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# Black in the Non-Black Imagination: How Anti-Black Ideology Shapes Non-Black Racial Discourse

Natasha Howard

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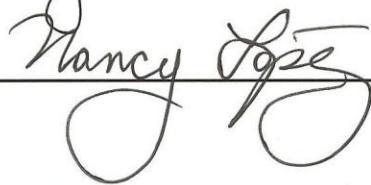
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**BLACK IN THE NON-BLACK IMAGINATION: HOW ANTI-BLACK  
IDEOLOGY SHAPES NON-BLACK RACIAL DISCOURSE**

**BY**

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B.A., Latin American Studies, DePaul University, 1991  
M.A., Latin American Studies, The University of New Mexico, 1995

DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy  
Educational Thought and Sociocultural Studies**

The University of New Mexico  
Albuquerque, New Mexico

**May, 2011**

## **Dedication**

In memory of my beloved Grandmother and Aunt Gloria

Thank you for overseeing my journey

## **Acknowledgements**

First, I would like to thank my Mother for her willingness to sacrifice so much of herself and her own dreams that I might be able to be where I am today. Your love is unconditional and has sustained me throughout my life. I am so grateful and blessed to have you.

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**ABSTRACT**

This study examines the (re)production of anti-Black ideology in critical discourses on race. Though contemporary critical discourses on race have been concerned with theorizing about the deployment of colorblind racial ideology, this study takes the position that anti-Black ideology is uniquely situated within the United States. Post-Civil Rights critical dialogues on race call for a move beyond the Black/white binary and the need to transcend dualistic racial paradigms. Though a typical critique of colorblind ideology implicates a social structure that oppresses all people of color uniformly, this study argues that the reality of material and social consequences vary depending on the group. The study makes an ideological critique of critical race discourses that purport to move beyond Black/white racial theorizing. It argues that not only is racial binary thinking implicated, but that there is a perpetuation of anti-Black ideology that works to create a non-Black/Black paradigm. This study proposes three frames that construct Blacks as nativists, essentialists and pathogens in the post-Civil Rights era. The

methodological approach of this study employs racial realism. Racial realism legitimates studies that explore the patterns of racial dynamics. As an ideological critique, this study unpacks and interprets the presence of dominant ideologies that endeavor to maintain a hierarchical racial order.



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## Chapter 1: Introduction

### Background

In 1903 W.E.B. DuBois famously wrote that the problem of the twentieth century would be the colorline—the unequal state of segregation between the darker and lighter races of the world, including Asia, Africa and the Americas. At that time it was difficult to imagine that 21<sup>st</sup> century United States would see the election of an African American president. Many regarded the moment of Barack Obama’s inauguration as a watershed moment, evoking the ideology and spirit of the 1960’s Civil Rights Movement and Martin Luther King Jr’s, “I Have a Dream” speech, which called for justice and a world in which the color of one’s skin did not determine her/his future.

For many, Barack Obama’s election was the symbol of racial transformation and our first real example of the new post-racial era hope for the achievement of a more utopian democracy. In many ways, Barack Obama became the poster-child for postmodern thinking on race. His multiracial identity fit well with the ambiguous nature of postmodern consciousness and the idea that we should move beyond binary racial paradigms from our past. And because he often drew upon his upbringing on strong American values as his foundation, there began a renewed interest in the politics of culture, overshadowing the issue of race. From a more liberal perspective, the 2008 election was evidence of the American dream ideology, which purports that anyone could be successful with opportunity and dogged determination to succeed.

