

LINDA MARTIN ALCOFF
PROF AT CUNY
ARTICLES

LATINOS AND THE CATEGORIES OF RACE

Apparently, Latinos are “taking over.”¹ With news that Latinos have become the largest minority group in the United States, the public airwaves are filled with concerned voices about the impact that a non-English dominant, Catholic, non-white, largely poor population will have on “American” identity. Aside from the hysteria, Latino identity poses some authentically new questions for the standard way in which minority identities are conceptualized. Are Latinos a race, an ethnicity, or some combination? What does it mean to have hybridity as the foundation of an identity, as is the case for mestizos and most Latinos? The term “Latino” signifies people from an entire continent, sub-continent, and several large islands, with diverse racial, national, ethnic, religious, and linguistic aspects to their identity. Given all this internal diversity, is “Latino” a meaningful identity at all?

Latino identity is, with few exceptions, a visible identity, for all its variability, and I will argue that unless we pay close attention to the way in which Latino identity operates as a visible identity in public, social spaces, our analyses of its social meanings and political effects will be compromised. In the following three chapters, I will address three issues that Latino identity raises, issues that have political ramifications but that also require us to think about the philosophical assumptions at work behind common ideas about race and ethnicity. First, what is the relationship between Latino identity and racial categories? Second, how do Latinos fit into, and challenge, the black/white binary thinking about race that has long dominated public discourse in the U.S.? And third, what does it mean to have a mixed identity, for Latinos or for other mixed race groups? Throughout, we will have to pay close attention to the especially significant heterogeneity of this particular population. Does such diversity threaten identity or does it reveal that identity has never presumed uniformity?

Only recently has the concept of pan-Latino, or generic Hispanic, identity overtaken the older identity monikers of “Cuban,” “Mexican,” “Puerto Rican,” etc. in significant national discourses across the United States. For Latinos themselves, Juan Flores argues that the decision whether to use the broad “Latino” or the more specific national terms is not an either/or but a both/and that can be determined by context. (Flores 2000) But what is it to be “Latino”? More than the national interpellations like Cuban or Mexican, Latino identity generally signifies one’s situatedness outside of Latin America. This spatial referentiality brings the concept, the identity, and the experience under the domain of north American symbolic systems and conceptual schemas to a greater extent, which is one reason some give to reject the label entirely.

Like many others, I am doubtful we can hold our collective breath and make it go away. The discourse in the U.S. (as well as elsewhere in the global north) about encroaching majority minorities tends toward aggregation, and the sometimes hysterical concern about the Spanish language, national loyalty, and non-Anglo cultural traditions makes the differences among Mexican, Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, and Cubans less important than the similarities (see e.g. Huntington 2004). But the concept of “Latino” identity is not coming solely from Anglos. It is no longer the case that Puerto Ricans dominate Latin New York, or Cubans have total hegemony in Miami, or even that Mexicans totally dominate Los Angeles: other immigrants from South America, Central America, and the Spanish speaking Caribbean are now sizable enough to make their cultures and their accents widely apparent. Thus, as Juan Flores says, “‘Latinos in New York’ no longer rhymes with Puerto Rican,” which means that the more inclusive term “Latino” has more real relevance and a real or objective referent (Flores 1996, 171).

Despite the objective nature of Latino identity as just explained, there can be no decontextualized, final or essential account of what the identity is, given the social basis and the dynamic, historical nature of

racialized and ethnic identities. My question then can be formulated as a project of social ontology in the following way: what is the best, or most apt, account of Latino identity's relationship to race that makes the most sense of the current political and social realities within which we must negotiate our social environment?

Although I am interested here in the politics of identity, that is, the political effects of various accounts of identity in and on popular consciousness, both among Latinos and among Anglos, my principal concern is at the level of experience, ideology, and meaning rather than the attendant political rights and implications that may be associated with identity. As will be seen, much of the debates over Latinas/os and race weave both strategic considerations---a concern with political effects---and metaphysical considerations---a concern with the most apt description---together. There are two reasons for this. One is that strategic proposals for the way a community should represent itself or should be represented cannot work if there is no connection whatsoever to lived experience or to the common meanings that are prominent in the relevant discourses. Thus, the strategic efficacy of political proposals are dependent on correct assessments of social ontological realities. But, secondly, the question of what is the most apt description of those ontological realities is not as clear-cut as some philosophers might suppose. This is because the concepts of "race" and "Latino" admit of different meanings and are under heavy contestation. Any given descriptive account will presuppose some judgement calls about which meanings are most salient and plausible and these judgement calls will be underdetermined by usage, history, science, or even phenomenological description of experience. And in making these judgement calls, we must look to the future and not just the past. In other words, given that we are participating in the *construction* of meanings, we must carefully consider their likely real world effects.

I. Three options

The question of Latino identity's relationship to the conventional categories of race that have been historically dominant in the United States is a particularly vexing one. To put it straightforwardly, we simply don't fit. Racialized identities in the North have long connoted homogeneity and easily visible identifying features, but this doesn't apply to Latinos in the United States, nor even to any one national subset, such as Cuban-Americans or Puerto Ricans. We have no homogeneous culture, we come in every conceivable color, and identities such as "mestizo" signify the very absence of boundaries.

Moreover, the corresponding practices of racialization in the United States---such as racial border control, legal sanctions on cross-racial marriage, and the multitude demands for racial self-identification on nearly every application form from day care to college admissions---are also relatively unfamiliar south of the border. Angel R. Oquendo recounts that before he could even take the SAT in Puerto Rico he was asked to identify himself racially. "I was caught off guard," he says. "I had never thought of myself in terms of race." (Oquendo 1998, 61) Fortunately, the SAT included "Puerto Rican" among the choices of "race," and Oquendo was spared what he called a "profound existential dilemma." Even while many Latinos consider color a relevant factor for marriage, and anti-black and anti-indigenous racism persists in Latin America, the institutional and ideological forms that racism has taken in the Latin South are generally disanalogous to those in the Anglo North, focusing on shades of difference rather than sharply divided categories. This is why many of us find our identity as well as our social status changing as we step off the plane or cross the river: race suddenly becomes an all-important aspect of our identity, and sometimes our racial identity dramatically changes in ways over which it feels as if we have no control.

There are at least three general options possible in the face of this trans-continental experiential dissonance as a way of characterizing the relationship between Latino identity and race. The first option is to refuse a racialized designation and understand "Latino" to signify an ethnicity (or perhaps a related group of ethnicities). This would avoid the problem of racial diversity within Latino communities and yet recognize the cultural, social, and political links among Latinos in the North. Theorists such as Angelo Corlett defend this option on the grounds that the concept of ethnicity builds on cultural practices, customs, language, religion, and history, rather than the specious biological connotations of race (Corlett 2003, 6-17). A second option would resist the ethnic paradigm on the grounds that, whatever the historical basis of Latino identity is, living in the context of North America we have become a racialized population and we need a self-understanding that will accurately assess our portrayal here. A third option, adopted by neo-conservatives

and neo-liberals, is to attempt to assimilate to the individualist ideology of the United States both in body and in mind, and reject the salience of group identities *a priori*.

