

# **La Apropiación de la Identidad “Americano”: Límites del Pasado y Nueva Realidades\***

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## **Resumen**

Esta ponencia examina la forma en que el racismo de EE.UU. se manifiesta en sus leyes de inmigración y naturalización del siglo XIX. La idea es reflexionar sobre cómo esa historia institucionalizó el racismo lo que continúa influyendo las condiciones sociales, económicas y políticas de los diferentes grupos étnicos en EE. UU y en esa medida de las poblaciones latinoamericanas y caribeñas residentes en EE.UU. Una mirada sociológica del pasado en EE.UU. proporciona una perspectiva más amplia para interpretar el contexto racial y étnico de la actualidad. La ponencia aborda cómo la “blancura” y la imagen “americana” sigue estableciendo límites en la pertenencia al grupo americano en EE. UU. y la forma en que dicha adhesión se asocia con privilegios y beneficios. La ponencia también examina los cambios demográficos de la población de EE.UU. y cómo el crecimiento de los latinos, asiáticos, y las personas multiraciales desafía el paradigma negra-blanca que siempre ha dominado el entendimiento de las relaciones sociales, raciales y étnicas en los Estados Unidos. Finalmente, la ponencia discute como la apropiación de la identidad de americano por EE.UU. continúa marcando las relaciones económicas, sociales y culturales entre EE. UU. y América Latina y El Caribe.

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## **La Apropiación de la Identidad “Americano”: Limites del Pasado y Nueva Realidades**

This essay explores the highly complex issues of race and ethnicity in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century United States, the context into which millions of people from the other Americas’ nations enter. Though the election of the first black American to the U.S. presidency reflects real progress, the racial discourse that surrounded both Obama’s election and that continues to persist during his administration point to the tremendous work on race that still needs to be done. We illustrate the significant role race has played historically in influencing the laws meant to control the population coming to the United States, contorting the distribution of property and resources. We then examine how these race conscious policies continue to play out into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

While U.S. race relations remain driven by a framework revolving around two races—black and white—the demographic reality challenges this model. Bonilla-Silva and his colleagues (Bonilla-Silva 2004; Bonilla-Silva and Glover 2004) suggest that the United States should move from such a “U.S. style” of race relations to one recognizing a greater spectrum across racial and color lines, as is the case in Latin America. In much of Latin America, such as Brazil (Telles 2004), numerous terms are used to identify people racially and, unlike in the U.S., people with dark skin of high socioeconomic standing may be viewed as white, as “money whitens.” In the Dominican Republic many deny their African roots in favor of their indigenous *Taino* and Spaniard ancestry roots (Jiménez 1996, 2006, 2008; Robles 2007; Stinchcomb 2004). In this setting, Dominicans with dark skin, who would be seen as black in the United States, are viewed as white. Indeed, the term black is reserved almost exclusively for Haitians. Dominicans and other Latin Americans with dark skin get a rude awakening when they come to the United States and are viewed as black.

We draw upon the works of many scholars across disciplines to ground our theoretical arguments regarding the role that race continues to occupy in the United States and in other parts of the Americas. As this essay illustrates, tracing the role of race in society requires scholars including sociologists to broaden their analytic gaze to incorporate both a wider geography and other academic disciplines as well. Furthermore, to begin to understand the enduring role of race in society requires rethinking the traditional methods of the social sciences. Not only have our political and social structures been constructed and defined by the dominant group, so too have the methods of the social sciences. For example, early sociologists such as Sumner, Ward, Park, Cooley among others, who laid the foundations upon which we still build, were heavily influenced by and reproduced in their research the racial stereotypes of their day (see Zuberi, 2001). For the contemporary study of race and racial stratification, this means unraveling these racist ties and looking anew at the (racial) assumptions that undergird much social science research (Zuberi and Bonilla-Silva, 2008).

In sum, we argue that not only does a color line continue to demarcate U.S. society, but that it is so entrenched in our bureaucratic structure that further progress will take uncovering and acknowledging these linkages, publicly airing them, and ultimately unraveling them in order to construct a fairer, more just America. Moreover, many persons from other parts of the Americas immigrate to the United States where they often encounter clashes between how they were viewed racially in their home country and how they are viewed in this country. Our broad approach drawing from a variety of disciplines and understanding of racial matters across the Americas provides insights for the teaching of race in the Americas.

### **A Brief Discussion on Race in America**

Racial classifications and the designation of the U.S. population into racial categories stem back to the beginning of the new union (Hochschild and Powell 2008). Indeed, the first U.S. census conducted in 1790 designated between “Free Whites,” “All Other Free Persons” and “Slaves.” In 1820 a new category for “Free Colored Persons” was introduced. The next decade saw a further parsing of the white population into “Naturalized” and “Not Naturalized” categories.