Like others, I was emotionally invested in the 2008 election. And while it was a celebratory moment for many reasons, I also was keenly aware of the racial politics that were unfolding daily during the campaign and post-election. Rather than understanding

this as our first steps towards living the goals of the Civil Rights Movement, I sensed that there was more of the same kind of racist intention concealed within presumably encouraging messages about the insignificance of racism for the disadvantage of Black Americans. In fact, I was discomforted by the prominence of anti-Black sentiment on display. One of the more prominent messages was that finally Blacks would have to get over it. If a large majority of the white voting public could cast their votes for Obama, this meant racism was not the problem. And as sociologist Eduardo Bonilla Silva notes, this somehow meant that whites might feel absolved from feelings of discomfort about white supremacy and privilege. However, voting for an African American did not mean a change to the hierarchy. In fact, I would argue that prior to the election and since becoming president, Obama has had to prove time and again that the racial arrangement will not be challenged.

Though Obama is not a U.S. immigrant, it was interesting the way a traditional immigrant analogy was attached to his success. All the popular tropes about working hard, belief in the American dream and pulling oneself up by the bootstraps were implored. The fact that he had lived a portion of his life outside of the United States added to the characterization. Related to this was the fact that though he was multiracial he had been raised by a white mother and separated from his African roots. This point was often highlighted by the media during the campaign and by Obama himself. The politics of this dynamic suggested that, culturally, Obama's African Americanness was a bit ambiguous.

On a practice level, the consequences of the post-modern/racial era infiltrate our schools in troubling ways. While teaching in Baltimore, I found many students were

attracted to the kind of messages around race that post-racial and postmodern ideology reflected. They too believed that racism was not as significant as it had been several generations ago. They thought that if Blacks were not making it, it was because they did not value education, schools, their communities or other people. They would often revert to post-racial concepts that appeared to not notice race or find it important for anyone but would make overtly racial comments that highlighted just how much they did see race, and in particular, Black people. Blacks were either over-privileged, receiving social benefits they had not worked for, or they were underprivileged but, once again, due to their lack of work and effort. Students often were not able to understand why Blacks had not followed the same path as other immigrants who also began on the bottom and worked their way up. The Blacks that were acceptable to them were those that modeled the kinds of post-racial politics represented in the Obama campaign. Since practically all of my students were k-12 teachers, most working in urban school settings, their approaches to teaching reflected this kind of problematic racist thinking about Black people.

### **Statement of the Problem**

I argue that the deployment of anti-black ideology is central to an understanding of whiteness and a white supremacist social order. Whiteness has been conceptualized in contrast with and in opposition to blackness. Other people of color are also defined with this dichotomy. Although a common trend today in critical academic research is to move “beyond” the white/Black binary, I find it relevant to revisit this as a useful framework for analyzing the historical and current nature of race relations in the United States.

There is no doubt that anti-Blackness is implicated in other racial ideologies such as Jim Crow or post-Civil Rights colorblind racism; however the purpose of this study is to explore the unique aspects of anti-Black racial ideology and its entrenchment in the social and political context of American society.

I argue that there is a need to study anti-Black racial ideology as a unique phenomenon within the U.S. racial structure. For example, the typical critique of colorblind ideology implicates a social structure that oppresses all people of color uniformly. But, the reality is that material and social consequences vary depending on the group. The extent to which honorary white status is bestowed upon other people of color greatly depends upon how a group is perceived in relationship to Blacks/blackness. Whiteness also constructs a hierarchical racial ordering between people of color. The presence of anti-Black ideology significantly undermines the potential for more cooperative relations between Blacks and other people of color. The tension between non-whites is useful for white America. It is not surprising that there is an enticement for non-Black people of color to distance themselves and their racial experiences away from Black America. In fact, the *Los Angeles Times* (July 31, 2002) reported that most new immigrants chose to identify as white because they equate whiteness with what it means to be American. This report is supported by other empirical studies (McClain et al, 2006; Mindiola and Rodriguez, 2002; Nguyen, 2004) on non-Black immigrant motivations for distancing from Blackness. This evidence also conveys to us the idea that most immigrants recognize what is *not* American—those identified as Black.