In my view, none of these responses is fully adequate, though some have more problems than others. In regard to the second option, it is hard to see how the racial diversity among Latinos could be fairly represented in any unified concept of race. And in regard to the third option, the visible features of many Latinos makes it doubtful that they could succeed in transcending racialization or group stereotypes. On the face of it, the first option—understanding Latino identity as an ethnic identity---seems to make the most sense for a variety of reasons that I will explore in this paper. This option could allow for more internal heterogeneity and resist the racializing that brings racism as well as often mischaracterizing our own sense of self. However, I will ultimately argue that the “ethnic option” is not fully adequate to the contemporary social realities we face, and may inhibit the development of useful political strategies for our diverse communities. Primarily my argument in this chapter will take the form of a negative: the ethnic option is not adequate. Developing a fully adequate alternative is beyond my ability, but the very failure of the ethnic option will establish some of the necessary criteria for such an alternative.

Before any of these options can be fairly assessed, we need to begin by understanding the specificity of Latino identity.

II. Latino specificity

Irish, Italian, Polish, Ukrainian, and other so-called “white ethnic” communities have organized cultural events on the basis of their identities at least since the 1960's, with the cooperation of police and city councils across the country. Certainly for the Irish and the Italians, this movement of ethnic assertion has been precisely motivated by their discrimination and vilification throughout much of U.S. history, a vilification that has sometimes taken racialized forms. Thus, there are some clear parallels between Latinos and white ethnics: many have immigrant family histories, and many today share a cultural pride and desire to maintain some cultural traditions perhaps motivated by an awareness of historical if not ongoing discrimination. So why does the growth of a visible, politically assertive Latino population so often elicit such strong negative reactions and a flurry of political analysis about its likely degenerative effects on the general society? If I may be permitted a gross overgeneralization, many European-Americans are afraid of strongly felt ethnic identities, but only certain ones. There is a different attitude among whites in general toward *non-white* public celebrations of ethnic identity and toward those of white ethnic celebrations. And this is, I suspect, because it is one thing to say to the dominant culture: “you have been unfairly prejudiced against me” as southern European ethnicities might say; and quite another to say “you have stolen my lands and enslaved my people and through these means created the wealth of your country” as African Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans might say. The latter message is harder to hear, it challenges the basic legitimating narratives of the U. S.'s formation and global status, and it understandably elicits the worry, “what will be the full extent of their demands?” Of course, all of the cultural programs that celebrate African, indigenous, or Latino heritage do not make these explicit claims. But in a sense, the claims do not need to *be* explicit: any reference to slavery or indigenous peoples or Chicano or Puerto Rican history implies challenges to the legitimating narrative of the US, and any expression of solidarity among such groups consciously or unconsciously elicits concern about the political and economic demands such groups may eventually make, even if they are not made now.

This is surely part of what is going on when European-Americans express puzzlement about the importance attached to identity by non European Americans, when young whites complain about African Americans sitting together in their cafeterias or wanting to live together in college dormitories, or when both left and liberal political theorists, such as Gitlin, Schlesinger and others, jump to the conclusion that a strong sense of group solidarity and its resultant “identity politics” among people of color in this country will fracture the body politic and disable our democracy (see Gitlin 1995, Schlesinger 1992, Elshtain 1997, Hochschild 1996).

As I discussed earlier, a prominent explanation given for these attachments to identity, attachments that are considered otherwise inexplicable, is that there is opportunism at work, among leaders if not among the rank and file, to secure government “hand-outs” or claim special rights. However, there are two problems with this assumption. Identities themselves require interpretation, and thus their political implications will be

subject to contestation. Moreover, celebrations of Latino identity such as Puerto Rican Day parades or Caribbean festivals are venues for the possibility of cultural expression no different than any sports event or holiday which allows for the public expression of European American cultural identity: the ubiquitous playing of "We will rock you," or Sinatra singing "New York, New York" which is played after every Yankees game, or Easter egg hunts held at public parks. Latino-themed events are *marked* as such in a way that white cultural traditions are not—the latter are seen as simply "American" or "Christian" rather than white American or Anglo Christianity. Whites who enjoy a surfeit of opportunities for their own cultural expression often do not realize this privilege, and then feel mystified and threatened by the cultural expressions of other groups. Given this mystification and feeling of amorphous threat, assumptions of opportunism become plausible.

Assumptions about the opportunism behind identity politics also operate on the basis of the following understanding of the recent historical past: in the 1960's, some groups *began to clamor* for the recognition of their identities, they began to resist and critique the cultural assimilationism of liberal politics, and they argued that state institutions should give these identities public recognition. On this scenario, *first* we had identity politics asserting the political importance of these identities, *and then* we had (coerced) state recognition of them. But denigrated identity designations have *originated* with and been enforced by the state in U.S. history, not vice versa. Obviously, it is the U.S. state and U.S. courts that initially insisted on the overwhelming salience of some racial and ethnic identities, to the exclusion of rights to suffrage, education, property, marital and custody rights, immigration, and so on. Denigrated groups are trying to *reverse* this process; they are not the initiators of it. It seems to me that they have two aims: (1) to publically valorize identities that are derided by the dominant culture, and (2) to have their own hand at representing these identities and interpreting their political implications.

The U.S. pan-Latino identity is perhaps the newest and most important identity that has emerged in the recent period. The concept of a pan-Latino identity is not new in Latin America: Simon Bolivar called for it nearly two hundred years ago as a strategy of anti-colonialism but also because it provided a name for the "new peoples" that had emerged from the conquest. And influential leaders like Jose Martí and Che Guevara followed Bolivar in promoting a broad Latin American solidarity. It is important to note that populations "on the ground" have not often resonated with these grand visions, and that national political and economic leaders continue to obstruct regional accords and trade agreements that might enhance solidarity. But the point remains that the invocation of a pan-Latino identity does not actually originate in the North.

Only much more recently is it the case that some Latino political groups in the North have organized on a pan-Latino basis, although most Latino politics here has been organized along national lines, e.g. as Puerto Ricans or Chicanos, and these only within specific communities or sectors (such as students). But what is especially new, and what is being largely foisted on us from the outside, is the representation of a pan-Latino identity in the dominant North American media, and it is this representation which we want to have a hand in shaping. Marketing agencies have discovered/created a marketing niche for the "generic" Latino. And Latino-owned marketing agencies and advertising agencies are working on the construction of this identity as much as anyone, though of course in ways dominated by strategic interests or what Habermas calls purposive rationality (see Dávila 2001). There are also more and more cultural representations of Latinos in the dominant media and in government productions such as the census. Thus, the solicitous concern that U.S. Latinos have with our identity is not spontaneous or originating entirely or even mostly from within our communities; neither is the ongoing representation of our identity something we can easily just ignore (see e.g. Flores and Yudice 1990).

III. Contexts, spatial and temporal

Social identities, whether racial or ethnic, are dynamic. In their study of what they name "racial formations," Michael Omi and Howard Winant argue that "Racial categories and the meanings of race are given concrete expression by the specific social relations and historical context in which they are embedded." (Omi and Winant 1986, 60) Racial concepts and identity categories are constantly facing forms of resistance and contestation which transform both their impact and their effective meaning. Clearly, this is the case with ethnic as well as racial identities, as the transformations of "Latino" indicate. As social constructions imposed on variable experiential facts, they exist with no stable referent or essential core. This is not to say that they do not refer, but that what they refer to is dynamic. There is, moreover, a feedback loop between referential

descriptions, personal experience, and political resistance. Because racial and ethnic identities in particular are also the site of conflict over political power and economic resources, they are especially volatile. Any analysis of Latino identity, then, must chart historical trends and contextual influences.

