

Keeping Up With the Diazes

BY DIANE ASITIMBAY

You like to think of yourself as a member in good standing of the Hispanic Snob Society. You buckle up in your Ford Taurus and never drink and drive. You buy nonfat milk and try not to buy frozen pizzas. You even give money to your favorite Hispanic organization, though you're a little behind on your *Wall Street Journal* subscription. But you and other Hispanic business types see eye to eye on the North American Free Trade Agreement, and that's important. You believe in international trade as a concept but want the best of both worlds: freedom to buy and sell internationally and a strong domestic economy with plenty of jobs. Though you voted for Bill Clinton, it was easier to keep your nose in the air when George Bush was President.

No, you're not prejudiced against your own people, but between your naked self and the world. It's strictly a class thing—right down to your designer underwear. You're a snob.

As anyone of the growing number of the Hispanic rising class will tell you, it's hard work being a snob these days. You try to stay afloat above the rapidly rising tide of Hispanics who came to the United States, immigrants whomade good, followed by the roar of the new generation of Hispanics born here.

New snobs are impeccably dressed and sport that "look." This year, it's the Miss Universe look of Dayanara Torres. Old snobs, however, are understated in their dress. A Gloria Vanderbilt monogram peeps out ever so discreetly on the back pocket of their jeans.

It's quite easy, though, to tell the new snob from the old snob.

The symbol of class is apparent in the color of your skin. You're labeled shades of brown. Chocolate. Coffee. Coffee with milk.

Or the sound of your voice. Singsong? You're not one of us. Mumbling words or firing a machine gun? Nix. Another dead giveaway: *tu, vos, or usted*. Enrique addresses everyone in the informal "you." Señora Mosquera always uses the formal "you." New snobs shrink in horror at genteel and servile terms. Is respect becoming extinct?

The ultimate snob has to be thin. Fitness is snobbery supremo. The body of a *tamal* is out. You must look like you live on grapefruit. You snitch greasy foods (fried pork especially) at friends' houses. You invite your associates to try *comida típica* for lunch. You call



it "ethnic" cuisine when describing your native specialties. Who cooks anymore? Only your grandmother, *que descance en paz*, had to earn the best cook in heaven award.

Genuine snobs work out at a members-only club. It's a way of showing your superiority. When you can't make it to the clubs, you simply pop an exercise video into your VCR and do your sit-ups and jumping jacks at home with Raquel Welch.

"How's your tennis coming along?" This sport has always been a tried-but-true sport for the privileged. "How's the golf?"

The crème de la crème can only get so much social mileage from money, though. Today, to really impress, you have to go one step further. You must, after the big house and private school for the kids, feign a certain air of intellectuality. And where better to acquire the semblance of an intellectual than to watch PBS's *Americas* specials?

To score high on the snob Richter scale these days, you don't have to read. If you watch CNN regularly, you can assemble the incoherent sound bites into some logical order. Then the punchy news tidbits make

for excellent conversation since they're always superficial.

Now that TV is the great leveler of the modern age, it's becoming much harder for the upper crust to keep their secrets to themselves. All their dirty laundry is being aired on programs like *Los Ricos También Lloran*.

You can always save yourself by offering your literary judgments on the translation versus the original version of Gabriel García Marquez's book *Pilgrims*. "It was marvelous," you gush. If asked whether you have actually finished it, you can always say, "I read the *New York Times* book review."

You also maintain your intellectual aura by contributing to good causes. They must have social eminence, of course, and the issue must sound serious. After all, Hispanic snobs have Liz Taylor-types, too. Ricardo Montalbán begs us to adopt a child. Gloria Estefan raises funds for Miami's hurricane. Paul Rodriguez fights for literacy.

The final, definitive line of class distinction is drawn in the art of greeting acquaintances at cocktail parties. This takes much longer for new social climbers to master. Take the kiss on the cheek. Etiquette demands that you only air-kiss people that you vaguely hate or barely know but can't ignore. You lightly skim their cheek with your own while making a little pecking noise. And you're supposed to go on flattering them while straining to remember their name.

During this three-second ritual, you also must take advantage of this stellar moment to show off your Paloma Picasso perfume before your mineral water with a slice of lemon arrives. Your goal is to leave very important people dazzled by your manners and the lingering whiff of your scent so that they'll remember royalty is quite distinct from the riffraff.

Not everyone can pull this off even after years of practice. Up-and-coming snobs often fail, and their kisses are remembered as those by the Spider Woman.

Remember, blue blood is rather thin here in the United States. ■

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