Although this entry is tenuous and conditional at best, it does create a more complex multi-tiered racial “ordering” that grants groups privileges relative to one

another based on how they are ultimately racialized *and* the degree to which they are complicitous with the racial order. It is also relevant to note that anti-Black racism is not unique to the United States but prevalent throughout the world. In most other parts of the world the racial hierarchy reflects what we see in the United States (Allen, 2001). Darker people are by in large situated at the bottom of the social structure. While white or lighter skinned people occupy the top of the social structure and receive greater social, material and psychological advantages.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to present a critique of anti-Black ideology in race discourses that claim to challenge racism and the notion of race altogether. It is important to consider how these discourses, though critical of racism and colorblind ideology in particular, may also theorize from an anti-Black ideological framework. I am concerned by the presence of anti-Blackness within allegedly race critical scholarship. More specifically, I consider how critical ethnicity theory, class-based or Marxist-approaches to race, and variations of critical race studies (including LatCrit, AsianCrit, etc.) may be complicitous with anti-blackness. It is not unusual to hear in some academic circles the suggestion that Blacks have held a prominent position in race studies for too long. The implication is that Blacks have too much power—even from an oppressed position. In this study I explore how this tension creates divisions between “BlackCrit,” LatCrit and AsianCrit scholars.

A final aspect of this study is to develop a critical understanding of how anti-black ideology is produced within the field of education. Though a significant amount of scholarship is dedicated to the study of race and education, I propose to consider more

explicitly how anti-Black ideology influences educational theory concerned with explaining the poor academic achievement of Black youths. Anti-Blackness, too, influences the context in which educators create remedies for Black underachievement in school. This is important when we think about the focus of legislation like NCLB which in large part relates school failure to family deficiency. Of course, anti-Black ideology has consequences for how educators think about the culture of Black families or how they develop programs to address the problem. Teacher education programs continue to be non-critical of cultural explanations for Black academic failure/underachievement. Or they attempt to remedy Black academic failure through culturally-based approaches such as adding a few more Afrocentric elements to the curriculum or teaching about diversity. An explicit focus on how schools (re)produce anti-Black ideology is absent. Without this we cannot hope to develop educators with awareness for intervening in anti-Black ideology in schools.

### **Significance**

The significance of this research is its contribution to critical race studies and critical education studies. Critical race studies have not adequately critiqued the presence of anti-black discourse present within tenets of its field. Critical race studies have fractioned into a number of subset fields, each with its own agenda for understanding how race works particular to a group's experience and history. And while this contention is certainly acceptable, as people of color do have unique racialized group experiences, they nevertheless exist relationally in the same racialized social system. The outcome of has been the development of "critical" discourses that reinvent the same kind of problematic discourse they purport to challenge because they fail to account for an



analysis of the racial totality, and their situation within it. This study contributes to the work concerned with unpacking the tension, particularly between people of color, and critiques the often hidden ideology that is complicitous with Black oppression and white domination.

Another significance of the study is in its contribution to critical education studies, including fields like critical multicultural education. My intention is to add to the ways in which they theorize about race and teach educators about racism. Though critical educators may be more aware of the ways in which white supremacy is implicated in our society and the educational system, they may not have given due attention to the specific nature of anti-blackness and how this is embedded within our multicultural ideologies.

My intention is to add to that body of work that builds on theoretical analysis of race as a hierarchical ordering of racialized groups. This is implicated in the work of Eduardo Bonilla Silva and Karen Glover (2005) and their theory on “Latin Americanization of Race in the United States”. My study will contribute to understanding the specific nature of contemporary post-Civil Rights anti-Black racial projects.

### **Research Questions**

1. What is “anti-Black ideology”? What are its main assumptions, tenets, and frames? What distinguishes it from other racial ideologies (e.g., colorblind ideology)? How is it performed discursively? How does it function hegemonically to reproduce the U.S. and global racial orders? What forms of praxis constitute resistance to anti-Black ideology?