Since the Immigration Law was passed in 1965 that ended the quotas on immigration from South and Central America and the Caribbean, millions of Latinos have entered the United States from various countries, diversifying previously dominant Chicano, Puerto Rican, and Cuban communities. As the immigrant communities settle in, younger generations develop different cultural practices, musical tastes, political orientations, and even religious beliefs from their parents, adapting to their cultural surroundings, in some cases no longer being Spanish dominant or practicing Catholics. So in one sense diversity has increased as new immigrations continue to diversify present communities and as new generations of younger Latinos develop new formations of cultural identity. But in another sense diversity has decreased as Latino immigrants experience common forms of discrimination and chauvinism in the United States and an increasingly generic cultural and racialized interpellation.

In the 1960's, U.S. state agencies began to disseminate the ethnic label "Hispanic" as the proper term for identifying all people of Latin American and even Spanish descent. (Oboler 1995, xiii) So today we have a population of 30 or so million "Hispanics" in the United States. The mass media, entertainment, and advertising industries have increasingly addressed this large population as if it were a coherent community (Mato 1997, 2). Suzanne Oboler's study suggests that this generic identity category feels especially socially constructed to many of the people named by it, given that it is not how they self-identified previously (Oboler, chapter 1). Oboler asks, somewhat rhetorically:

Are marketers merely taking advantage of an existing 'group' as a potentially lucrative target population? Or are their advertising strategies in fact helping to 'design' the group, 'invent' its traditions, and hence 'create' this homogeneous ethnic group? (Oboler, 13)

One might well be concerned that adapting to any such pan-Latino identity as constructed by dominant institutions---whether economic or political ones---represents a capitulation, or is simply the inevitable effect of what Foucault called governmentality.

However, much of the debate over this interpellation among those named by it does not so much critique the fact of its social construction or even the fact that its genesis lies in government and marketing agencies, but focuses instead on its political implications and its coherence with lived experience, for example, the way in which it disallows multiplicity or the way in which it erases national allegiance. In this way, the debate shifts to a more productive set of concerns, it seems to me. I witnessed an interesting exchange on some of these points at the "Hispanics: Cultural Locations" conference held at the University of San Francisco in 1997. Ofelia Schutte, a leading Latina philosopher, presented a paper which argued that a pan-U.S. Latino identity may be a means to disaffiliate us from our nations of birth or ancestry, nations which are invaded or otherwise harmed by the U.S. government. Thus, thinking of ourselves primarily as U.S. Latinos rather than, say, Panamanians or Salvadorans, may work to dislodge or weaken feelings of loyalty to countries outside the U.S. borders. In the discussion period after her paper, one member of the audience, Professor of Spanish Susan Sanchez-Casal, argued strongly that, as a half Spanish, half Puerto Rican woman who grew up among Chicanos in southern California, she had found the emergence of a pan-Latino identity a welcome relief. Although she recognized the dangers that Ofelia was describing, identifying herself simply as Latina allowed her to avoid having to make complicated choices between the various components of her identity, and it helpfully named her experience of connection with a multiplicity of Latino communities. I myself resonated with Ofelia's concerns, having met Latinos in the U.S. Army who participated in the 1989 invasion of Panama. But given that I have lived most of my life in the United States and grew up in Florida among mostly Cubans, I could also understand Susan's point: in some cases, "Latina" is not only the easiest identity to use, it also feels like an apt description.

Another important political consideration in regard to homogenizing Latino identities is that this can allow those members of the group who are themselves less disadvantaged to benefit from affirmative action and other forms of economic redress that have been created mainly for (and often mainly fought for by) Chicanos and Puerto Ricans, i.e. the more disadvantaged constituencies. This has been a clear effect of the generic label "Hispanic," and it is the reason that many institutions will use more specific designations, such

as Mexican American and Puerto Rican, in their affirmative action policies. However, here the problem is that one cannot assume that no South Americans or other Central Americans in the U.S. have suffered racial and ethnic discrimination. Many are not able to pass as white, even if they were to try. Since the Mariel boat lift in the 1980's, even Miami Cubans are no longer almost all light skinned and middle or upper class. Given the class, ethnic, and racial heterogeneity of every Latin American and Caribbean country, one cannot exclude entire countries from measures aimed at redressing discrimination without excluding many who are marked as inferior north of the border. In my experience, some individuals who have not experienced much discrimination (for one reason or another, e.g. looks, class, lack of accent, etc.) will remove themselves from consideration for scholarships or other programs aimed at redressing anti-Latino injustices. I think more of this goes on than some imagine, but it is very difficult to tell how effective such self-policing measures can be on the whole.²

Although some programs do specify nationalities in an effort to avoid the overly homogenizing effects of a pan-Latino identity, both government and marketing agencies are increasingly relying on the latter. And, as both Dávila and Mato have argued in separate studies, the marketing and advertising agencies are not simply forcing us to use labels that have no real purchase on our lives, but, rather, participating in a new subject-construction that affects how Latinos think about and experience our identity and our interrelatedness to other groups of Latinos to whom we may have felt little kinship with before (Dávila 2001, Mato 1997). Mato points out that the television corporation Univisión, which is jointly owned by U.S. and Latin American companies, is exposing its viewers to a wide array of programming from diverse countries and regions. In this way, "Univisión is participating in the social construction of an imagined community." (Mato 1997, 2) To say that an identity is socially constructed is not to say that it does not refer to anything in reality, but that what it refers to is a contingent product of social practices rather than a natural kind. And even beyond the experience of community produced by the media, the exchange I described above at the "Hispanics" conference indicates that because of migrations both intra- and inter-national, and because of cross-nationality parenting relationships, the pan-Latino identity corresponds to at least some contemporary Latinos' lived experience.

Latin America itself is undoubtedly the most diverse continent in the world, which in turn creates extreme racial and ethnic diversity *within* Latino communities. By U.S. categories, there are black, brown, white, East Asian, South Asian, Jewish, Arab, Native American Latinos and more. (George Lopez jokes that this shows that Latinos will sleep with *anybody*). There are many Latinos from the southern cone whose families are of recent European origin, a large number of Latinos from the western coastal areas of Latin America whose families came from Asia, and of course a large number of Latinos whose lineage is entirely indigenous to the Americas or entirely African. The majority of Latinos in North and South America are no doubt the product of a mix of two or more of these groups. And being mixed is true, as Jorge Gracia reminds us, even of the so-called "Hispanics" who are direct descendants of Spain and Portugal, given those countries multi-ethnic and multi-racial past as part of the Ottoman empire. And it is true as well of many or most of the people identified as black or *moreno*, as is the case in the United States.

IV. Latin American categories

Latin Americans are thus generally categorized "racially" in the following way: white (which often involves a double deceit: a claim to pure Spanish descent, very rare, and a claim that pure Spanish descent is purely white or European, also very rare); black (meaning wholly or mostly of African descent, usually sub-Saharan); Indian (meaning having some or mostly Amerindian descent); and mixed (which is sometimes divided into sub-categories, *mestizo*, *mulatto*, *cholito*, etc.) with the mixed category always enjoying a majority. Asians are often entirely left off the list, even though their numbers in several countries are significant.

