Latinos beyond the Binary

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In the cultural imaginary of *el norte*, the growing Latino popula-
tion in the United States—now at 15 percent nationwide, with a
majority or near-majority in many major cities—is experiencing a
representational crisis. On the one hand, we are represented as a
threat, on the other hand, a promise. We threaten jobs for non-
Latino workers; we threaten to increase drug smuggling, gang,
and other urban crime; we threaten to loosen the hegemony of
the law through our persistent ability to enter the country and to
live outside of legal documentation; and we threaten the cultural
and political integrity of "America."[1] At the same time, we are
represented as the promise of a politically passive, docile, reli-
gious, family-oriented population whose majority might well
become Republican which would help to shore up various conser-
vative cultural tendencies, ranging from the movement to pro-
hibit abortion to the effort to increase the role of religion in U.S.
cultural and political life.[2]

    The title of this paper is meant to signal not simply the usual
black–white racial binary but also this binary of threat and
promise that exists not only in the Anglo cultural imaginary but
also in the policies and practices of the neoliberal state, or what
might be called the new feudalism.[3] In trying to assess the poli-
tical and normative effects of the increasing visibility of Latinos
in the U.S. sociocultural landscape, I kept coming across these
divergent treatments, sometimes explicitly analyzed, but more
often operating as a kind of schizophrenic unconscious. The
binary of threat and promise can be found in cultural represen-
tations as well as in economic analyses, political policy proposals,
and in the urban politics of real estate markets reacting to the
influx of Latinos into new environments. On the one hand, we
are seen as hard and pliable workers vital to the economy, moti-
vating leading politicians to call for amnesty, driver's licenses,
guest passes, and differential wage scales to facilitate employ-
ment. On the other hand, we are said to threaten the economy by
flooding specific labor sectors and driving down wages and work-
ing conditions by our "third world work ethic." Thus electrified
fences are built, brutal immigration raids are on the rise, and the
Texas Rangers, well known in the past for lynching Mexicans, are
back in operation.

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Such contradictory approaches might be viewed as the result of warring factions among the policymakers. Neither the Republicans nor the business community has uniform analyses of current conditions or a consensus about the best way forward for capital accumulation. Neither do they necessarily have a coherent or uniform set of economic and political interests in regard to this new demographic. The current contradictory attitudes toward the growth of Latino populations might also be understood as conflicts between agri-business and the construction trades that rely heavily on Latino labor against other economic sectors that neither need nor want them.

However, as the work of Arlene Dávila shows, sometimes the contradiction is itself the source of "added value." As her book *Barrio Dreams* both documents and analyzes, the rich cultural specificity of Latino neighborhoods is used to attract capital for the growth of small business and to spur the gentrification of depressed real estate markets even while there continues to be a "simultaneous disavowal of ethnicity and race as grounds for equity and representation."[4] This disavowal of the relevance of identity provides an alibi for the de-Latinization of property owners in the very same neighborhoods. In other words, *latinidad* is a highly marketable commodity, an acknowledged piece of cultural capital that Anglo investors want to preserve in superficial form even while they buy it up and force people out. Profiting off of *latinidad* then strengthens the trends of commodity capitalism that effects a brutalization of working conditions, so that Mexicans in the United States today are killed in on-the-job accidents at a rate four times higher than that of U.S.-born workers.[5]

The binary of threat and promise is thus neither the natural by-product of rapid cultural shifts nor an old-style Marxist contradiction whose resolution will necessarily bring social progress. It is too functional to likely be transformed in a Hegelian style sublation. Nor is it analogous to the treatment of other racialized ethnic groups. Although other groups do experience similar love-hate relations in the U.S. cultural imaginary, Latinos are a highly specific form of threat and promise, a more real threat and more significant promise situated as we all are in the Americas, where Spanish is dominant throughout the hemisphere and no border is unnavigable. No other minority can realistically pose the threat of ballooning numbers that we can.

The existence of this binary treatment means that any normative proposal for Latino political or social refiguration or reframing must address both sides of the binary. Reassurances that we represent a promise and not a threat, such as one gets from Jorge Ramos or other mainstream commentators, don't work to dislodge the binary as much as they work within it.[6] Analysts must incorporate into their accounts the fact that we can be used for and by diametrically opposed forces. For example,

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an argument that *mestizahe* will loosen the hold of racist concepts of race must take into account *mestizahe*'s utility for anti-black racism (e.g., because it is better to be mixed like Obama than to be nonmixed like other African American political leaders) *as well as* its potential to loosen racial boundaries (Obama's visibility in the mainstream has undoubtedly helped to reduce antiblack racism). And the claim that the celebration of *latinidad* or Latin culture can provide a resource against a WASP-dominant mass culture and strengthen the political resistance of Latino communities must contend with the reality that mass culture is now organized by ever more particularized niches, and that cultural particularity itself is a highly profitable commodity capable of strengthening the hegemony of the forces that depress Latino wages and disempower Latino workers.