2. What are the main ways in which key “critical” academic discourses on race (e.g. Anti-subordination theory, multiracialism, cultural ecological theory) communicate anti-Black ideology? What are the consequences of anti-Black ideology in these discourses? How can these discourses be articulated from a position that takes seriously the problem of anti-Black ideology?
3. What are the most significant ways in which anti-Black ideology shapes the field of education? What are the consequences? How does it work to reproduce the U.S. racialized social system? What are the possibilities for rethinking how schooling can be used to intervene in anti-Black racism?

### **Definition of Key Terms**

(1) Black and African-American: I use the term *Black* in reference to those who are racialized as such typically based upon phenotypical characteristics that denotes an individual as being of African heritage and/or ancestral origin. I do this with the understanding that all races are socially constructed. The ways in which we are racialized serve to maintain an unequal power relation that privileges whiteness and oppresses Blackness. African American denotes any person who is of African descent and is self-defined as having a U.S.-born identity.

(2) Racialized social system: I draw from Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (1997) who says this “refers to societies in which economic, political, social and ideological levels are partially structured by the placement of actors in racial categories or races.

(3) Racism: Is defined as the ideological work that supports the racialized social system (Bonilla-Silva, 1997).

(4) Race: Is a social construct that hierarchically arranges people into categories related to phenotype, geographic origins of a group and other socially ascribed characteristics (Bonilla-Silva, 1997; Omi and Winant, 1994).

### **Limitations**

No study is capable of addressing every social problem or studying even one social problem through every possible lens. This study is no exception. It is limited to an analysis of race. The frameworks I draw from are heavily grounded in racial realism and an Africana existentialist analysis and understanding of anti-Blackness. One critique of CRT is that it prioritizes race to the exclusion of analyzing how other social categories like class, gender or sexual identity intersect with racial oppression (Darder & Torres, 1999). Those who make this critique conclude that without this multidimensional lens we may fail those who are most oppressed. For example, a racial justice movement needs to be aware of how women of color face an oppression that is both racialized and gendered. Added to this is the fact that this study is limited in focus to understanding the nature of anti-black ideology in postmodern racial discourses. I am influenced by Africana existentialism which is concerned with the “critique of Black subjugation and dehumanization” (Bassey, 2007, p.916). I do realize that this study will be one-dimensional in that it will focus primarily on anti-Black racial discourses. This decision was determined by my commitment to the idea that there is a need to study the unique and purposeful positioning of Blacks in our racialized social order. The complicity of “critical” discourses in anti-black rhetoric must be interrogated if we are to challenge the permanence of racial hierarchy.

For these reasons I have decided to centralize anti-Black discourse as the unit of analysis for this study. I do this with full knowledge that this has limitations in that I will not capture how other issues such as sexual identity, gender, class or the multiplicity of racialized experiences of diverse groups of people of color confront. I do this with the intent that this study will add to a deeper understanding of how anti-blackness is operationalized in contemporary “critical” racial discourses.

### **Methodology**

This study takes a critical hermeneutical approach. According to Gallagher (1992) critical or depth hermeneutics is concerned with engaging ideology critique. He notes that, “critique calls for a special and suspicious interpretation of those ideologies and institutions which support and maintain ruling power structures” (Gallagher, 1992, p. 240). He cites four guiding principles related to critical hermeneutics: 1) reproduction, 2) hegemony, 3) critical reflection and 4) application.

Drawing from Habermas, Gallagher states that the purpose of critical interpretation is not simply to attempt to reproduce original meaning but rather to interrogate ideological positions presented in texts. A critical or depth hermeneutic methodological approach proposes that reproduction of texts without any critical reflection on ideological representation only serves to maintain unequal power relations. This stands in sharp contrast to traditional methodologies that follow strict non-critical, non-reflective approaches concerned with reproducing the supposedly pure words of the texts (or in the case of empirical research, the voice/s of the subject/s of study).