The first reference to mixed-races appeared in the 1850 census when the population was categorized as “White,” “Black” and “Mulatto.” “Chinese” and “Indian” were new racial categories added to the 1870 census forms. The 1890 census tried to more finely quantify the mixed-race population through the distinction of “quadroons” (1/4 black) and “octoroons” (1/8 black). Further, “Japanese” appeared for the first time as a racial category in the 1890 census, while terms for “Koreans,” “Hindus” and “Filipinos” were added in 1910. The 1930 census witnessed “Mexican” as a new racial category.

Censuses throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century continued to adjust racial categories. A directive from the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) required that for the 1980 census race be designated into one of four categories—American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian or Pacific Islander, Black or White (see Snipp, 2003). A separate question determined Hispanic or non-Hispanic ethnicity. Furthermore, since the 1980 census people have self-identified their race and Hispanic origin. Moreover, beginning in the 2000 census people could designate more than one race as established by the 1997 revisions of OMB Directive No. 15 (see Snipp 2003).

In retrospect, U.S. society has had difficulty in classifying mixed-race individuals. As James (2008) points out, the social understanding is that mixed-race individuals are not white. As the inclusion of categories to deal with mixed-race persons on the census forms indicates, this

discomfort of a “white” label is most acute for mixed-race individuals who are part black. For these persons, the one-drop rule has traditionally placed them in the black category. Indeed when a mixed-race person identifies as white, they are deemed to be “passing” (James, 2008).

The white racial category has been similarly protected. As James (2008) has argued, the ongoing issue of how to classify the mixed-race population reveals the long-standing concern with protecting the “white” category. For example, past census instructions required classifying multiracial children according to the race of the non-white parent. Further, the Census Bureau has long struggled with how to label the Latino population. Conventional wisdom recognized long ago that while the Bureau classified Latinos as “white,” Latinos are not “white.” In fact, the 1930 census, for the only time, treated “Mexican” as a racial category. The 1970 census introduced the umbrella term “Hispanic” to include persons whose ancestors originated from Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, South or Central America, or other Spanish origin. Yet, the term “Non-Hispanic white” is part of the American racial taxonomy and “white” remains protected.

No doubt an adequate racial definition for classifying people living in the United States remains elusive. However, so central is the role of race in our society that we continue to try. This discussion illustrates the socially constructed nature of race and the variable meanings of race which depend upon the historical context in which they appeared.

### **Immigration, Citizenship and Race**

Traditionally, citizenship has been conferred through birth or naturalization. The decisions regarding who and under what conditions a person can enter the United States and then, once here, the conditions necessary for citizenship are powerful ones. Indeed, that this activity has been regulated almost from the nation’s founding reveals that the United States, far

from being the beacon to the world's poor and oppressed, has been far less welcoming and democratic than the rhetoric indicates. While the Declaration of Independence declared that "all men are created equal," the constitution codified a slave as 3/5<sup>th</sup> of a person—far from equal. Our history abounds with examples of contradictions and tensions regarding citizenship. Sociologically defined, citizenship is "a set of practices...which define a person as a 'competent' member of society...." (Turner, 1993:2). In short, citizenship is about membership with associated rights and responsibilities.

Determining "competent" pools from incompetent ones, the rights and duties associated with this membership and the conditions for the realization of this membership are steeped in race. Concerns about the type of people coming into the country are long standing (Jasso, 1988). The first naturalization law passed by Congress dates to 1790 and specified that any free, white alien who had lived in the country for at least two years was eligible for citizenship provided they could prove their moral worth, were not likely to become a public charge, and were willing to take an oath of allegiance. Thus, being white was a prerequisite for becoming American. In 1870, the naturalization law was amended to confer citizenship onto former slaves, thus establishing a black-white color line for determining eligibility for U.S. citizenship.

Immigration laws have likewise been fashioned using blatantly racist means. Race was the defining feature in decisions regarding who to allow and who to exclude from the United States. As Ngai (1999, 2004) has shown, U.S. immigration laws drew color lines around the world separating countries deemed "white" and "non-white" with only people from the former being eligible for immigration and naturalization. For example, the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 banned all immigration from China, with Japan added to the exclusion list through the Gentlemen's Agreement in 1908, and other Asian nations added in 1917 to the "barred Asiatic

zone....” (Ngai, 2004:18). The 1924 Immigration Act, one of the most restrictive immigration laws in U.S. history, created a hierarchy of desirability for the world’s inhabitants with rising levels of restriction on the least desirable. The Act specified a quota of two percent of the total of a given nation’s residents as reported in the 1890 U.S. census (Daniels, 2004). Curiously, all non-white U.S. residents were excluded from definitions that determined the quotas for immigration (Daniels, 2004). Daniel concludes “If anyone requires evidence that Congress regarded the United States as a ‘white man’s country,’ this clause...provides it” (p. 55).