Contradictory binaries flourish in climates where simplifications are preferred over complex analysis. The idea that a black–white racial binary can account for all forms of racism in the United States is an example of such a pernicious simplification, as well as the idea that Latinos, or whites, have homogeneous political effects on our shared public culture. In this paper I want to redress such simplifications by developing three concepts that are especially relevant for understanding the conditions of Latinos in the United States. The first concept is anti-Latino racism, as a specific form of racism distinct in some respects from antiblack racism and thus lost in racial discourses that remain exclusively focused on the black–white binary. The second concept is ethnorace, a hybridized identity category that bridges racial and ethnic categories and enhances our ability to conceptualize the treatment of most if not all Latinos in the United States. Finally, the third concept involves an expansion of identity categories—ethnic and racial and ethnoracial—that I argue will help us understand the economic and political realities and transformations in the current era. Each concept offers an alternative to binaries either through a larger set of conceptual resources or through transcending given binaries in a bridge concept.

But the overall point is that, as we address each of these issues, the binary of threat and promise should counsel against unified political projections, as if we could empower only one set of forces in this tug of war. We need, rather, to chart the likely contradictory effects of every step that is taken.

So I will develop each of these three concepts in turn.

1. Anti-Latino Racism

For my purposes racism can be defined as a negative value or set of values projected as an essential or noncontingent attribute onto a group whose members are defined through genealogical connection—that is, as sharing some origin—and who are

demarcated on the basis of some visible phenotypic features.[7] Antiblack racism is the most virulent and persistent form of current racisms, and it informs and infects other forms, but I want to argue that it is not the only form nor is it the model for all forms of racism. Racism's persistence is due to its flexibility and vitality, thus we need a typology for the variety of forms racism can take.

Racial oppression works on multiple axes. The axis of color is currently the most pernicious, but color is neither exhaustive nor paradigmatic of all the forms racial oppression can take. Consider the most pejorative terms used against Asian Americans and Latinos. Terms used against Asian Americans often have a physical connotation but without a color connotation— "Chinks," "slant-eyes," and for the Vietnamese, "gooks." These terms are racist because they generalize negative values across a whole group and they highlight in some cases visible features. Thus they parallel the essentializing move of racist discourse by not singling out a particular set of customs or a specific history but general physical features or, in the case of "gook," subhuman status. The two most pejorative terms widely used against Latinos in this country have been the terms "spic" and "wetback." There is some controversy over the origin of the term "spic," but most believe it evolved from Anglos who heard people saying "no spic English" and thus is a term that denigrates a people's language. The term "wetback" denigrates both where people came from and how they got here: from Mexico across the Rio Grande. Mexican Americans were also called "greasers," which connoted the condition of their hair and skin tone, but not their skin color.

Thus, we need to understand that racialization and racism operates through multiple ways of constructing and then denigrating a variety of physical attributes. We might think of color as an axis of racism that operates to favor lighter over darker skin tones. This axis works independently and sometimes in tandem with another axis that operates to favor northern European visible, physical features such as hair type, facial features, height, and bodily morphology. If a given person has light skin tones but other features that are marked as non-European, they may be subject to racism along the latter axis. There is also an axis of racism that operates through cultural or geographical origin, denigrating peoples who come from non-European cultures that are viewed as premodern, primitive, less civilized or restrained, less individualistic, less rational, and so on. Again, it makes sense to categorize all of these as forms of racism because they operate to project negative values *as an essential or noncontingent attribute* onto a group whose members are demarcated on the basis of some visible, phenotypic features.