Related to the second principle, hegemony, a depth hermeneutical approach would take the perspective that ideology is embedded within linguistic symbols. Once

again, drawing from Habermas, Gallagher notes that problematic ideology distorts and serves the purpose of maintaining oppressive social relations. Critical hermeneutics is concerned with undistorting distorted communication, which takes place through engaging in ideological critique. In other words, depth hermeneutics questions the meaning behind linguistic symbols and to what extent does the meaning collude in the reproduction of oppression.

The third principle, critical reflection places the interpreter in relationship to that being interpreted. Gallagher states that “the purpose of critical reflection is to assist in the achievement of emancipation the objectivity of interpretation is seen either as a tool to be used in the pursuit of emancipation or as a result of emancipation, but not as an end in itself (p.244).

The fourth principle of critical hermeneutics is application or the idea that there exists ideal undistorted communication, which we strive to achieve. A critical hermeneutic approach is guided by the pursuit of freedom and transformation. In reflecting on Habermas’ and the principle of application, Gallagher (1992) writes,

For Habermas, application, which is the result of critical interpretation in the sense that it always comes along with the practice of depth hermeneutics, involves an escape from prejudice, a radical modification of the anterior relation with the tradition process. The “deep” meaning discovered by the critically suspicious interpretation is not only enlightening but also emancipation for the interpreter. (p. 246)

My methodological framework, depth hermeneutics, is grounded by Derrick Bell’s theory of racial realism (1992). This theory makes us aware of the real dynamic

and effects of a racialized social system for Blacks. Although race may be a social construct, the social outcomes produce concrete forms of inequality. Bell also concludes that racism has such a dynamic in our society that it is unlikely that Blacks will achieve full equality since American society is premised upon a system of white supremacist domination. This ideology penetrates American consciousness to the point that no institution, individual or group has not been touched or affected by it. Racism will always re-invent itself in such a way as to maintain the hierarchy and the subordinate status of Blacks. Thus, with each racial gain achieved by Blacks, there are subsequent setbacks. We can see the evidence of this in the aftermath of the Civil Rights Movement. Of course, the movement led to significant gains for Blacks. However, anti-discriminatory laws have not successfully leveled the playing field. Furthermore, in recent decades we have witnessed some backlash against any goals or principles that might presumably lead to any potential advantage for Blacks. We see how the language of the Civil Rights Movement and subsequent laws are currently being used to deter from the goal of racial equality and now a racial hierarchy. Racial realism tells us that we must acknowledge the historical endurance of anti-Black racism and understand that it has often been disguised. This is particularly true in our contemporary age of colorblind race politics. Therefore, we must be mindful of how anti-Blackness manifests in the post-Civil Rights era.

A study influenced by racial realism would critique the idea of abstract neutrality or pure deductive reasoning, and instead acknowledge that research is also interpreted through social knowledge. A study grounded in a racial realist approach would work toward exposing and confronting anti-Black ideology in fields of thought that collude in

the perpetuation of a racial hierarchy. For example, from a racial realist perspective even those discourses that are presented as “critical” or still yet “anti-racist” discourses may also be complicit in the preservation of anti-Black ideology. This means that even presumably critical discourses on race must be studied from the perspective that they take a particular social position, also understand Blacks from a particular social position and maneuver theoretically based upon that understanding.

Racial realism is premised upon ideological critique. My study is rooted in this method of inquiry. In *Ideology and Modern Culture*, Jon Thompson (1990) highlights the debate in defining the notion of ideology. Ideology has its origins in Marxist theory and the idea of false consciousness. Ideology is seen as negative in that it supports the status quo and delimits the development of counter-hegemonic consciousness among the working class. Ideology illusively hides unequal relations of power between dominant and subordinate groups. Other theoretical perspectives propose that ideology is neutral, moving away from the purely pejorative connotation. Ideologies can be regarded then as ‘systems of thought’, ‘systems of belief’, or ‘symbolic systems’ which pertain to social action or political stance” (Thompson, 1990, p.5). In this light, all political action and thought is ideological.

