2 = .46$ . For this regression, only the Stereotypes of Illegal Immigrants Scale made an independent contribution,  $\beta = .58$ ,  $t = 7.39$ ,  $p < .001$ , with the HE making a nonsignificant contribution,  $\beta = -.13$ ,  $t = -1.84$ ,  $p < .07$ .

For the regression on the Beating Scale, the Attitudes Toward Legal Mexican Americans Scale, the HE, the PE, the Stereotypes of Illegal Immigrants Scale, and the Attitudes Toward Illegal Aliens Scale were entered simultaneously. The multiple regression equation was significant,  $F(5, 123) = 16.64$ ,  $p < .001$ , with a multiple  $r$  of .64 and an  $r^2$  of .40. Attitudes Toward Illegal Aliens Scale,  $\beta = .21$ ,  $t = 2.23$ ,  $p < .05$ ; Stereotypes of Illegal Immigrants Scale,  $\beta = .21$ ,  $t = 2.15$ ,  $p < .05$ ; and the Attitudes Toward Legal Mexican Americans Scale,  $\beta = .58$ ,  $t = -.374$ ,  $p < .001$ , were individually significant in the equation.

## Discussion

With the exception of the Protestant ethic or individualism, the results support the expectations that negative attitudes toward illegal immigrants are related to the stereotypes held about illegal immigrants, a humanitarian-egalitarian value system, and negative attitudes toward legal Mexican Americans. It is not surprising that stereotypes held about illegal immigrants made the largest contribution to explaining attitudes toward illegal immigrants. The beliefs that are held about a social group are related to judgments about how the group should be treated. Because these data are correlational, it cannot be argued that the negative policy judgments regarding illegal immigrants are a direct result of the beliefs people hold about the immigrants. Conversely, it could be argued that stereotypes are as much a consequence as a cause of political judgments—that the stereotypes justify exclusion and ill treatment. In any case, the perception that illegal immigrants are honest, hard-working, and contributing individuals would seem inconsistent and in a state of imbalance with the judgment that these illegal immigrants should be excluded from services, infringe on a country's resources, and should be denied human rights.

Regarding the issue of more distal basic values, humanitarianism—but not individualism—as a value system is important in understanding individual variation in attitudes toward illegal immigrants. In contrast to research on attitudes toward African Americans (Katz & Hass, 1988) in which both value systems were important, this study suggests that regarding disempowered minorities, values may operate differently in the case of those who have been U.S. citizens since emancipation of the slaves (African Americans) than in the case of those who would attempt to become new members of American society. One possibility is that African Americans are perceived by some as not using their opportunities, whereas illegal immigrants are perceived as wanting the opportunities: That is why they have entered the United States.

In the case of both African Americans and illegal immigrants, the value of treating people in a kind and helpful way, helping others less fortunate than oneself, and the belief in equality seem to be important.

In an indirect way, the relation between attitudes toward illegal immigrants and attitudes toward legal Mexican Americans suggests that it is not just immigration status that leads people to reject illegal immigrants; it is also their ethnicity. If those who reject illegal immigrants also reject legal immigrants, it may be that immigration is a factor, legal or illegal; however, this relationship represents a form of racism. Because the majority of respondents thought specifically of Latinos when they responded to the Attitudes Toward Illegal Aliens Scale and the other half probably included Latinos in their schema of illegal immigrants (they said they were thinking of no particular group), it is likely that a bias against Latinos—or racism—is one reasonable explanation for current anti-illegal immigrant attitudes, at least in California. Increased discrimination against Latinos (CHIRLA, 1995), including those who are legal citizens, suggests that racism underlies the association between negative attitudes toward both illegal immigrants and legal Mexican Americans.

The inclusion of responses to a controversial public event—the beating of two illegal immigrants by sheriffs in Riverside County, California—places these findings in a real context. As in many public events in which prior attitudes, values, and identities play a role in interpretation of that event (e.g., the O.J. Simpson case, the beating of Rodney King), those individuals in this study who were more humanitarian, more accepting of legal Mexican Americans, and more positive toward illegal immigrants in both attitudes and stereotypes were more likely to believe that the police should be held accountable for the beatings and the illegal immigrants not punished. This beating, although less well publicized than the Rodney King beating, shared some of the same characteristics with the Rodney King beating. Videotapes were made and shown of both beatings, and the victims were members of a minority group. Both beatings generated much discussion in California media with people taking different positions. Our study indicates that judgments were not simply the result of an analysis of the behaviors in question and whether these behaviors were justified but reflected relevant values and attitudes, especially toward illegal immigrants. The disquieting aspect of these findings is that the prevailing negativity toward illegal immigrants, combined with anti-Latino sentiment among some citizens, and a possible decline in humanitarian values as expressed in the passing of Proposition 187 may lead to further infringements on human rights and mistreatment of Latinos, legal or not.

Limitations of this study are a small sample size, particularly when comparisons of Latino and Caucasian respondents were noted, and use of a

nonrepresentative sample of college students who may not represent the views of the larger community.

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*Livier Martinez recently received her B.A. in psychology from California State University, San Bernardino. She has been working as Hispanic outreach coordinator at Riverside Area Rape Crisis Center and is currently attending the Social Work Program at the University of Southern California. She and Alberto Martinez-Granillo edit an educational newsletter, Beans and Rice, on Latino, multicultural, and gender issues. Livier contributed to the project an indomitable spirit, outstanding leadership and organizational skills, and the care that comes with a lifelong commitment to the betterment of the lives of Latinos.*

*Stephanie Mendiola recently received her B.A. in psychology from California State University, San Bernardino. She is working on a credential to teach elementary school and hopes someday to pursue graduate work in ethnic and gender studies. Stephanie contributed the ability to write exceptionally well, a warm and loving spirit whose smile lights up her face, and the ability to draw the best from others.*