Different countries vary these main racial designations, however. During a recent weekend festival for "Latino Heritage Month" in Syracuse, New York, Latinos of different nationalities provided information about their countries for passers-by, which included statistics culled from government sources on what in every case was called the country's "ethnic make-up." Racial categories of identity were given *within* this larger rubric of "ethnic make-up," suggesting an equation between ethnicity and race. For example, in the Dominican Republic the "ethnic make-up" is reported to consist of 73% mixed, 16% white, 11% black. In Ecuador the categories are listed as mestizo, Indian, Spanish, and black. In Chile there is a single category

called "European and mestizo" which makes up 95% of the population. In Cuba we get categories of mulatto, which is 51% of the population; and we also get categories of white, black, and Chinese. In Bolivia the breakdown is between Quechua (25%), Aymara (30%), mestizo (30%), and white (15%). One is reminded by this list of the encyclopedia invented by Borges which divides dogs into such categories as "(a) belonging to the Emperor...[b] tame...[c] drawn with a very fine camel hair brush...and [d] having just broken the water pitcher." (Quoted in Foucault 1970, xv) There is no internally consistent or coherent theory of ethnic or racial identity underlying the diversity of categorizations. Under the rubric of ethnicity are included a mix of cultural, national and racial groups, from Spanish, to Quechua, to white. The only point that seems to be consistent throughout is that the category black is the only category that is invariably racialized, i.e. presented as black or mulatto and never presented as "West Indian" or "African." Interestingly, the category white is also often racialized, though it is sometimes replaced with "European" or "Spanish." I would suggest that there is a strong relationship between these two facts. That is, it becomes important to use the category white, and to self-identify as white, when the category black is present, in order to establish one's clear demarcation, and out of concern that a category like "mestizo" might be allowed to include black people. The category white is also used to separate out so-called whites from "Indians," a category that bears racialized meanings in Latin America and negative associations similar to the associations with African Americans in the U.S..

Blackness of course signifies differently in Latin America; thus it is not likely that a typical white American landing in Santo Domingo D.R. would look around them and think only 11% of the population is black. However, it seems clear that the striking use of the term "black" for all people of African descent, and used rather than cultural and national markers like Spanish and European that are used for other groups, is an indication of anti-black racism. Black people so designated are reduced to skin color as if this is their primary characteristic rather than some self-created marker like nationality, language, culture, or (if slavery removed the salience of these first three), at least geographical genealogy. One may have been born into a culture and language not of one's own choosing, but these are still more indicative of human agency than is any classification by phenotype. From this, one might argue that replacing "black" with another ethnicity category, such as Caribbean or West African, might help equalize and dignify the identities.

The category Indian, however, even though it might initially look to be more of an ethnicity than a race (since it is not merely the name of a color), has primarily a racial meaning, given that one cannot tell anything about language, mode of life, religion, or specific origin from the term Indian. Also, the term often carries as negative associations as does the term black in non-indigenous communities of discourse. Here, one might argue that disaggregating the category Indian would be helpful. If the primary meaning connoted by the word "Indian" is a kind of racial meaning, then the use of "Quechua" and "Aymara," "Mayan," etc. reduces the significance of the racialized connotations of the identity, subordinating those to the specificity of linguistic and cultural markers.

Despite all this variety and heterogeneity, when Latinos enter the United States, we are often homogenized into one overarching Latino or Hispanic identity. Latinas who don't look like "Maria" from Sesame Street or who don't eat spicy food often encounter Anglo skepticism about our identity (even though most of Latin American food is rather mild). This expected generic hispanicity is not, as Jorge Gracia reminds me, actually homogeneous. That is, in European-American eyes, "Hispanic" identity does not carry the same connotations in every part of the United States. Gracia explains:

In Miami it means Cuban; in New York City it means Puerto Rican; and in the southwest it means Mexican. So in California I am supposed to have as my native food tacos, in New York City, *arroz con gandules*, and in Miami, *arroz con frijoles negros!*³

Still, there is one feature that persists across this variety of "generic" Latino or Hispanic identities, and that is that our identity in the U.S., whether or not it is homogenized, is quite often presented as a racial identity. Anthropologist Gloria A. Marshall reported in 1969 that appellations such as "Spanish," "Cuban," and "Puerto Rican," are used in many U.S. contexts "as if they were equivalent to the racial designations currently in use." (Marshall 1993, 119) A recent report in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* illustrates how such equivalences continue to occur. Differences in average SAT scores were reported in the following way: The average verbal scores *by race* were: white, 526; black, 434; Asian-American, 498; American Indian, 480; Mexican-American, 453; Puerto Rican, 452; and other Hispanic students, 461.⁴

So again, like Angel Oquendo, we find that "Puerto Rican" is a racial identity, and a different one at that from the "race" of Mexican Americans. Whereas in the categorizations I just analyzed from Latin America, racial categories are subsumed within an overall account of "ethnic make-up," in this example from the U.S., ethnic categories are subsumed within an overall account of racial difference. But in both cases, race and ethnicity are all but equated.

V. The ethnicity paradigm

Latinos in the U.S. have responded to racialization in a variety of ways. One response, still ongoing, has been to either claim racial neutrality or claim whiteness, two claims which end up with the same implications. The scandal is that 80% of Puerto Ricans in the 2000 census self-identified as white, apparently thinking that, if they are going to have to be racialized, whiteness is the one they want. Other Latinos have literally campaigned to be called white. Anita Allen reported in 1994 that the largest petitioning group that had thus far requested changes for the 2000 U.S. Census was the Association of White Hispanics, who were agitating for that designation to be on the census form (Allen 1994). In the self-interested scramble for social status, many Latinos perceive correctly where the advantages lay (for further analysis of this phenomenon and its history, see Darity et al 2003; Santiago-Valles 1996). But at best, such a strategy would have to be specified for a Latino sub-group, as the Association of White Hispanics understood, and would not be applicable to the majority of Latinos. Claiming whiteness for oneself does not work unless there is public acceptance of such a designation.

Another response has been to use the discourse of racialization as it exists in the United States to self-identify as brown but in positive rather than derogatory way. Oquendo, after having overcome his existential dilemma, supports this strategy. He says:

Attacking racial exploitation and making amends for a long history of racial oppression requires taking the existing categories and turning them against their original purpose. The conceptual structure that singled out people in order to undermine them must now be used to empower them. (Oquendo 67)

As examples of this approach, Chicanos in the August Twenty-Ninth Movement and in the student group MECHA, as well as the primarily Puertorriqueno Young Lords in Chicago and New York, at times adopted and adapted the concept of a *brown* racial identity to signify solidarity and resistance, e.g. the Brown Berets. But neither the moniker "white" nor "brown" works across the board for a pan-Latino identity (or even for the specific nationalities they want to represent). Many argue that what better unites Latinos both across and even within our specific national cultures is not race or phenotype but precisely those features associated with culture: language, religious and familial traditions, cultural values, musical styles, and characteristics of comportment. The ethnicity paradigm denies that race applies to Latino identity because to be Latino is to belong to an ethnic group that encompasses different nationalities and races within it (see e.g. Corlett 2003, Klor de Alva 1996). The United States census supported this paradigm when it listed its Latino category as an ethnic category, with no Latino option listed under race.