I concur with Thompson’s (1990) critical conception of ideology in which he finds that,

the analysis of ideology is primarily concerned with the ways in which forms intersect with relations of power. It is concerned with the ways in which meaning is mobilized in the social world and serves thereby to bolster up individuals and groups who occupy positions of power. To study ideology is to study the ways in

which meaning serves to establish and sustain relations of domination.

Ideological phenomena are meaningful symbolic phenomena in so far as they serve, in particular social historical circumstances, to establish and sustain relations of domination. (p.56)

Nicolas Burbules (1995) proposes five forms of ideology critique including (1) scientific, (2) immanent, (3) deconstructionist, (4) argument from effects, and (5) counter-ideology. Scientific critiques see ideologies as distorted and irrational. They examine ideologies for the ways in which they distort the truth. Immanent critiques reveal how ideologies often do not “measure up to their own standards” (p.57). The critic reveals the contradictions that belie a particular standpoint or position. Burbules states that the third form, the deconstructivist approach, takes the position that there are no universal truths or metanarratives. The fourth form of ideological critique, argument from effects, takes the stand that we must examine the outcome or consequences of ideological positions and then critique those that uphold domination or perpetuate unequal systems of power. The final form of critique is counter-ideology, which proposes that ideological critic challenge ideologies with other counter-hegemonic ideologies. Burbules (1995) notes that there are both possibilities in and limitations to each form of ideological critique he describes. He proposes that we approach the process from the perspective of critiquing ideology as a way of working on developing critical thought. Additionally, he proposes that the work of the ideological critic is to understand people on their own terms, in their journey towards changing perspectives as they are introduced to new ways of thinking about the world. And while, as an educator, I do tend to concur to some degree with the position, I strongly disagree with his presupposition



that we must not refute ideologies but rather attempt to induce people towards transformative thinking. For instance, I see my role as ideological critic as one that is guided by racial realism and the commitment to refute and challenge forms of anti-Blackness or what I see as ideologies that uphold the oppression and subjugation of Black people.

By intersecting racial realism with ideological critique I propose a study that will critique the presence of anti-Black ideology in post-Civil Rights racial discourses on multiracialism, culture, and those defined as moving beyond the Black/white paradigms (e.g., LatCrit and AsianCrit). I have selected these fields of thought because they represent contemporary discourses on race that purportedly reject binary racial thinking in an attempt to offer new theoretical insight into U.S. race relations. Each field of thought dedicates substantial scholarship to problematizing the presence of Blackness in U.S. racial thought. Though individual texts were selected and interpreted in relationship to anti-Black ideology, taken as a whole, these texts represent a larger pervasive anti-Black discourse that works to sustain the racial hierarchy. As an ideological critic I am concerned with challenging ideology that sustains unequal power relations. Anti-Black discourse sustains a racial hierarchy that places Blacks at the bottom. My responsibility as an ideological critic is to unpack that ideology colluding in the oppression of Blacks. As Thompson (1990) states, ideological critique proposes a contestation or challenge to systems of domination by unveiling precisely how they manifest, are defended and also become unquestionably part of social reality.

I first will begin with a review of literature comprising the following areas: racial hierarchy in the post-Civil Rights era; globalized anti-Blackness; ethnicity and the structure of racism; and the construction of the Black body.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

This literature review will bring together theories related to 1) History of immigration and race in the United States 2) Globalized anti-Blackness 3) ethnicity and race theories and 4) The construction of the Black body. The first area will address the history of the relationship between immigration and racial hierarchy in the United States. The second section puts anti-Blackness in global context. The third section addresses Blacks in ethnicity and race theories. The final section concludes by examining the Black body and its place in white supremacist racial thought.