During this era, aside from former slaves who became U.S. citizens, persons deemed nonwhite were denied U.S. citizenship (Carbado, 2005). It was the job of the federal courts to determine whiteness and thus eligibility for U.S. citizenship. According to Ngai (2004) between 1887 and 1923 the federal courts heard 25 cases in which the racial status of those seeking citizenship was questioned. Further, the definitions of whiteness were neither static nor consistent, but vacillated between the science of eugenics and “common sense” (Lopez, 1996; Ngai, 2004). In two landmark decisions in 1922 and 1923, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that Japanese and Asian Indians in the United States were not white and thus ineligible for citizenship.

The easing of the blatantly racist provisions of immigration and naturalization laws began in the aftermath of World War II in the environment of war-time labor shortages and post-war economic prosperity. The McCarran-Walter Act of 1952 removed the most egregious racist and discriminatory elements of U.S. immigration and naturalization laws including those barring Asians. The liberalization of immigration and naturalization laws begun in the 1950s was completed in the 1960s with the lifting of all quota restrictions.

The consequences of both the long-standing racist and discriminatory nature of the immigration and naturalization laws and their eventual liberalization would impact immigration to the United States in ways unanticipated at their crafting. As we detail next, today's immigrants and racial and ethnic minorities are a reflection of (and burdened by) our racist past.

### **Racial Legacy**

For most of U.S. history, immigration, citizenship and race were explicitly linked. Non-whites were intentionally kept out of the United States and citizenship was reserved for whites. While the definition of who was "white" has been contested, it nonetheless continued to be the defining feature in U.S. naturalization laws. The 150-plus years of overtly racist laws have molded the racial and ethnic lines that are still clearly demarcated in U.S. society today.

For one, the long legal link of whiteness and citizenship clearly established whiteness as the normative identity for U.S. citizenship (Carbado, 2005). Carbado (2005:637) notes that "Naturalization is not simply a formal process that produces American citizenship but also a social process that produces American racial identities." What does this mean for today's minorities? One consequence of this legal linking of whiteness and citizenship today is the social delinking of citizenship and American identity particularly for those who are not white. As Carbado (2005) points out, most of the Japanese interred during World War II were not identified as "Americans" despite being American citizens. Indeed, the modern characterization of Asian Americans as "perpetual foreigners" point to the enduring legacy of these normative associations of identity, race and citizenship.

While the National Origins Act of 1924 restricted immigration from Southern and Eastern Europe, it still allowed it. Thus, white Southern and Eastern Europeans, while regarded as inferior to those from other parts of Europe, were still viewed as assimilable into American



society. Hence, the Act still conferred and affixed the “white” racial category to these groups thereby paving their way to U.S. citizenship. In contrast, non-whites living in the United States were ineligible for U.S. citizenship. Excluded from the vision of “American” in the 1920s, these same groups remain outside the vision of “American” today.

But what does it *mean* to be “American?” To be white, Anglo-Saxon and Protestant (WASP), speak English, and reside in the United States rather than Canada or Mexico, is the short answer. One of the definitions of “Anglo-Saxon” provided by dictionary.com is “a person who speaks English.” Having discussed the white connection to the definition of American, we now turn to a discussion of the prominence of the English language to U.S. culture.

### **“Do You Speak American?”<sup>3</sup>**

In an essay on language, Heritage (2006) describes language as the basis of social identity and culture. While a multitude of different languages are spoken in the United States, the vast majority of U.S. residents (80%) speaks only English at home. To “speak American” then is to speak English.

However, it is not enough to simply speak English, but to speak *Standard* English. Recall the brouhaha that arose when the Oakland School Board in 1996 declared Ebonics (Black Urban Vernacular English) the official language of African American students who attended its schools. Lost in the uproar of this decision were the reasons given for this bold move—to address the language barrier that confronts many African American students and foster lines of communication between teacher and student. Nevertheless, in the maelstrom that followed, the Oakland School Board quickly retreated from this position.

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<sup>3</sup> In January 2005, PBS aired a documentary entitled “Do you speak American?” in which former NewsHour anchor Robert MacNeil journeyed across the United States seeking answers to this question. Despite the diversity of possible answers that the provocative question implies, MacNeil’s stated purpose was to explore in detail American English. Thus, to speak “American” is to speak English.

Orlando Taylor, a linguist, claims that “Language is a reflection of a people” (Hamilton, 2005:35). According to Taylor, if a group of people are considered inferior, it follows that so too is their language. One thing that the ensuing uproar over the Ebonics debate made clear is that the language used by many African Americans is considered inferior.