Whether Latinos want to work with or reject racial categories depends not just on their visible features but also on their political orientation and history. Puerto Ricans have a long experiential history of U.S. colonization which imposed racialization even before they left the island, which may account for their comparatively quick adaptation to the "race rules" in the U.S.. Latinos from countries without this experience of intensive colonization are more surprised by being racially designated when they come here and may be more resistant (see e.g. Grosfoguel and Georas 1996). There is certainly a powerful sentiment among many Latinos toward resisting the imposition of U.S. racializations and U.S. categories of identity. Luis Angel Toro thus calls on us to "*abandon the outdated racial ideology embodied in [the Office of Management and Budget's Statistical] Directive no. 15 and replace it with questions designed to determine an individual's membership in a socially constructed, cultural subgroup.*" (Toro, 58) It is not as if the system of racial classification here has benefitted anyone except the white majority. As Jorge Klor de Alva provocatively put it to Cornel West in a conversation in *Harper's*, "What advantage has it been, Cornel, for blacks to identify as blacks?" (Klor de Alva, 56) Although Oquendo supports a political reformulation of racial categories, he rejects the imposition of the U.S.'s black/white binary on Latinos and argues against the use of such racial terms as "Black Hispanics" and "White Hispanics" on the grounds that these categories "project onto the Latino/a community a divisive racial dualism [i.e. black/white] that, much as it may pervade U.S. society, is alien to that community." (Oquendo 60)

Just because we are located within the U.S. does not mean we must accept existing categories: we can challenge and change them. Moreover, our identity is about culture and nationality rather than race, according to many Latinos. The majority of Puerto Ricans may have chosen white over black on a racial list but their first form of self-identification, as Clara Rodriguez has shown, is as Puerto Rican (Rodriguez 1989). However, in the United States, cultural, national, ethnic, religious and other forms of identification are constantly subordinated to race. So Afro-Cubans, English speaking West Indians, and Afro-Brazilians are grouped as "black," in ways that often counter people's own felt sense of identity or primary group alliances. Race trumps culture, and culture is sometimes even seen as a simple outgrowth of race. Part of this is a descriptive argument to the effect that identity categories in the North are inappropriate to Latino

experience. But there is also a political claim made here, that we should oppose and strive to diminish the ridiculous biological essentialism implied in race and therefore the use of race as an identity. It is not just that the categories in the North are inappropriate; they are also specious on their own terms. Thus Corlett argues:

I reject primitive race theories that categorize peoples into different "races" based solely on certain genetic traits possessed by members of each putative racial group....[E]thnicity...in no way supposes, however, any distinctions between ethnic groups on the basis of genetic or any other kind of innate ordering so that one group is classified as "superior" to another. If any such distinctions of quality do exist, it is because, on average, one group or another has outperformed others in certain ways, perhaps because it has had greater social advantages or opportunities than other groups, or it exists in an environment more congenial to its own flourishing than other groups in the same or different environments. (Corlett 2003, 7)

For just these sorts of reasons many African Americans have been opting out of racial categories as well, since Jesse Jackson started pushing for the use of the term "African-American" in the late 1980's. This was a self-conscious strategy to encourage analogies between African American identity and other hyphenated ethnic groups, to, in a sense, normalize African American identity by no longer having it set apart from everyone else. The strategy of using ethnic terms rather than racial ones is based on the hope that this will have the effect of reducing racism or prejudice generally, because, as Corlett explains, a representation by ethnic terms rather than racial confers agency on a people, it invokes historical experience, cultural and linguistic practices, all of which are associations with human subjectivity, not objectivity.

In contrast, race is often said to be something one has no control over, that is not shaped by collective practice. This surely perpetuates the association between denigrated racial categories and victimhood, animal driven natures, inherent inferiority or superiority and so on. For whites, racial essentialism confers superiority whether they've done anything to deserve it or not; superior intelligence is just in their genes. These beliefs may be more unconscious than conscious, but given the historically sedimented and persistent layers of the ideology of race as the essential determinant, no matter what one intends by use of a word, its historical meanings will be brought into play when it is in use. Thus Corlett is far from alone in his view that any use of racial terms will be inevitably embedded with biological essentialism and historically persistent hierarchies of moral and cognitive competence (besides Klor de Alva, op. cit., see e.g. Appiah 1992, Zack 1993). The goal here of course is not only to change whites's assumptions about racialized groups but also to help alter the self-image of people in those groups themselves toward a more affirming identity, an identity in which one can take justifiable pride.

Some point to the relative success of Jamaican immigrants in the U.S. as an example here. Grosfoguel and Georas write that "The Jamaican's community's strategy was to emphasize ethnic over racial identity. The fact that Jamaicans were not subsumed under the categorization 'African American' avoided offsetting the positive impact of their skilled background. Thus Jamaicans were successfully incorporated into the host labor market in well-paid public and private service jobs...[and] are currently portrayed by the white establishment in New York as a model minority..." (Grosfoguel and Georas, p. 197). One should note here, however, the contrast between this kind of exceptionalism strategy (to emphasize one's positive differences from the devalued group) and the strategy of resisting racialization as a way to join with others who are victimized by racism. Also, Grosfoguel and Georas' claims are questionable if they are taken to be representations of self-conscious choices made by the majority of Jamaicans, many of whom have been strong supporters, participants and even leaders of the African-American civil and political rights struggle. But their claim is helpful in its representation of a common view about the superiority of an ethnic or cultural as opposed to racial form of self-identification.

To summarize the arguments in favor of the ethnicity paradigm, we can divide them into the political arguments and the metaphysical arguments. The political arguments are that (a) the use of ethnicity will reduce racism because it refers to self-created features rather than merely physiological ones, and that (b) this will also resist the imposition of U.S. forms of identifying people, thus disabusing North Americans from their tendency to naturalize and universalize the predominant categories used here in the U.S. The metaphysical arguments are that (c) ethnicity more accurately identifies what really holds groups together and how they self-identify, and (d) ethnicity is simply closer to the truth of Latino identity, given its racial heterogeneity. All of these arguments are, in my view, good ones. But unfortunately, there are other considerations that, once they are put on the table, will complicate the picture.

VI. Racial realities

Let us look, for example, at the case of Cuban-Americans. By all measures, they have fared very well in this country in terms of both economic success and political power. They have largely run both politics and the press in Miami for some time, and Presidential candidates neglect the Cuban community at their peril. Of course, one cannot argue as some do in the case of Jamaicans that the Cuban's strong ethnic identification is the main reason for their success: most important is their ability to play an ideological (and at times military) role for the U.S. in the Cold War. The enormous government assistance provided to the Cubans who fled the Cuban revolution is simply unprecedented in U.S. immigration history: they received language training, both educational and business loans, job placement assistance, housing allocations, and their professional degrees from Cuban institutions were legally recognized to an extent other Third World immigrants still envy. In 1965 when President Johnson began his Great Society programs, the amount of their assistance from the government was actually increased (Grosfoguel and Georas, p. 198).

But one may legitimately wonder whether the Cubans' status as refugees of Communism was all that was at work here, or even the overriding factor. The Cubans who came in the 1960's were overwhelmingly white or light skinned. They were generally from the top strata of Cuban society. It is an interesting question whether Haitians would ever have been treated the same way. The Cubans who left Cuba post-1980, known as the Marielitos, were from a lower strata of Cuban society and a large number were Afro-Cubans and mulattos (Grosfoguel and Georas, p. 199). These Cubans found a decidedly colder welcoming. They were left penned in refugee camps for months on end, and those who were not sent back to Cuba were released into U.S. society with little or no assistance, joining the labor ranks at the level of Puerto Ricans and Dominicans. There are no doubt many factors at work in these disparate experiences of Cuban immigration, having to do for example with the geo-political climate. But surely one of these important factors is race, or racialized identity. Perceived racial identity often *does* trump ethnic or cultural identity.