The discrimination against Latinos (among others, especially Asian Americans and now Arab and Muslim Americans) has also operated very strongly on the basis of nativism. We might

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think of nativism as a fourth axis of racism that targets immigrants. Nativism is distinct, though often related to, a general xenophobia, ethnic chauvinism or dislike of foreigners because it adds a racialized construction of the group in question as inassimilable due to inherent characteristics. Thus, in the United States today there is ethnic chauvinism against numerous groups, but not all of these experience racialization. Consider the French, who have been the target of a publicly sanctioned derogation that is not based on attributions of innate inferiority. All immigrant groups are not racialized in the sense of universalizing negative values onto a group that is demarcated on the basis of visible features, nor subject to the essentializing of their cultural characteristics as static. Russian and Eastern European immigrants are not the targets of random identity-based violence or national scapegoating to "explain" economic downturns. European immigrants are not tagged as inassimilable cultural inferiors nor is their difference racialized in the way that some Latinos, Arabs, and Asian Americans experience. Thus nativism today takes a decidedly racialized form, different from earlier periods in U.S. history when, for example, German immigrants were shunned, German street names were changed, and frankfurters were renamed hot dogs. The target of nativism today is a racialized other who threatens the imaginary identity of the U.S. nation to an extent no European culture probably can, given that the imaginary identity is centrally European based. A cultural amalgamation of European and Latin elements that might occur naturally as Latino numbers in the United States rise strikes many people with horror.[8]

Nativism's racialized attributions encourages people to turn a blind eye to the injustices that happen to "nonnative" peoples, such as those profiled as terrorists or those standing on the corner day-labor meat markets or those trying to cross borders. It puts nonnative groups outside the pale of peer group conventions of tolerance, respect and civil rights. The problem with Latinos is not just that they are seen as foreign but that their cultural background makes them ineluctably foreign, both incapable of and unmotivated toward assimilation to the superior, mainstream, white Anglo culture. Debates over bilingualism thus invoke the specter of a concerted resistance to assimilation rather than language rights, and the public celebration of nationally specific holidays, such as "Puerto Rican Day" or Mexican Independence Day, and even the presence of ethnic-specific cuisine can come to signify a threat to the imagined community of Anglo nationalism. Despite the fact that Mexican Americans have been living within the current U.S. borders for longer than most Anglo Americans, they are all too often seen as squatters on U.S. soil, interlopers who "belong" elsewhere. This has nothing to do with claims to native inclusion and everything to do with cultural racism.[9] Anti-Latino racism mobilizes very specific

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narratives involving history and culture as well as accounts of racial hierarchies and the effects of race-mixing to portray all Latinos negatively.

Thus, the color axis is only one of the axes that need to be understood as pivotal in racist ideologies. Racism can and has operated through a variety of physical features, cultural characteristics and origins, and status as "native" or "nonnative" to exclude groups from engendering empathic identification, or from deserving social inclusion and political representation. These multiple axes produce a mechanism for the classification and delimitation of subsets of people that then justifies discrimination and exclusion.

Numerous groups experience more than one axis of racism, including African Americans who are derided for a variety of physical features as well as geographical origin. But my argument in this section as been that to understand anti-Latino racism we especially need an attentiveness to these multiple axes, since all four come into play against Latinos. Thus, we need an expanded analysis of racism and an attentiveness to the specific forms it can take in regard to different groups, rather than continuing to accept the idea that it operates in basically one way, with one axis, that is differentially distributed among various groups. In its oversimplification of racisms, the black–white binary inhibits our ability to accurately describe and understand current social realities, in some cases eclipsing the severity as well as the complexity of the problem. And any fore-shortened understanding of the problems reduces the possibility of effective solutions as well as the possibility of making common cause.

It is important to move beyond the black–white binary of race for reasons of descriptive accuracy of our current social realities, but also for reasons of political efficacy in the struggle against racism. Racism's persistence into the twenty-first century bespeaks its resilience, its flexibility of targets, and its capacity to move to new ground and to shift from biological to cultural justifications. It is like any other language game whose practices and modes of intelligibility are capable of shifting because they are grounded only in shifting historical and cultural terrain. The very fact that racism is grounded not in natural facts but in social constructions means that it is an ever-present threat, capable of new metamorphoses and mobilizations, and resistant to a final cure.

2. Ethnorace

If racisms need to be complexified, the relationship we draw between ethnicity and race needs further thinking as well. The term ethnorace is used in David Theo Goldberg's book, *Racist Culture*, to refer to group identity categories (1) that are viewed

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as interchangeably racial or ethnic, (2) that have moved historically from one designation to another and then sometimes back again, or (3) that conflate meanings that invoke both natural and social kinds.[10] Beyond this Goldberg does not develop or precisely define the concept. I have found that when I used Goldberg's term in various presentations, members of the audience are often intrigued and want more elaboration. This indicates, I believe, that the concept resonates with current experience and the complexities of contemporary classification. So here I will offer a further elaboration, building from Goldberg's initial characterization.