### **Racial Projects in the Post-Civil Rights Era**

Omi and Winant (1994) argue that racial hierarchy should be understood through analyzing the history of *racial formations*. They define this as, “the sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhibited, transformed, and destroyed” (p.55). *Racial projects* represent the ideological campaigns that are organized in our society to at once redistribute privileges and justify the newly established order. I shall begin here because I think this theory is useful for analyzing how immigrant groups have been able to transform their initial racial/ethnic status within a generation or two after migrating to the United States.

We have only to look at the history of nation building in this country to understand the significance of race for immigration. This relationship can be best described as the process through which white power was established in the United States. Immigration laws and policies have been key in maintaining white hegemony. This was historically true and, as I shall later argue, continues to be true in more contemporary times.

Research emerging from the field of whiteness studies has noted the difficult incorporation into the nation of various European ethnic groups that from the onset were not inherently conceived of as white. Irish, Italian and Jewish immigrants acquired their white status after immigrating to this country. The Irish, for example, who are often referred to as the “Blacks of Europe,” were subjected to similar kinds of racial epithets and poor urban ghetto environments as Black Americans. Likewise, Italian immigrants were characterized as “colored.” In some cases, they were subjected to segregated schools or were required to attend schools with Black students rather than Anglo whites (DeSalvo, 2003). However, European ethnics were able to transform their low racial status within two or three generations. How and why did this transformation take place for these immigrants? What were the racial projects that took place to serve this purpose?

Roediger (1991) and Jacobson (1998) note that the rise of Irish and other non-Anglo immigrant populations came at the expense of Black Americans in this country. Achieving whiteness meant establishing a large social divide between Black and white. Irish immigrants who were initially constructed as “Black” were able to achieve white racial group membership as they became vehemently anti-Black. Toni Morrison (1994) asserts that the route to racial assimilation for immigrants in this country has always depended on the development of an anti-Black identity. She writes, “In race talk the move into mainstream America always means buying into the notion of American blacks as the real aliens. Whatever the ethnicity or nationality of the immigrant, his nemesis is understood to be African American” (p. 98). As I will later discuss, this has relevance for more recent, post-1965 immigrants, too.

For Irish and other similarly positioned European immigrants, this was strategic because although their difference from Anglos assigned them to a lower ethnic status, their newly gained racial group privilege prevented them from submerging into the lower racial caste, that is, blackness in America. For this reason, millions of European immigrants willingly gave up their ethnic difference for something much more valuable: racial privileges (Roediger, 1991; Morrison, 1994). While wealth was not afforded every European immigrant that made his/her new home in the U.S. in return for their complicity in the status quo, they were granted a racial status that elevated them higher than Black Americans. As Roediger describes, the “psychological wages of whiteness” were significant enough to overshadow class inequality. No matter how poor a white person was, at least they were not Black.

As working class whites organized labor unions for better pay and work conditions, they also fought to make sure none of those rights/privileges were granted to Black workers. Poor whites actively fought to keep jobs away from other poor Blacks. Working class social movements often did not cross racial lines. Poor whites simply were not willing to have their racial privilege challenged (Allen, 1997; Gerstle, 1993; Ignatiev, 1995; Lipsitz, 1998; Roediger, 1991).

Some scholars challenge the idea that European immigrants were ever conceived of as anything other than white. In writing about Italians and whiteness, Thomas Guglielmo (2003) says that while Italians may have been constructed as ethnically different from and inferior to Anglos, there was never any question as to their right to whiteness. It would be a myth to think they were ever considered “Black” in the same way as African Americans although present research may make this claim. Yes, Italians

were subjected to ethnic hostility, but it was never the kind of racial hostility and systematic violence that was experienced by African Americans.

This idea that other European populations have been able to shed their Black oppressive status is manipulated to imply that African Americans have been unable to assimilate through some problem(s) of their own. If other immigrants who were thought to be racially inferior could successfully transform themselves, breaking free of their low racial status, then Black Americans should be able to do the same. And, if they cannot, it is because they are not working hard enough to achieve a higher status in our society. I would agree with Guglielmo that we must reconsider if non-Anglo European immigrants were ever conceived of as anything other than white. We know that their immigration was courted while immigration from non-European countries was limited or outright restricted. There was an open agenda to whiten all of the Americas through European immigration (King, 2000).