Stereotypes regarding a person's intellect are often associated with the enunciation and pronunciation of English as we saw in Barrack Obama's presidential campaign. Recall Senator Joe Biden's description of Obama as “the first mainstream African-American who is articulate and bright and clean and a nice-looking guy. I mean, that's a storybook, man” (as quoted in Coates, 2007). While it is no secret that Obama is biracial and multicultural, this nuance is lost on Biden who sees Obama only as African American. While “complements” such as this one play out before the public, it does not take much to imagine what happens behind the scenes and away from microphones and cameras (see Picca and Feagin, 2007).

Clearly there is a stratification system which ranks regional dialects along a continuum anchored by Standard English on one side and black English on the other. Yet, speaking English with a foreign accent warrants a separate discussion. English as a second language, particularly when the first language is Spanish, is problematic to many in the United States. So strong is the mainstream attachment to English (and distaste for Spanish—the nation's second most common language) that attempts are made regularly to have English declared the country's official language. And because these efforts have failed at the national level, states have taken matters into their own hands. West Virginia, among states with the fewest Latinos, is seeking to adopt English as its official language. In fact, 30 states have made English their official language (ProEnglish Action, 2010).

Reinforcing the negative perception of both the Spanish language and the Spanish-

speaking population are the legal cases in which judges have viewed a child's lack of English comprehension (and use of Spanish) as abuse on the part of the parents. For example, the *New York Times* reported that a Texas judge accused a mother of abusing her child for speaking to her only in Spanish and then threatened to remove the child from her custody unless the child began speaking English (Verhovek 1995).

In short, language and more specifically *Standard English* is much more than a vehicle for communication. The language one speaks is a symbol of identity, citizenship, patriotism and apparently, even parenting skills. Thus, to have one's language challenged (or the ability to speak the dominant language) is to also question one's being on a variety of dimensions and to imply that one is of low social status.

### **“What Are You?”**

Questions like “What are you?” are not uncommon for people whose appearance does not conform to the “American” image. Yet, one thing is clear just from the asking—the asker has precluded the option of American from the list of possible answers. Canadian citizen Marsha Giselle Henry's (2003) parents emigrated from Pakistan to Canada during the mid-1960s. Like many multiracials, Henry (2003) reveals she is constantly asked about her “pedigree” and feels uncertain about how she represents herself on a daily basis.

Sitting outside the mainstream seems to give license to continuous questioning of one's identity. How to answer questions such as “what are you?” and “where are you really from?” is difficult and anxiety provoking. Henry (2003:234) laments, “I remember feeling angry and frustrated when people challenged my representations, always probing and asking additional questions and then resigning themselves to some first impression.” As Wu (2002) explains, people whose own American identity is assured do not seem to understand how offensive these

questions are.

Like many other people of color...who share memories of such encounters, I know what the question “Where are you *really* from?” means, even if the person asking it is oblivious and regardless of whether the person is aggressive about it. Once again, I have been mistaken for a foreigner or told I cannot be a real American (pg. 80).

For multiracial individuals, the issue of identity is further confounded by inadequate and simplistic racial categories. To be multiracial in the United States is to have no home or to be a stranger in one’s own home. In Barack Obama’s bid for the Democratic Party’s nomination for U.S. president, concerns were expressed within the black community as to whether Obama was indeed “black enough.” But ask any white, say Senator Joe Biden, and there is little doubt that Obama is black. But is he “black enough?” That, in fact, was the title of a *Time* magazine article: “Is Obama Black Enough?” In the article, Coates (2007) notes that while Obama’s biracial identity made him acceptable to many whites, it “also opened a gap for others to question his authenticity as a black man.” Despite African Americans, such as Stanley Crouch, questioning his blackness, Obama succinctly illustrates how he is viewed in the larger society: “If I’m outside your building trying to catch a cab,” he told Charlie Rose, “they’re not saying, ‘Oh, there’s a mixed race guy.’” (Coates 2007).

Similarly, professional golfer Tiger Woods was roundly criticized by many blacks for his self-identification as “cablinasian,” a term he coined to encompass his mixed-racial ancestry (Kamiya, 1997). Such is the plight of multiracial persons who are neither totally accepted nor rejected and defined by others as they see fit especially if one refuses to answer the series of questions: “What are you?” “Where are you *really* from?” “Where are your parents from?” meant to locate one into a racial category so as to ease the anxiety of the asker. Per Wu (2002):

“they have placed me in their geography of race and somehow know all they need to know. They must feel they have gleaned an insight into me by knowing where I am ‘*really*’ from. They can fit me into their world order” (Wu, 2002:81). As Pearl Fuyo Gaskins (1999) notes, the question “what are you?” indicates that far from not seeing race, instead, it is the first thing we notice about a person. And when a racial identity is not readily discernible, we are thrown into a kind of crisis that is “caused by the contradictions between how people have been trained to understand race and the fact that the multiracial person doesn’t fit that scheme” (pp. 20-21). In many ways, then, people whose American membership is questioned are placed in a subordinate position vis-à-vis the mainstream.