In classic formulations of these terms in the literature of at least Western-based sociology and social theory, race and ethnicity are differentiated by their basis in genealogical and phenotypical criteria or in cultural and social criteria. Thus, ethnicity and race map onto the natural and social kind distinction Goldberg mentions, with race viewed as a natural kind and ethnicity viewed as a social kind or social product. Race connotes an unchosen arbitrary designation of identity based on heritable physical and visible characteristics. One does not choose one's race, nor can one change it, according to this view. Ethnicity, on the other hand, connotes culture, ways of being in the world, manners of dress, bodily comportment, and history. It is true that one is born into an ethnic group, and to this extent it is as arbitrary and unchosen as one's racial membership, but the ethnic group itself is defined by a set of practices or customs developed in response to historical events and geographical location that are chosen, invented, and in a process of ongoing development. Ethnicity, then, connotes subject-hood, not mere object-like physical descriptions, and thus is potentially more consonant with notions of human dignity.

This is the way Werner Sollors, Max Weber, and other twentieth-century theorists spliced the distinction, but it is interesting to note that they too blur the boundaries. Weber notes that the *belief* in group commonalities "often delimits social circles" to create practices tending toward "monopolistic closure."[11] He then says "we shall call 'ethnic groups' those human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs or both, or because of memories of colonization or migration...."[12] Although he goes on to say that "it does not matter whether or not an objective blood relationship exists," the point is that the social closure that produces group formation, motivated by history and social conditions, then creates a reproductive community with delimited boundaries and shared physical features.

We can note three distinct commonalities between such understandings of ethnicity and today's common characterization of the socially constructed categories of race: (1) Exclusionary reproductive practices start from social and historical

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formations to create identity categories that are, or might be seen as, natural kinds. In other words, a social group identified as an ethnic group will reproduce internally to create a genealogically related biological unit, or a race.[13] (2) Both ethnicities and races can be similarly characterized as having essential and stable common identities, with noncontingent features. And (3) both races and ethnic groups are treated as a political threat to democracy to the extent that they manifest in-group loyalty or deference that results in "special interest group" approaches to politics that disengage from considerations of the common good.[14] These important commonalities indicate that there is not much of either a semantic difference or political difference between the concepts as one might imagine.

Weber's analysis interestingly prefigures more contemporary anti-identity accounts (e.g., Appiah, Fraser, Gilroy, etc.),[15] where, for example, both ethnicity and race are often seen as founded in wrong beliefs (what Weber calls an "artificial origin"). The concept of ethnicity in particular, Weber says, "forgets … the original motives and reasons for the inceptions of different habits of life…."[16] This forgetting works to naturalize and perpetuate differences, according to Weber, thus circumventing possibilities of critique and change and creating the conditions for the actual heritability of "qualities and traits." Although such processes of group formation can enhance survival and the ability of individuals to flourish in hostile cultural climates by creating networks of solidarity and material support, most classical ethnicity theorists seem to see primarily negative effects arising from the artificiality of ethnic genealogy stories, as well as from the trends toward "monopolistic closure." Together these have ill effects both socially and politically because they promote in-group interaction over a wider social intercourse, they generate "special interest" approaches to political participation, and they prioritize identity considerations over the content of proposals (what Cornel West calls "racial reasoning"). Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan's influential characterization of ethnicity in the 1960s expresses this most forthrightly: in their view, strongly felt ethnic identities are an a priori problem requiring political policies that would enhance their dissolution and irrelevance.[17]

So it turns out that ethnicity no less than race is generally viewed as based in artificial origin stories and strategic forgetting, and thus the distinctiveness of race and ethnicity is shallow at best. The natural/social distinction is not merely conflated by mistake by theorists such as Weber but argued to dissolve in the practice of ethnic group reproductive isolation, so that an ethnic group can turn into something like a race. And the political distinction—in which race is seen as arbitrary, without subjective control, and without dignity, whereas ethnicity is seen as the product of collective agency and praxis—is dissolved

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once ethnicity is viewed as formed on the basis of artificial origin stories whose motivations are consciously forgotten and thus naturalized, and whose political payoff is a decreased rationality in the public sphere. Today, given the widespread belief that the true genealogy of racial classification is social process rather than natural differentiations, these commonalities between race and ethnicity are all the more striking.

