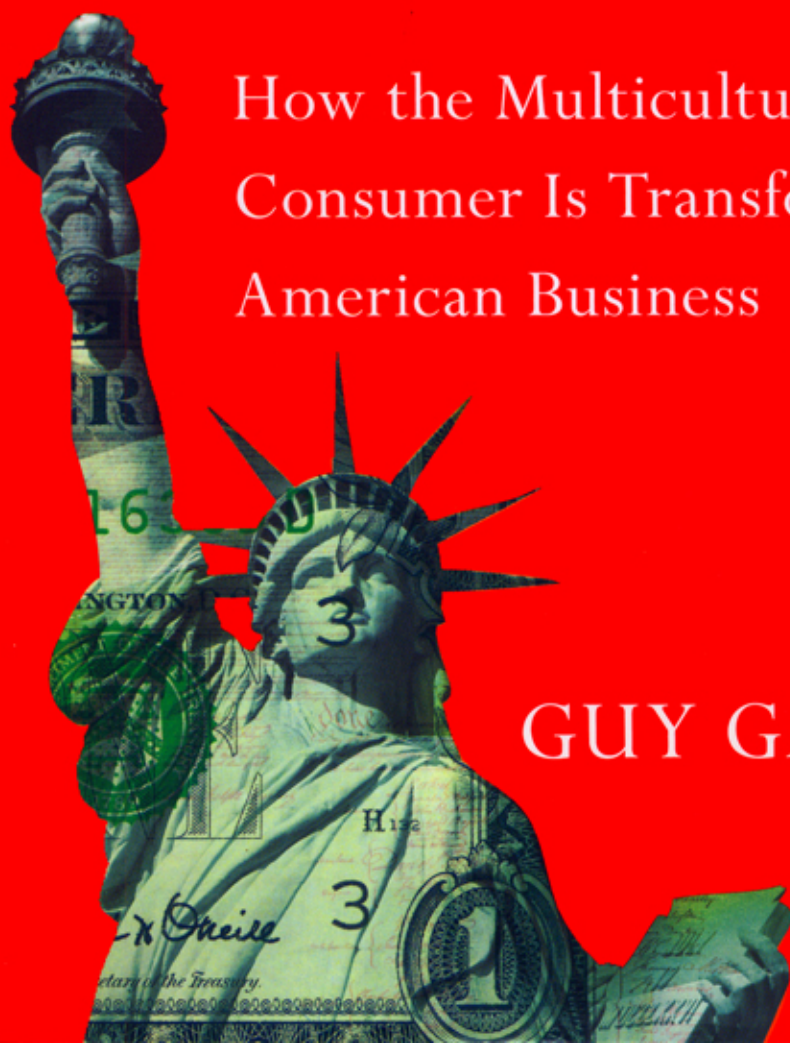


# The **NEW** Mainstream

How the Multicultural  
Consumer Is Transforming  
American Business

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been broadened to imply that life itself is a struggle and that even affluent suburbanites need to stand up for their beliefs. The religious imagery that's part of the look can be intended as ironic or displayed as a sincere expression of personal spirituality, an ambiguity that only adds to the *cholo* allure.<sup>12</sup>

In New York City, Rafael Jimenez, a Dominican American who grew up in Washington Heights, has built a thriving fashion business producing Latin-themed T-shirts, hats, and accessories that he sells through Bloomingdale's and at his SoHo shop, República Trading Company. It all started in 1995 when he got the idea to make a variation of Banana Republic T-shirts by replacing "Banana" with "Dominican." Since then, his fashion line has expanded and refined its Hispanic message for a multicultural audience. Featured in his 2004 collection are several new T-shirts, including one with roosters meant to evoke rural Latin America and one featuring the masked visage of Mil Máscaras ("A Thousand Masks"), a "lucha libre" pro wrestler and cult figure in Mexico and the U.S. Hispanic community. Others are marked with the word *Freedom*, *Culture*, or *Peace* in English and Spanish, and one shows the word *Revolución* superimposed on a tank with a quote from John F. Kennedy: "Those who make peaceful revolution impossible will make violent revolution inevitable."<sup>13</sup>

Some major retailers, citing the notoriously fickle winds of fashion, have expressed skepticism about the longevity of the trend. That argument, not incidentally, is one that Russell Simmons also encountered when trying to find a buyer for his Phat franchise, and there's no doubt that the numbers of young, multiethnic urban shoppers will continue to rise. Not that the minority entrepreneurs who are making millions by blending irony and ethnic pride seem very worried. More interesting, though not much more convincing, is the claim, coming from inside the Chicano community itself, that barrio-based couture somehow debases Mexican American culture by making it available to—and wearable by—nonminorities. But just imagine where Giorgio Armani would be today if he had tried to limit the buyers of his suits to Italians or if Russell Simmons had decided to limit his hip-hop clothing to blacks. More likely, *cholo* fashion will continue its journey from the inner-city fringe to becoming just one more way to dress like an American.