Clearly, racialization operates differently for diverse Latino identities. As the Cuban example illustrates, class as well as physical appearance will mediate ethnic and cultural labels to determine meanings. Some groups—notably Puerto Ricans and Mexicans---have “enjoyed” a long history with the U.S. in which their identities have been interpellated through dominant U.S. schemas. In terms of the pan-Latino identity, this means that when Mexicans or Puerto Ricans are called Latino, the latter term will connote racial meanings; whereas Argentinians who are called Latino in the North may escape these connotations. Identity terms, as Omi and Winant argue, gain their meaning from their context. Just as Gracia said “Latino” means tacos in California and *arroz con gandules* in New York, it may well mean race in California, Texas, New York, and Florida and perhaps ethnicity only in a few specific locations and in regard only to certain subsets of the group.

The even broader problem for the attempt to escape racialization is that ethnicity itself signifies race even without further mediations. Look again at the passage about Jamaicans quoted earlier from Grosfoguel and Georas: “The Jamaican’s community’s strategy was to emphasize *ethnic* over *racial* identity. The fact that *Jamaicans* were not subsumed under the categorization ‘*African American*’ avoided offsetting the positive impact of their skilled background.” (Emphases added) Grosfoguel and Georas contrast the *ethnic* Jamaican identity with what they revealingly take to be a *racial* African American identity, even though the term “African American” was Jackson’s attempt to replace race with ethnicity. This again suggests that the racialization of black Americans will overpower any ethnic or cultural marker, interpreting the latter to *mean* race. It may also be the case that the term “African” is overly inclusive, since under its umbrella huge cultural and linguistic differences would be subsumed, and thus it is incapable of signifying an intelligible ethnic identity. But that may be assuming more knowledge about Africa among white Americans or even among Latinos than one reasonably should. More likely is the fact that “African American” is still understood primarily as a racial designation, in a way that terms like German-American or Irish-American are never understood. Thus, it is questionable whether the strategy of using an ethnic term for a currently racialized group will have the effect of reducing racism if it continues to simply signify race.

And after all, the first meaning given for the word “ethnic” in [Webster’s Unabridged Dictionary](#) is “heathen, pagan.” The history of the concept of ethnicity has close ties to the concept of race, emerging in the same period of global history, European colonialism. For many people in the U.S., “ethnic” connotes not only non-white but also the typical negative associations of nonwhite racial identity. Meanings given for the word

"heathen" in the same dictionary include "rude, illiterate, barbarous, and irreligious." In this list, it is striking that "irreligious" comes last.

Like "African American," the fact is that in the United States the category Latino generally operates as a racialized category. Grosfoguel and Georas themselves argue that "no matter how 'blonde or blue-eyed' a person may be, and no matter how successfully he can 'pass' as white, the moment a person self-identifies as Puerto Rican, he enters the labyrinth of racial Otherness." (Grosfoguel and Georas, p. 195.) Nina Glick Schiller makes a similar case in regard not only to ethnicity but to cultural identity as well, and not just in the U.S.. She explains that case studies from Canada to Brazil reveal that "people may speak culture but continue to think race. Whether in the form of cultural pluralism or of the current idiom of multiculturalism, the concept of culture is used in ways that naturalize and essentialize difference." (Schiller 1995, iii) In the special issue on "(Multi)Culturalism and the Baggage of 'Race'" of *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power*, from which Schiller's comments are taken, the editor Virginia R. Dominguez calls into question whether the employment of culture is an effective means to fight racism. Study after study shows that culturalism operates very similarly as racism to differentiate groups on the basis of essential characteristics that can be hierarchically organized. Phyllis Pease Chock's study of the Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups shows that even this putatively progressive compilation "reified ethnic groups with simplified cultures and uniform histories" (Chock 1995, 316) Thus, the differences between race, ethnicity, and culture pointed to by such anti-race theorists as Corlett begin to recede once we look at how the terms are actually used.

Thus, moving from race to ethnicity is not necessarily moving away from race.

An optimist might want to interject here that the persistence of racial connotations evoked by ethnic categories is not insurmountable. After all, the Irish *did* transform in wide popular consciousness from a race to an ethnicity, and Jews are making the same transition. Is it truly the case that only light skinned people can enjoy this transformation, and that darker skinned people will *never* be able to? In order to answer this question, we need to ask another one: What *are* the obstacles to deracializing people of color in general?⁵ Is it really the mere fact of skin tone?

I would make two suggestions. First, race, unlike ethnicity, has historically worked through visible markers on the body which trump dress, speech, and cultural practices. Certainly for anti-black racists, the differences in ethnicity and nationality between Africans, Caribbeans, and African-Americans are not morally significant. Race demarcates groups visually, which is why racist institutions have been so upset about non-visible members of "races" and why they have taken such trouble in these cases to enforce racial identifications. What I am suggesting is that, in popular consciousness and in the implicit perceptual practices we use in everyday life to discern how to relate to each other, ethnicity does not "replace" race. When ethnic identities are used instead of racial ones, the perceptual practices of visual demarcation by which we slot people into racial categories continue to operate because ethnic categories offer no substituting perceptual practice. In other words, the fact that race and ethnicity do not map onto the same kinds of identifying practices will make race harder to dislodge. This was not the case for the Irish or for many if not most Jewish people, who could blend into the European American melting pot without noticeable distinctiveness (thus, those who are themselves Irish or Jewish are the best at "spotting" persons within their group). For them, ethnicity could replace race, because their racial identity as Irish and Jewish did not operate exclusively or primarily through visible markers on the body so much as through contextual factors like neighborhood and accent. So their identity could shift to "white" race and Jewish or Irish ethnicity without troubling the dominant perceptual practices of racial identification. However, for those who are visibly identified as non-white by these same dominant practices, or who, in other words, are "raced," the shift to a primary ethnic identity would require no longer engaging in these racial perceptual practices. It is unlikely that the use of new terms alone will have that effect. At best, for people of color, ethnic identities will operate *alongside* racial ones in everyday interactions, without in any way dislodging the racial identities. At worst, ethnic identities, like perhaps "African American," will operate simply *as* a racial identity.

Although this is a fact about the visible features of the body, it is not an immutable fact: the meanings of the visible are of course subject to change. However, the phenomenology of perception is such that change will be neither quick nor easily susceptible to conscious manipulation, and that substituting the terms we use

for identities will be nowhere near sufficient to make this change. The transformation of perceptual habits will require a more active and a more practical intervention.

The second obstacle to the deracialization of (at least most) people of color has nothing to do with perception or bodily features. This obstacle refers back to a claim I made at the beginning, that assertions of group solidarity among African American, Native American, and Latinos in the U.S. provoke resistance among many whites because they invoke the history of colonialism, annexation of lands, slavery, and genocide. Thus, our acceptance as full players within U.S. society comes at much greater cost than the acceptance of previously vilified groups like the Irish and Jews, groups that suffered just as much discrimination and violence, without a doubt, but groups whose genealogy is not a thorn in the side of "Pilgrim's Progress," "Manifest Destiny," "Leader of the Free World," and other such mythic narratives that legitimate U.S. world dominance and provide white Americans with a strong sense of pride. The Irish and Jews were (the Irish arguably still are) colonized peoples in Europe, and *there* they are reminders of colonization and genocide. But they do not play this role in the legitimization narratives of the U.S. state. Thus, the line between European ethnicities and people of color is not merely or perhaps even primarily about skin tone but about history and power and the narratives by which currently existing power arrangements are justified.