A further reason to see race and ethnicity as less distinguishable than academics might think is their actual interchangeability in current discursive practices. Examples abound. SAT scores are reported "by race" in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* with categories listed that include, separately, Puerto Ricans and Mexican Americans. Travel brochures describe the *ethnic* breakdown of various Latin American countries with percentages for blacks, mulattos, mestizos, whites, all obviously racial classifications, given along side numbers for European, Spanish, Quechua, Aymara, Chinese. Even academics exhibit this slippage by referring to African Americans or Hispanics (both presumptively ethnic terms) as races.[18] It is also debatable whether such large categories as "European" or "African American" have only ethnic and not racial meanings: both categories are too large and culturally and linguistically diverse to refer to an ethnicity. This is the current state of our ordinary, or real world, language, and it explains why one needs the adjective "white" in front of "ethnics" when referring to Italian or Greek neighborhoods or voting blocs. There is no precise differentiation of ethnic and racial identity in common language.

Some philosophers will view such confusions in the public domain as problems that philosophers can fix, by clarifying meanings and stipulating more precise usage.[19] But I would argue that in regard to race and ethnicity, at least, the problem is not simply in the imprecision of ordinary speech. In fact, the slippage between race and ethnicity makes sense given a longer view of how such group category words have been used. In Greek antiquity, the Oxford English Dictionary (*OED*) tells us, "ethnic" was "an epithet denoting nationality, derived from or corresponding to the name of a people or city." So it began, interestingly, as a pejorative rather than neutral description. In line with this, the first definition of "ethnic" given in the modern period was generally "heathen." Sixteenth-century definitions of the word "ethnic" in English define the term as "pertaining to nations not Christian or Jewish," thus adding religious identity to the mix.[20] Also in the modern period and before, what we today call ethnic groups and races were loose terms used to refer interchangeably to "peoples" and "cultures" and "nations." In the nineteenth century, the definition of "ethnic" was given in the *OED* as "pertaining to race" and as "having common racial, cultural, religious or linguistic characteristics, esp. designating a racial or other group within a larger system."[21] This indicates

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that ethnicity was associated with a minority group, never a majority. In the twentieth century, as the *OED* tried to capture common usage, the term ethnic was explained as connoting all of the above as well as "foreign," "exotic," and "un-American." Today, Webster's Unabridged gives as its first definition of race "any of the major biological divisions of mankind, distinguished by color and texture of hair, color of skin and eyes, stature, bodily proportions, etc." thus conforming to the more phenotypical characterization of race as opposed to ethnicity that I alluded to above. But Webster's also gives the third definition of race as "any geographical, national, or tribal ethnic grouping" and the fourth definition as "the state of belonging to a certain ethnic stock."

Thus confusion, and conflation, abounds. The strict differentiation of race as physical or natural, and ethnicity as cultural or social, does not accord with historical etymology or common current usage, and even if we try to maintain the distinction for analytical purposes, we find a slippage caused by reproductive practices of ethnic groups and common political treatment. Given the current deconstruction of the naturalist pretensions of the concept of race, both ethnicity and race are increasingly used as social categories of identity referring to a historically created group of people.

I have for the most part in this quick synopsis referred to negative treatments of race and ethnicity and to what seem to be unconscious conflations of the terms, which suggests the important observation that we would be foolish to think that we can escape pejorative essentialisms by ceasing to use the word race and using only the word ethnicity. But I don't mean to imply that either term has only negative connotations or uses. I follow Omi and Winant's Foucauldian-inspired view that definitions (even of the more loaded term "race") come from below as well as from above, that they are negotiations in which the oppressed play a role, and that the form their resistance takes has an impact on social meanings.[22] Thus today there are new meanings connoted when even derided terms like "black" or "Mexican" are in circulation in dominant spaces, and there are and have always been divergent and positive in-group meanings. To say that "black" is only a negative term (as some philosophers and sociologists still maintain) is to take the white Anglo dominant discourse as effectively hegemonic (which it never is) and also to ignore the increasing internal diversity of white discourse itself.

Now, to return to the category of ethnorace. The point of introducing this term would not be to replace usage of race and ethnicity entirely, since each continues to carry some different possibilities despite the fact that they overlap and are sometimes even equated. We can continue to use race to signify physical visible features deeper than dress and comportment, and ethni-

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city to signify customs and group practices developed by a people within history. Nor is the point of introducing the concept of ethnorace meant as a way to provide clarity of usage and analytical rigor into the language, as some philosophers are still wont to do, however quixotic the project.