Per Blumer (1965), dominant groups work to maintain, reinforce and protect their privileged group position by way of the color line. Power imbalances between dominant and subordinate groups contribute to the maintenance of the color line. So too do assimilation ideologies. As Douglas (2008) articulates one problem with assimilationist assumptions is its superficiality that an American can be gleaned using a narrow spectrum of physical appearance. Alba and Nee (2003) define assimilation as the “attenuation of distinctions based on ethnic origins” (p.38). But what does it mean to “attenuate” one’s ethnic/racial distinctions? Per Alba and Nee (2003), “a key to assimilation...is boundary spanning and altering” (p. 59). Boundary crossing can also occur across generations through intermarriage which ultimately results in “...individuals...whose social appearance is indistinguishable from majority group members of the same social class and region” (Alba and Nee, 2003:61). As shown above, assimilation as Alba and Nee define it is an impossibility for a large swath of the U.S. population who sit outside the “American” image. Further, this narrow image does not allow for nor acknowledge the increasing multiracial population.

In sum, as Douglas (2008) argues, assimilationist theories and assumptions fail to grant that the immigrant experience (and the assimilation process) is one that is largely defined by the dominant group. Persons outside the mainstream are situated and defined relative to the dominant group whose interests are in protecting both their status and higher position within the stratification system. It is to illustrate this point that we turn to next.

### **The Dynamics of Privilege, Affirmative Action, and Retrenchment**

Groups in position of power use all means at their disposal to maintain their status and to keep competing groups at a disadvantage. This perspective, extending back to Marx, is used to recognize how whites have kept their superior economic, social, and political position vis-à-vis groups of color. As noted above, this was done originally through the definition of citizenship drawn on the basis of whiteness which provided access to societal resources. The racial hierarchy has been sustained by the benefits that whites gain from the existing stratification system and the historic subordination of non-whites (Bonilla-Silva 2009; Feagin 2006; Jensen 2005). For all of U.S. history, whites have not only dominated in terms of power and resources, but also demographically.

In this setting, whites have been the beneficiaries of white privilege. More specifically, when societal resources have been marshaled to deal with economic crisis or to create social and economic opportunities, they have been unequally placed in white hands. Thus, whites were the disproportionate beneficiaries of massive social programs such as New Deal programs and the G.I. Bill (Katznelson 2005). Social benefits stemming from these programs, which opened doors to higher education and homeownership, were allotted at the local and state levels with the white power structure routing benefits to whites. In essence, in the words of Katznelson (2005), whites were the beneficiaries of affirmative action long before formal Affirmative Action programs to

address racial inequities were created. Whites benefited and gained access to societal resources and social, economic, and political opportunities simply by being white. Even when the War on Poverty was initiated in 1964, the majority of the poor were white, making up 71 percent of the nation's poor in 1960.

The period between 1954 and 1964 saw the development of policies designed to provide minorities access to the opportunity structure (Saenz et al. 2007). During this period, we saw the *Brown v. Board of Education* 1954 ruling, which called for integration of public schools, along with the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which opened opportunities for minorities in such areas as voting, housing, and education. Yet, in the context of groups in power using all means at their disposal to hold their power and privilege, individual and structural efforts were made to prevent the Civil Rights legislation from coming into effect. Thus, educational institutions in the South fought viciously to bar blacks from gaining entrance. Moreover, many white families subverted the desegregation of education by voting with their wallets and feet and placing their children in private schools or moving to places with few persons of color. In addition, the principles of Civil Rights and Affirmative Action laws were undermined through ideology and the political system. For example, many whites cried "foul" when such legislation was put in force, claiming that they were victims of "reverse racism" or "reverse discrimination." Beginning with the *Bakke* decision of 1978 alongside a series of court cases related to desegregation of public schools in the K-12 system, by 1980 we had seen a tremendous reversal of policies designed to allow minorities access to the societal opportunity structure (Orfield and Eaton 1997).

The post-Civil Rights era has coincided with a major demographic shift that has changed the face of the United States with the share of whites declining significantly. As people of

color—especially immigrants from many of the nations of the Americas—are increasingly part of the ranks of youth and the poor, we have seen an unraveling of the safety net starting in the 1980s. The large investments that we saw in the post-WWII era, which benefitted whites disproportionately when they were a large share of the youth and poor population, have not been marshaled over the last few decades to allow today's youth and the poor to gain access to the opportunity structure. Latinos, the nation's fastest growing group, continue to have extremely high dropout rates, with one in two dropping out of high school in many areas (Velez and Saenz 2001). We suspect that dropout rates of such magnitude would be intolerable and commissions and policies would be put in place to deal with this issue if the group in question was white rather than Latino.