So what are we to do? If the move from race to ethnicity is not as easy as some have thought, how can we be more realistic without becoming fatalistic about racialization? How can we avoid both defeatism and naivety? Are we to accept, then, that Latino identity is a racial identity, despite all the facts I have reviewed about our heterogeneity and different methods of self-identification, and all the pernicious effects of racialized identity?

VII. Ethnorace

Although racial ideology and practices of racialization seem always to carry within them some commitment to biological essentialism, perhaps the *meaning* of race is open to transformation. If race is going to be with us for some time to come as a mode of identification based on visible markers on the body, it might still be the case that race itself can alter in meaning, even before we can eradicate the perceptual practices of racialization. Such an alteration is exactly what much of the new work in black studies, for example, by Paul Gilroy, Robert Gooding-Williams, bell hooks, Lewis Gordon, and Patricia Williams is aiming for. In these works there is an intentional use of the term "black" rather than African American, which seems to be a way of addressing with honesty and directness the social reality we live in, and also as a way to suggest a "linked fate" between all black people in the diaspora across nationalities and other cultural differences. But in their works, blackness has been decidedly de-essentialized and given a meaning that consists of historical experience, collective memory, chosen social practices and forms of cultural expression. For Gilroy, there is a "blackness" that transcends and survives the differences of the U.K., Caribbean, and U.S. nationalities, a blackness that can be seen in cultural form and narrative focus. Blackness is formed out of social location, shared history, and a shared perception about the world. For Gooding-Williams, black identity requires a certain self-consciousness about creating the meaning of blackness. It requires, in other words, not only that one is treated as a black person, or that one is "objectively" black, but that one is "subjectively" black as well in the sense of actively interpreting the implications of this imposed category for one's sense of self and community life. Thus black identity requires agency, rather than imposing only obstacles to the development of agency.

Whether such an approach can be used for Latinos, I am not sure. There is probably even greater diversity among Latinos in relation to history, social location, and forms of cultural expression than among black people across the diaspora (because, for example, an experience such as slavery is not shared by Latinos). And the question of where black Latinos "fit" is still unresolved, even when we make racial identity a matter of self-creation. This is a serious weakness in Gilroy's broad conceptualization of a "black Atlantic": Brazil, as large a country as it is, is nowhere to be found on his conceptual map. Theories of "black identity" must address this critical Anglo/Latino divide, and theorists in the U.S. must recognize the way in which U.S. hemispheric imperialism, as well as cultural and linguistic differences, create real resistance against an assimilation to the predominantly Anglo-constructed cultural articulation of black identity.⁶

But I believe that we can take an important lesson from this body of work because it suggests that, even while we must remember the persistent power of racialization, and the inability of ethnicity easily to take its

place, the meanings of race are subject to some movement. Only a semantic essentialist could argue that race can only mean biological essentialism; in reality, this is not the way meaning works. Let me be clear about my position here: I don't believe, a la *some* postmodernists, that signifiers are slippery items whose meanings and associations can be easily transformed. Just because we have seen the successful transformation of some such derogatory terms (e.g. "black," "Chicano") does not establish that *any* term can be. It is true that meaning works through iterability: that is, the invocation of prior meanings, but when those prior meanings are centuries old and globally influential, they will be difficult to dislodge. On the other hand, words do not simply pick out things that exist prior to their being picked out, and thus reference is mutable.

So the first point I am making is this. Despite our hopes that the influx of Latinos on the North American continent, in all of our beautiful diversity, would transform and annihilate the binaries and purist racial ideologies prevalent in the United States, this is not likely, at least not likely very soon. The racializing practices long dominant in the U.S. will not simply implode because of the pressure of Latino self-representation as non-raced or as racially mixed. Latinos in the U.S. have without a doubt been racialized. And I would argue that the history and even contemporary socio-economic situation of Latinos in the U.S. simply cannot be understood using ethnicity categories alone; we have been shut out of the melting pot because we have been seen as racial and not merely cultural "Others". However, although we may be stuck with racial categories for longer than some of us would wish, it may be easier to help "race" slowly evolve than trying to do away with it as a first step.

One might still argue at this point that various Latinos have different relationships to racial categories. Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, and Dominicans have been racialized, but not all others. And lumping us all together can dilute the political efforts to redress discrimination, allowing white or light Latinos to reap benefits we do not even need. So what are we to do in the face of this diversity of historical experience and social location? Is race perhaps a way to understand some of Latino identities but not all? For a pan-Latino moniker, shouldn't we refer to ethnicity?

Given the persistent racialization of many Latinos, and the ways in which ethnic and cultural categories can carry race within them, the adoption of the ethnic paradigm will leave most Latinos behind. That is, some of us will no doubt be assimilated to the non-racial paradigm of ethnicity that has been operative for European Americans in this century, while other Latinos will continue to be racialized. This will exacerbate the hierarchies and divisions among Latinos, and weaken the political power of the overall group. It will also mean that Latinos will be unable or at least unlikely to address the racial issue *from within* Latino identity: if "Latino" comes to mean merely ethnicity, race will come to be viewed as an issue that may affect many of us but is properly outside of our identity as Latinos. Light Latinos will do what too many white *estadounidenses* have done: believe that race has nothing to do with them.

This is surely both a political and a metaphysical mistake. Raced identities are mediated by cultural context: the racialization of various Latinos differs according to our specific national or cultural identity. Blackness signifies very differently in the Caribbean than in other parts of South America, in terms especially of its marginalization vis-a-vis the cultural "norm," e.g. Puerto Rican versus Colombian. Thus, race cannot be understood except in its cultural, or ethnic, context. Racial essentialists would hope that this was not true, but racial essentialism is simply false: race is a system of meanings that varies by context, not an inherent quality that is manifest everywhere the same. Moreover, all Latinos are in almost all cases racially different than Anglos, certainly in the common usage of race categories in the US. That is, even for Spaniards as Jorge Gracia is arguing, we are not "purely European," claims of white hispanicity notwithstanding. By pursuing the ethnic paradigm, Latinos may appear to be lacking in solidarity with other racialized people of color, seeking to better our social status by differentiating ourselves from African and Asian Americans who remain persistently racialized. Shouldn't we rather unite with the efforts of those like Gilroy and Gooding-Williams who seek to give race itself a cultural meaning? Moreover, because Latino identity—in its "impurity" and variability--- challenges the shibboleths of U.S. race ideology, we have a better chance to affect that ideology by acknowledging our racialization than in trying to escape it.

Of course, it does not make sense to say simply that Latinos constitute a "race", either by the common sense meaning or even by more nuanced references to historical narrative and cultural production. I do believe that if the concept of *mestizo* enters into U.S. culture it can have some good effects against the

presumption of purity as having an intrinsic value. The problems caused by this presumption are both persistent and significant, as mixed race children are still asked to “choose” and integrity and autonomy are still thought to require homogeneity.² Still, the concept of mestizo when applied to Latinos in general, as if all Latinos or the essence of being Latino is to be mestizo or mixed Spanish and Indian, has the effect of subordinating all Latinos both north and south whose descendants are entirely African, Indian or Asian. Mestizos then become the cornerstone of the culture, with others pushed off to the side. This is clearly intolerable.