Rather, the point of introducing ethnorace is to provide more linguistic options in order to develop better descriptive tools to characterize and understand current realities. In particular, it is to provide a solution to the special difficulties of Latinos, who cannot be characterized as *a* race and yet who are, by and large, racialized and thus disanalogous in their past and present treatment from other white ethnic groups who are seen as assimilable, less endemically premodern and irrational, and thus less of a threat to "American" identity. To characterize Latino identity as merely ethnic is to misunderstand the specific racisms directed at Latinos, the obstacles to acceptance, and the (often) visible nature of the identity. As stated, clear-cut distinctions between race and ethnicity do not always hold and certainly do not always hold for Latinos. Latinos are, then, a good candidate for an ethnorace. I would also argue that we need to disaggregate Latinos, as I will explain in the following section, if we want to make any meaningful political or economic assessments. We are not all racialized, or racialized to the same degree or in the same way, and any political discourse that tries to ignore the differences is only inviting trouble. Those who represent the "promise" will be happily incorporated, accepted, and affirmatively acted upon, and those who represent the "threat" will be excluded through some newfound criteria. To address these complexities as well as others, we need more terms, not fewer ones.

The concept of ethnorace, then, might be defined as pertaining to groups who have both ethnic and racialized characteristics, who are a historical people with customs and conventions developed out of collective agency, but who are also identified and identifiable by bodily morphology that allows for both group affinity as well as group exclusion and denigration. But an ethnoracial group will not be seen as primarily a biologically based natural kind but as a hybrid form that has evolved over time with elements of both. The advantage of such a designation for Latinos is twofold. One advantage is that we can avoid having to choose between race or ethnicity to explain the meaning of Latino identity. Neither is adequate, if only because the large pan-Latino category incorporates many diverse races and ethnicities within it. The term "Latino" is too large a category to be analogous to the sub-European groupings such as Italians or even Scandinavians. A second advantage is that our distinctiveness in the cultural imaginary of the United States can become more perspicuous. When we are called simply an ethnicity, it can become difficult to explain the reason why Latinos are not

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assimilating or viewed as equally assimilable. We need to understand the racialization of Latinos and anti-Latino racism to understand why Latinos are not, and cannot, on the whole, become white. The term ethnorace, then, allows us to avoid having to choose between binary concepts imagined as independent at the same time that it allows for more fine-tuned analyses of the diverse political effects of increasing Latino visibility.

3. Identity Proliferation

The final concept I want to bring in here is identity proliferation. In the face of imprecise, artificial, politically troubling concepts of social identity, not a few theorists argue for retreating back to class or to cosmopolitan individualism. But this would disenable effective political analysis of how people enter the political process and what obstacles they encounter in doing so.[23] It is true that current identity categories all have some limitations, especially when we try to fit them to Latinos. The concept of a pan-Latino identity itself is subject to a vigorous debate concerning whether it is a meaningful marker of lived experience or, rather, is too broad to capture any significant political or socioeconomic realities. In light of all these concerns, some think it would be better to stem the tide of identity categories (if not immigration) and adopt either a racial eliminativism or some pan-national or otherwise amorphous category like "brown" under which we can all (white, black, brown, etc., alike) be subsumed.

The major problem with transcendence proposals and amalgamation models is that they ignore the fact that our labor markets are still stratified by race, ethnicity, nationality, and gender, and that the global culture wars continue to project conflict based on intractable differences based on identity. Moreover, global capital moves to, and from, its various locations based on identities that correlate to job skills, degrees of vulnerability, levels of unionization, and flexible social practices.[24] The global labor market is thus organized around identity and complexly differentiated. It is also capable of transition, but its capacity for transition is also correlated to shifts in identity, as light skinned English speaking people of color gain managerial acceptance, and as new waves of immigrant populations come to dominate certain labor sectors. Thus, to understand the complexities of global identities and global markets, we need increased specificity rather than only broad categories (this is as true for whites as any group—given the concentration of Eastern European immigrants in low-paid service work both in Europe and the United States).

Amalgamation proposals, along with transcendence models, are often motivated by the understandable desire to enhance the possibility of collaboration and unity. But analyzing and

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accounting for the specificities of our complex differences should in no way entail an increase in conflict but should enhance our ability to see more clearly where we need to negotiate and compromise and thus how we might more effectively make common cause.