### **The Changing Demography of the U.S. Population**

While a black-white paradigm has been used historically to understand race relations in this country, the reality is that the white population has declined in a relative sense and the black population has remained fairly stable. Indeed, major changes in the U.S. population have been afoot for decades resulting in dramatic changes in the racial and ethnic tapestry of the population.

Overall, the U.S. total population increased by 8 percent between 2000 and 2008. The non-Hispanic white (single-race) population grew much more slowly (2.3%) while the black population growth rate (8.1%) mirrored the national growth level. However, the growth in the Latino (32.8%) and Asian (30.8%) populations was especially impressive, each expanding about 14 times faster than the white population and about four times faster than the black population.

It is obvious that Latinos represent the engine of the U.S. population change. Latinos accounted for one of every two persons added to the national population between 2000 and 2008. Furthermore, Latinos and Asians—the two groups growing the most rapidly—comprised two of



every three persons added to the U.S. population during this period. The varying growth across racial and ethnic groups has led to changes in the relative size across these lines. For instance, the percentage of the U.S. population that is Latino increased from 12.5 percent in 2000 to 15.3 percent in 2008, with the percentage of Asians also rising. The relative size of African Americans remained stable at 12.1 percent in the two time periods. The share of people in the country who are white dropped from 69.1 percent in 2000 to 65.4 percent in 2008 (it was 80 percent in 1980).

We are increasingly moving to a minority-majority country where nonwhites will be the numerical majority. This is already happening among the youth in a variety of states across the country, a pattern that portends future changes in the racial and ethnic composition of the country as these young people age. Of all babies born in the United States in 2006, 46 percent were nonwhite (Martin et al. 2009). As these youth age, they will contribute to the rise of minority-majority populations across these areas.

Population projections conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau (2009) document the deepening racial and ethnic transformation that the United States will experience in the coming decades. The U.S. population is projected to increase from 308 million in 2010, to 358 million in 2030, and to 399 million in 2050. While each nonwhite racial and ethnic group is projected to grow between 2010 and 2050, this is not the case with whites. The white population is expected to dip between 2010 and 2050 with the population decline expected to occur between 2030 and 2035.

While all nonwhite populations are estimated to increase between 2010 and 2050, the growth is concentrated among Latinos and to a certain extent Asians. The Latino population is projected to more than double from 48.5 million in 2010 to 110.7 million in 2050. Moreover, the

Asian population is expected to expand by 77 percent from 13.3 million in 2010 to 23.6 million in 2050. African Americans and American Indians and Alaska Natives are projected to grow at a relatively slower pace.

Accordingly, the U.S. population growth will increasingly depend on Latinos. Of the 90.6 million persons that are projected to be added to the nation's population between 2010 and 2050, two of every three are expected to be Latino. The rapid increase of the Latino population will lead to a rise in the share of Latinos in the population, increasing from 16 percent in 2010 to 28 percent in 2050. In contrast, the share of the white population in the U.S. population is expected to decline progressively from 65.2 percent in 2010 to 49.9 percent in 2050.

Thus, the disproportionate growth of the Latino and Asian populations alongside the decline in the white population and the stability of the black population are placing challenges on the black-white framework. There are other demographic changes in progress that also call for the expansion of the black-white framework.

Major transformations in intermarriage have occurred over the last few decades with concomitant changes in the way that the offspring of such unions view themselves racially and ethnically. In 1980 about one of every 31 marriages was exogamous (spouses of different racial/ethnic groups); by 2008 approximately one of every 12 marriages was exogamous. There are several variations in the prevalence of exogamy across racial and ethnic groups. For example, whites and blacks cross racial or ethnic boundaries the least, a reflection of the rigid color line that continues to define race relations in this country. Yet, the greatest increases in exogamy between 1980 and 2008 have occurred among whites and blacks. In relative terms, whites and blacks were about three times more likely to cross racial lines in marriage in 2008 than they were to do so in 1980.

The increase in intermarriage over time has led to the rise of offspring who identify with more than one race. The 2000 census for the first time allowed people to classify themselves as multiracial. The 2000 census tallied about 6.8 million multiracial persons, about 2.4 percent of the nation's population. The number of multiracial persons rose, albeit slowly, to 7 million in 2008. The demography of the multiracial group, however, suggests that the multiracial population will increase noticeably in the future. In particular, multiracial individuals are a much younger population than single-race individuals—the median age of the multiracial population was 18 in 2008 compared to 37 for the single-race population. Given the youthfulness of multiracial individuals, it is no surprise that population projections suggest that the multiracial population will increase significantly over the coming decades. The projections suggest that the multiracial population is expected to nearly triple from 5.5 million in 2010 to 15.4 million in 2050.