A concept that might be helpful here has been coined by David Theo Goldberg: ethnorace. Unlike the category race, ethnorace might have the advantage of bringing into play both the elements of human agency and subjectivity involved in ethnicity, that is, an identity that is the product of self-creation, at the same time that it acknowledges the uncontrolled racializing aspects associated with the visible body. And the term would remind us that there are at least two concepts, rather than one, that are vitally necessary to the understanding of Latino identity in the US: ethnicity and race. Using only ethnicity belies the reality of most Latinos’ everyday experiences, as well as obscures our own awareness about how ethnic identifications often do the work of race while seeming to be theoretically correct and politically advanced. Race dogs our steps; let us not run from it else we cause it to increase its determination.

Endnotes:

¹ Jorge Gracia, Pablo DeGreiff, Eduardo Mendieta, Paula Moya, Susan Sanchez-Casal and Angelo Corlett gave me substantive help with this arguments of this chapter for which I am extremely grateful.

² I myself refused to accept a five year full scholarship to graduate school at the University of Michigan, a scholarship I had not applied for but that the (white Anglo) Graduate Director in the philosophy department applied for on my behalf on his own and then urged me to accept. It’s not that refusing this makes me a moral hero, but it simply was a means to avoid being burdened by moral guilt. So I don’t believe that such refusals require superlative moral qualities.

³ Jorge Gracia, personal communication. December 1998.

⁴ “Disparities Grow in SAT Scores of Ethnic and Racial Groups” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, Sept. 11, 1998, p. A42. Emphasis added.

⁵ I am very aware of the paradoxical way this question is raised (since in a project of deracialization one shouldn’t refer to people by their color), and of other paradoxes with the categories I’ve used at times in this paper at (e.g. the use of “black” when I have argued that it is oppressive). It is impossible to avoid all such paradoxes while maintaining clarity about which groups one is trying to pick out. All I can hope to have done is to problematize all such categories, and increase our self-reflectiveness about them.

⁶ And it is no less true for theories of Latino identity that the differences of racializing practices must receive serious attention. On another point, I realize that it is odd to launch an argument about an Anglo/Latino divide using the example of Brazil, but in this context, the division between Anglophone “developed” North America and non-Anglophone “developing” Latin America (thus including Brazil as well as others) is the key conflict.

⁷ E.g. it is sometimes assumed that the possibility of self-determination is hopelessly compromised if a group or person has genealogical or other such ties to an outside group, especially the outside group from whom one wants to be autonomous. It is this logic that sometimes polices any feminist or anti-heterosexual sentiments within nationalist movements on the grounds that feminism and gay liberation originates outside this culture. Of course feminism and gay liberation do not originate simply in, for example, the West, but the point is that this shouldn’t matter in any case. Solidarity across gender or sexual lines does not threaten a movement for self-determination unless one presumes the necessity of political purity and community homogeneity.

LATINOS BEYOND THE BINARY

In the cultural imaginary of *el norte*, the growing Latino population in the United States—now at 15% nationwide but 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, religious, family-oriented population that might well become majority Republican and help to shore up various conservative cultural tendencies from the movement to prohibit 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 neo-liberal state, or what might be called the new feudalism.³ In trying to assess the political and normative effects of the increasing visibility of Latinos in the U.S. social-cultural 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 cultural representations as well as 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, motivating leading politicians to call for amnesty, driver's licenses, guest-passes, and differential wage-scales to facilitate employment. On the other hand, we are said to threaten the economy by flooding specific labor sectors and driving down wages and working 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.

Such contradictory approaches might be viewed as the result of warring factions among the policy makers. 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 which 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 U.S. 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 un-navigable. 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, an argument that *mestizaje* will loosen the hold of racist concepts of race must take into account *mestizaje's* utility for antiblack racism (e.g. because it is better to be mixed like Obama than to be non-mixed 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 U.S. The first concept is anti-Latino racism, as a specific form of racism distinct in some regards to 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 U.S.. And the third concept involves an expansion of identity categories--ethnic and racial and ethno-racial—that I argue will help us to 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.

I. Anti-Latino racism

For my purposes racism can be defined as a negative value or set of values projected as an essential or non-contingent attribute onto a group whose members are defined through genealogical connection—i.e. 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 light 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 pre-modern, primitive, less civilized or restrained, less individualistic, less rational, and so on. Again, it makes sense to call all of these forms of racism because they operate to project negative values as an essential or non-contingent 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 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 U.S. 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 that imaginary identity is centrally European based. A cultural amalgamation of European and Latin elements that might occur naturally as Latino numbers in the U.S. rise strikes many people with horror.⁸

Nativism's racialized attributions encourages people to turn a blind eye to the injustices that happen to "non-Native" 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 non-native groups outside the pale of peer group conventions of tolerance, respect and civil rights. On this view, 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 cuisines 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 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 "non-native" 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 has 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 over-simplification 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 foreshortened 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 21st 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.

II. 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 that are viewed as interchangeably racial or ethnic, or that have moved historically from one designation to another, and then sometimes back again, or 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 20th 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 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 non-contingent 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, Gilroy, Fraser, 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 1960's 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 once ethnicity is viewed as formed on the basis of artificial origin stories whose motivations are consciously forgotten and thus naturalized, and whose political pay-off 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 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." 16th century definitions of the word "ethnic" in English define the term as "pertaining to nations not Christian or Jewish," thus adding religious identity into 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 19th 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 that ethnicity was associated with a minority group, never a majority. In the 20th 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 "unamerican." 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. And 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 confluences 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, 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 ethnicity 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 new-found 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 two fold. 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 then can become difficult to explain the reason why Latinos are not 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, becoming 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.

III. 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 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-brush 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 U.S.).

Amalgamation proposals, along with transcendence models, are often motivated by the understandable desire to enhance the possibility of collaboration and unity. But analyzing and accounting for the specificities of our complex differences in no way entails 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*, criss-cross 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 work sites 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 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 which 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 are real, but to understand with precision and accuracy what the differences are so that productive collaborations can be developed and trust across groups 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 or false commonality, but accurate renditions of differences of experience. In some cases this does mean that some groups will have to acknowledge their privileges, i.e. 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.

CONCLUSION

Binaries are often produced by overgeneralizations. The three concepts I have put forward here—anti-Latino racism, ethnorace, 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 non-differentiation between documented and undocumented workers for the purposes of organizing, and 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 INS. 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 threat and some as 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 simple-minded 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); 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), p. 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* Volume 7, Issue 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?* op.cit., esp. chapters 4 and 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* Vol XXII: 4, 1999, 409-434.

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

¹¹ Max Weber, "Ethnic Groups," in *Theories of Ethnicity: A Reader* edited by Werner Sollors (New York: New York University Press, 1996), p. 55-57.

¹² Weber, *op. cit.*, p. 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, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2003), p. 130-131.

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, *op. cit.*, p. 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), chapter 10.

¹⁹ See e.g. Jorge Gracia, *Surviving Race, Ethnicity, and Nationality: A Challenge for the 21st Century* (Lanham, Maryland: 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* Werner Sollors, editor, (New York: New York University Press, 1996), p. 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).

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, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979).

²⁵ "Comparative Race, Comparative Racisms" in *Black Ethnicity/ Latino Race?* edited by Jorge Gracia (Ithaca, N.Y.: 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*, vol. 96 (May), pp. 242-245.

²⁷ Go to www.seiu.org