In the essay "Comparative Race, Comparative Racisms," I advance this argument for identity proliferation based on a description of real-world organizing in complex worksites where races, ethnicities, linguistic communities, nationalities, and ethnoraces, crisscross one another in their political allegiances and solidarities.[25] Union organizers and leaders use the phrase "community of solidarity" to describe the alliances they find in worksites in which bonds of trust, communication, and support are shared. Solidarity is sometimes based on color, sometimes based on language, and sometimes based on nationality. Employers often try to exploit and exacerbate conflicts among workers, such as encouraging African Americans to support English-only policies or drawing on the antiblack racism among Filipinas. But communities of solidarity in workplaces also emerge organically from real and not only imagined shared experience and shared interests. That is, communities of solidarity are not merely based on "artificial origins" stories, or on mistaken metaphysical views, but on the shared need to have bilingualism accepted as a right, to have antiblack racism seen and named as such when it affects hiring and promotion, and to have the contract committee take up the demand for long vacations that immigrants need so they can return to home countries where their families (even partners and children) live. The task of the union or community organizer is not to convince everyone that neither race nor ethnicity is real but to understand with precision and accuracy what the differences are so that productive collaborations can be developed and trust across groups can be slowly cultivated. Only in this way can organizers show that, precisely because of their very identities and the ways these are used and exploited by bosses, workers have in some cases common enemies and common problems that trump their differences, or their differences can be negotiated for mutual benefit in mutual shows of support. The route to this expanded solidarity is neither transcendence nor false commonality, but accurate renditions of differences of experience. In some cases this does mean that some groups will have to acknowledge their privileges, that is, the fact that their light skin tone can enhance their capacity to be given a promotion. But even privileged workers cannot get their workplace rights secured without the collaborative power of a union.

Consider, for example, important new research by economist Sandy Darity and his collaborators that show surprisingly negligible differences between whites and light-skinned blacks in job success, unemployment, and salary differentials.[26] That is,

whether one is white or a light-skinned African American makes a statistically negligible difference. But Darity's work also shows that when those light skinned blacks are disaggregated from the statistics on black unemployment, black poverty, etc., the gap is even larger than we thought. I would argue that in the white imaginary, light-skinned African Americans still signify differently than whites do, raising fears of retaliation for slavery, for example, and yet the fact remains that patterns of discrimination do not operate with the same intensity across the category.

This indicates that what we have long known was true for Asian Americans and Latinos is also true for African Americans: we must disaggregate the categories to make meaningful analyses of the scope and intensity of the problems. For Latinos, it is not only about skin color but accent, language, documentation status, and body type. For Asian Americans, racialized features intersect with national origin to make economic analyses that take the mid-point or mean between Laotian and Japanese wages to be completely meaningless.

Thus we need identity proliferation in the sense of more fine-tuned analyses that can factor in a variety of mediations and categories to produce not only meaningful economic indicators but also political projections that can make plausible predictions. The white vote for Obama, for example, is not meaningful in an undifferentiated lump. What is predictive is whiteness as mediated by rural or urban status, gender, age, and living in a union household.

Identity proliferation requires us to redraw and revise some borders in potentially uncomfortable ways, to include the light skinned or more assimilated among us as near-white, and to take language, national origin, and ethnicity to create borders within racial groups that are often treated as monolithic. This is not to say that gross categories like Latino, black, or African American should no longer be used, but that we need to consider what we are looking for to determine which is the relevant degree of specificity. This is the sort of thing social scientists have been doing for some years now, but it has not yet seeped into the general discussions of even critical race theory as evidenced by the often weak analyses of recent electoral phenomena.

4. Conclusion

Binaries are often produced by overgeneralizations. The three concepts I have put forward here—anti-Latino racism, ethno-race, and identity proliferation—are meant to be a check on relatively useless generalizations so as to achieve more descriptive accuracy, predictive capacity, and thus political efficacy. The differences that these more fine-grained analyses foreground

need not be feared—we can still ask when and to what extent they are either analytically useful or politically relevant.

The emerging Latino population in the United States is testing existing categories and modes of conceptualizing identity, status, and political effect. We need expanded categories of identity, as well as expanded notions of racism, to provide meaningful representations and analyses, and we need to be willing to devise new creative concepts like ethnorace to be able to avoid unproductive debates about whether Latinos are an ethnicity or a race, whether they are closer to black or white, or whether they represent a threat or a promise.

The Service Employees International Union (SEIU) has attempted to develop a historically groundbreaking policy of nondifferentiation between documented and undocumented workers for the purposes of organizing and for deciding where their organizing resources will be allocated.[27] Given the retrograde protectionist and nationalist legacy of the U.S. labor movement that went so far as to support CIA activities against workers in other countries, this is indeed historic. They are also trying to negotiate contracts where possible that will minimize employer cooperation with the USCIS. In this way, SEIU has taken the stand that documented status will not be used to bifurcate U.S. workers, that they will take steps where possible to reduce the effects of this distinction and willfully ignore it whenever possible. There are many obvious advantages to such an approach, and not merely advantages accruing to the undocumented, since it can strengthen the overall power of labor against capital. But I want to end with this example as a policy response where binary differentiations of Latino workers in this case, and really of all workers, cannot be used to divide and conquer, to set some up as a threat and some as a promise. As SEIU practice indicates, we reach that stage not through a transcendence of the differences among us, but through crafty and calculated responses to it, not through simpleminded appeals to unity, but through better analyses of social mediations. To develop such responses, we need more complexified, fine-tuned, and accurate analyses.