In sum, the 21<sup>st</sup> century will increasingly result in greater racial and ethnic diversity in the United States. The nation's population will be increasingly Latino and Asian and less white. Multiracial individuals will become a growing part of the national racial and ethnic tapestry. These changes then place major challenges to the existing black-white paradigm that has guided our understanding of race relations in this country. It is apparent that today many Americans do not know where Latinos, Asians, and multiracial persons fit into the racial and ethnic landscape.

### **Challenges to the Existing Black-White Paradigm**

These demographic changes deviate from the traditional black-white paradigm that has been used throughout U.S. history to understand racial and ethnic matters. The rigid dichotomous color line in the United States has been quite influential in the way we think about race and ethnicity, how we define and measure race and ethnicity, the construction of policies related to

race and ethnicity, and the development of theoretical perspectives for understanding race and ethnicity. Groups such as Latinos, Asians, Native Americans, persons who refuse to classify themselves into available racial designations, and multiracial individuals do not fit snugly into the U.S. black-white paradigm. At best, these groups are squeezed into models and perspectives which continue to try to place them into the established “white” or “black” categories.

The practice of forcing racial and ethnic groups that are not black or white into one of the two dichotomies reflects the lack of appreciation or understanding of the specific histories and contexts in which these groups have existed in the United States. In line with the benefits of white privilege, the history of the United States that we learn throughout grade school and into high school is *white* history. The history of groups of color tends to be packaged into materials related to the Civil Rights movements and Civil Rights policies with the greatest emphasis on the black population. There is far less concern and understanding regarding the unique histories of the multitude of groups that comprise the Native American, Asian, and Latino populations. For example, many Americans are not familiar with the histories of Latinos and Asians in the United States. Indeed, it is likely that many Americans do not know that major areas of land in the Southwest and West regions once belonged to Mexico. Similarly, many Americans do not know about the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II and the major economic, political, and social loss that they sustained during this period.

Immigration matters complicate the way many Americans view the country’s two fastest growing racial and ethnic groups—Latinos and Asians. Despite their long presence in the United States, Latinos and Asians continue to be viewed as “perpetual foreigners”—people that do not fit into the American image. Among Latinos, Mexican Americans were initially incorporated into the United States in 1848 with the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo following the

end of the Mexican-American War. Thus, many persons of Mexican-origin can trace their roots to the United States for four, five, six, or more generations. Among Asians, Chinese, Japanese, and Filipinos began immigrating to this country in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Thus, many Asians from these groups can also trace their roots to the United States for many generations. Still, Latinos and Asians continue to be viewed as foreigners. Again, with complete historical amnesia, many Americans view *all* Latinos and Asians as immigrants who lack a history in this country.

Consistent with the “foreigner” conception of Latinos and Asians in the United States, these groups are absent in many areas of life in this country. In the mass media, we see few Latinos and Asians on the Hollywood screen, in television sitcom shows, as newscasters, and even in talk shows that try to bring in the “minority” perspective. Portales (2000) aptly shows how Latinos have been ignored in many dimensions of social life:

Hispanics...have traditionally been ignored and continue to be disregarded, in spite of considerable talk about the professed value of “cultural diversity” and “multiculturalism.” Indeed, if we pay close attention, we will observe that Hispanics are oddly missing from or only tangentially included in most dialogues about diversity, even when the needs of “minorities” are being discussed. When referencing Hispanics what we have, and one cannot soften the nature of the “oversight” much, is a vast and pervasive national unwillingness to acknowledge almost everything that is Hispanic....(pg. 54).

In sum, Latinos and Asians continue to be viewed as perpetual foreigners—people that do not fit the American image. As these two major groups play an increasingly important role in the shifting demography of the U.S. population, will this image change? Will they become seen as truly American? Will the definition of what constitutes American change?

### **Concluding Remarks**

So what to make of all of this? One take is provided by Cara Lockwood (2005), author of *Dixieland Sushi*, when asked the meaning of “American”:

I think there is not one definition of an American. Right now there’s a lot of discussion about how divided we are as a nation politically, but I hope that we don’t forget that one of the greatest things about our country is that there is room for so many combinations of cultures and attitudes....I hope that as a nation we continue to value our diversity because I think it’s our strongest attribute as a nation. The definition of being American is that there is no one definition....(pg. 287).

This is a hopeful vision. As this essay has detailed, we, as a society, have not exactly embraced our diversity—indeed, we have done much to deny its existence. Racial and ethnic inequalities continue. Unfortunately color-blind rhetoric minimizes this reality. Pointing this out subjects one to charges of whining and/or playing the “race card.” This is not constructive nor does it acknowledge nor begin to grapple with the racial legacy that still lives in this country.

