

① CELIA C. PEREZ-ZEEB, "By the Time I Get to Cucaracha"

Current debates about immigration often focus on the problem of illegal immigrants entering the United States from Mexico and other Central and South American countries. Critics of U.S. immigration policy sometimes charge that the high numbers of illegal immigrants from these countries place a burden on schools and other social services paid for by U.S. taxpayers; they also contend that because these immigrants are willing work for low wages, they weaken the job market for legal citizens. These concerns tend to cast the debates about immigration in economic terms. Writer Celia Perez-Zeeb, however, believes that concerns about immigration might have more to do with race and gender than with jobs and taxes. In the following essay she focuses attention on the laws governing marriages between immigrants and American citizens, and she points out how those complicated laws can place women at a disadvantage. She also examines the role that ethnic stereotypes about Hispanic people play in public debates about immigration. Although she focuses her argument on how Hispanic people are portrayed in these debates and in the popular media, you might consider whether her argument would apply to other ethnic groups associated with immigration. This essay appeared in *Bad Subjects* in 2002.

By the Time I Get to Cucaracha

CELIA C. PEREZ-ZEEB

"Green cards" grant noncitizens the right to live permanently in the United States. (See www.ftc.gov/bcp/online/pubs/alerts/lottery.htm.)

I was watching NBC's *Will and Grace*. It's a show about a woman, Grace, who leaves her fiancé at the chapel on their wedding day and runs off to live with her gay best friend, Will. In this particular episode Karen, Grace's extremely obnoxious socialite assistant, was upset because her housekeeper, Rosario, was going to be deported. In order to keep her in the country they hatched up the old green card* scam, and picked Will's gay friend, Jack, to be the groom. In one scene Karen and Rosario, who have one of those wacky love-hate relationships, are arguing and Karen says to Rosario, "If it wasn't for this you'd be flying back to Cucaracha on Air Guacamole with live chickens running up and down the aisle!"

I almost fell off the bed. I could not believe my ears.

The people involved in the creation of the show probably justify such blatantly unfunny and racist remarks by making the Karen character super-annoying, self-absorbed and materialistic, thus excusing her ignorance. Maybe they feel they have a little bit of leeway since they have (gasp!) gay characters in the show, and so, of course, they cannot possibly be racist or discriminatory. But, frankly, I think it's messed up that the maid "just happens" to be Latina because, hey, guess what, Latinas are capable of being more than some yuppie's housekeeper! And that said, we should be grateful to all the women, Latina or otherwise, who earn or have earned a living as housekeepers. My mom was a housekeeper when she first came to this country.

Most of the mainstream media seem to believe it's okay to portray Latinos like dirtballs.

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