Notes

[1] See, e.g., Samuel Huntington, *Who are we? The Challenges to America's National Identity* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004); Peter Brimelow, *Alien Nation: Common Sense about America's Immigration Disaster* (New York: Random House, 1995); Leo R. Chavez, *The Latino Threat: Constructing Immigrants, Citizens, and the Nation* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008); and http://www.usborderpatrol.com/Border_Patrol900.htm.

[2] See, e.g., Ryan Lizza, "Return of the Nativist," *The New Yorker*, Dec. 17, 2007; and John Cassidy, "Alien Nation," *The New Yorker*, April 10, 2006.

[3] To note the shift from a proletarianization of jobs to a peonization of jobs.

[4] Arlene Dávila, *Barrio Dreams: Puerto Ricans, Latinos, and the Neoliberal City* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 2.

[5] Justin Pritchard, "Mexican worker death rates rise sharply even as overall job safety improves," *The Associated Press*, March 20, 2004.

[6] See, e.g., Jorge Ramos, *The Latino Wave: How Hispanics are Transforming Politics in America* (New York: Harper, 2005).

[7] The arguments of this section were initially developed in my "Latinas/os, Asian-Americans and the Black/White Paradigm," *Journal of Ethics* 7, no. 1 (2003): 5–27.

[8] Huntington says as much in his argument that Latinos must assimilate to Anglo-Protestant values and begin "dreaming in English"; see *Who are We?*, esp. chs. 4, 9.

[9] For an explanation of the concept of cultural racism, see Ramón Grosfoguel, "'Cultural Racism' and Colonial Caribbean Migrants in Core Zones of the Capitalist World-Economy," *Review: Fernand Braudel Center* 22, no. 4 (1999): 409–34.

[10] David Theo Goldberg, *Racist Culture: Philosophy and the Politics of Meaning* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1993), 75.

[11] Max Weber, "Ethnic Groups," in *Theories of Ethnicity: A Reader*, ed. Werner Sollors (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 55–57.

[12] Weber, "Ethnic Groups," 56.

[13] Angelo Corlett's odd formulation of ethnic identity as determined by genealogy bridges this divide but in ways he does not acknowledge, since he characterizes his account as only about ethnicity and not about race. See his *Race, Racism, and Reparations* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), 130–31.

[14] See, e.g., Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Democracy on Trial* (New York: Harper Collins, 1995).

[15] Anthony Appiah, *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); Nancy Fraser, *Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflections on the 'Postsocialist' Condition* (New York: Routledge, 1997); and Paul Gilroy, *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture Beyond the Color Line* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1992).

[16] Weber, "Ethnic Groups," 55.

[17] Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *Beyond the Melting Pot: The Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Jews, Italian, and Irish of New York City*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1970).

[18] These examples and others are given in more detail in my *Visible Identities: Race, Gender, and the Self* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), ch. 10.

[19] See, e.g., Jorge Gracia, *Surviving Race, Ethnicity, and Nationality: A Challenge for the 21st Century* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005).

[20] "'Ethnic, ethnical, ethnicity, *ethnie, ethnique*': Entries from *Oxford English Dictionary* (1961) and *Supplement* (1972), and *Grand Robert* (1985)" in *Theories of Ethnicity: A Classical Reader*, ed. Werner Sollors (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 2–12.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formations in the United States: From the 1960's to the 1980's* (New York: Routledge, 1986).

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[23] See, e.g., José Cruz, *Identity and Power: Puerto Rican Politics and the Challenge of Ethnicity* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998).

[24] See, e.g., Mario Barrera, *Race and Class in the Southwest: A Theory of Racial Inequality* (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979).

[25] "Comparative Race, Comparative Racisms," in *Black Ethnicity / Latino Race?* ed. Jorge Gracia (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007).

[26] See, e.g., Arthur H. Goldsmith, Darrick Hamilton, and William Darity, Jr., "Shades of Discrimination: Skin Tone and Wages," *American Economic Review* 96, no. 2 (May 2006): 242–45.

[27] Go to www.seiu.org

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