As the history of the United States shows, citizenship has been a contested asset that has not been conferred easily. For long, only white immigrants were eligible for U.S. citizenship. We continue to have these debates now as the nation grapples with the issue of immigration reform. Much debate has focused on what to do with the 13 million or so undocumented immigrants in the country, particularly when it comes to the establishment of a path toward citizenship. In the post-9/11 environment associated with high-tech security, massive worksite raids, the criminalization of immigrants, and the deportation of immigrants including naturalized citizens, it is clear that citizenship status is a valuable commodity. Its absence places people in vulnerable situations politically, economically, socially, and legally. In particular, the absence of U.S. citizenship status has increased the vulnerability of Latino non-citizens to exploitation, fear, and

the violation of basic human rights. Massey (2008) has suggested that Latinos, especially Mexicans, represent the new blacks due to the lack of citizenship among many members of this group. Thus, simple immigration laws prevent many from becoming Americans at the very least on paper. The case of undocumented immigrants who came to the United States with their parents at a very early age—the 1.5 generation—and who have grown up and been educated and socialized only in this country illustrates the absurdities associated with the disconnection between the country that people know as “home” and U.S. citizenship status. Many such individuals continue to be deported to countries where they were born but for which they have little familiarity and connection. Many of these persons fail to fit into their countries of birth and some experience hostility for not speaking the native language or adhering to the local cultural norms. In the case of 1.5-generation Mexican-origin youth who have been deported to Mexico, often the locals view these individuals as “Americans” and not as genuine Mexicans. As in the case of race and ethnicity, it is clear that an American identity is itself a social construction.

The United States is part of the Americas consisting of North America, Central America, South America, and the Caribbean. Technically, persons from all of these regions are American. Yet, it has been the United States that has appropriated the American identity. To be American is synonymous with being from the United States. Imagine if a European country—say Germany—co-opted the European identity and that European became interchangeable with being from Germany. The second author of this article grew up in the Rio Grande Valley in South Texas, a predominantly Mexican American area. In the dynamics of race relations in the region, whites viewed Mexican Americans as “Mexicans” not as “Americans.” Mexican Americans too referred to themselves as “Mexican” and to whites as “Americans.” Thus, for many Mexican Americans

from this area as well as from many other parts of the country, to be called an “American” continues to sound foreign and unexpected and not inclusive of themselves.

While we appreciate the larger point that Massey makes referring to Latino’s as “the new blacks,” it reinforces our larger point that a broader racial vocabulary is needed to deal with the new racial reality. Indeed, we can learn from our American neighbors to the north and south. We agree with the contentions of Bonilla-Silva and his colleagues (Bonilla-Silva 2004; Bonilla-Silva and Glover 2004) and Wu (2002) that the United States should evolve from its traditional black-white model to one that recognizes nuances that go beyond the dichotomous black and white categories. The demographic shifts that we have described above will likely push the country to change the way in which it has historically viewed racial and ethnic matters. Further, we can appreciate Canada’s embracing of multiculturalism and its adoption of multiculturalism as a matter of national policy.

Nonetheless, it is important to recognize that even in Latin American countries where race is fluid and dynamic and in which money can whiten people racially, that individuals with darker skin and those with indigenous features continue to occupy the bottom rungs of the stratification system while persons with lighter skin and European features hold the higher levels of the stratification system (Campos, 2009; Murga, 2008). Likewise, in Canada despite its celebration of multiculturalism, “visible minorities” (Asians, blacks, and Latinos) live in segregated neighborhoods with lower incomes compared to people of European ancestry (Fong and Wilkes, 2003). Furthermore, Canada’s Aboriginal and black populations account for a disproportionate share of Canadian prisoners (Roberts and Doob, 1997).

As we have demonstrated throughout this essay, the Americas in the most inclusive sense of the word is far from color-blind. Indeed, race and racial hierarchies infiltrate every aspect of



life from where we live, work and play. All the same, we stand to learn from our brethren from the other Americas and expand our own racial categories beyond black and white. Integrating Latinos, Asians and other racial and ethnic groups into the white-black paradigm need not be a zero-sum game. As Wu (2002) asserts, Latino and Asian perspectives supplement rather than replace other perspectives. No doubt the demography of the United States has changed. A different lens is needed.

Our essay contributes to the teaching of the Americas in several ways. For example, our essay points to the importance of considering the historical past in understanding contemporary issues related to the social and economic standing of racial and ethnic groups. In addition, our essay points to the importance in considering insights from multiple disciplines in understanding the historical past and contemporary conditions of racial and ethnic groups. Moreover, our essay calls for the expansion of the lens from which we have traditionally viewed racial and ethnic relations in the United States and beyond. In particular, the growth of the Latino, Asian, intermarried, and multiracial populations will require the expansion of the traditional black-white paradigm to one featuring a greater degree of racial and ethnic spectrum as found in the rest of the Americas. Similarly, we call for the need to understand the American identity beyond the mainstream of the United States to encompass groups that have been seen as perpetual foreigners in the United States as well as people in the rest of the Americas.

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