The Hart-Cellar Act of 1965 began a new period of immigration history for the United States. The most significant aspect of this new immigration has been its elimination of racial preferences for visa allotment. The United States needed to change its image if it sought to gain political and economic power in newly independent Third World countries. The fact that this country openly discriminated against immigration from Third World countries would work against the U.S. interests in global domination (Bell, 1995; Plummer, 2003).

The threat from within the United States came from political movements challenging Jim Crow segregation and other related forms of racial oppression. A Black Nationalist movement, organized by more radical factions like the Nation of Islam and

Black Power Movement, posed a greater threat to white liberalism. These more racially conscious movements challenged the idea that liberal incremental rewards would ever really help Blacks since whites would not consider the central issue — a redistribution of wealth, resources and unearned *white* privilege. A compromise came in the way of liberal and more conservative white America aligning itself with the colorblind politics of the Civil Rights Movement. The new direction of race ideology would be one that did not see race at all. Race consciousness was thought inappropriate for social justice agendas as we were working towards a raceless society. The importance of this colorblind ideological shift lies in the way it hides racial privilege and therefore racial oppression (Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Pellar, 1995). Beginning in 1965, immigration policies were conceived of within this social and political context. It is not so much that immigration laws were reconstructed within a new moral enlightenment in the U.S., but that new policies would allow for the maintenance of the old structure without illuminating racial hierarchy.

Between 1965 and 1997, legal immigration from Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean rose dramatically. Most of today's immigrant population is "of color." It must be noted, however, that they may not be legally described as such. For instance, Spanish-speaking African-Caribbean immigrants are legally defined as white or Hispanic even though their phenotype may constitute them as Black in our society. The very idea that African-Caribbean immigrants might be able to transcend a Black racial status in this country may lend added credibility to Omi and Winant's contention that racial categories are non-static and up for re-negotiation. This general argument I shall return to in the

next section on Black immigrant experience, but I will address it here with regard to Asian and other non-Black Hispanic immigrants.

Are new immigrants of color assimilating into the racial order just as European-descent immigrants before them? Scholars are now attempting to elucidate how the experiences of new immigrants of color compare to those of the European immigrants of more than a century ago. Although there is more than a century of history between them, they are exploring whether race is any more significant for immigration now as it was then for social mobility of foreign born populations. Scholars diverge, however, in how new immigrants are impacting the present racial order.

One theory (Gans, 1999; Warren and Winddance-Twine, 1997) suggests that new immigrants from Asia and Latin America are changing previous concepts of who is white. They contend that Asian and Latina/o immigrants are ascending into the white racial group, thereby expanding whiteness and white power. Just as previous Irish, Italian and Jewish immigrants successfully asserted their right to white privilege, these new immigrants are challenging their status of color and staking a claim to white America.

Gans (1999) argues that the white racial group has always “opened up” to include previously non-white populations when it has been in the interest of whites to do so. Warren and Winddance-Twine (1997) also contend that Asians and Latinos are rapidly becoming white Americans. Our future racial concepts will define Asian and Latinos as ethnically different but not racially different from European-descent immigrants. As today’s immigrants lose their ethnic/cultural affiliations, they will be positioned to gain full whiteness. This acceptance into white America depends on their complicity in



protecting white's right to privilege. This issue of protecting white right to privilege is critical because it presupposes that this privilege must be protected from something or some other group.

This is where the binary is made explicitly clear. There seems to be permanence in the insurmountable divide between Black and white in America. Racial transformation has occurred, as immigrants are able to construct themselves and their identity *outside of* blackness. But achieving whiteness for immigrants has always included acquiring an indifference towards Black Americans (Brodkin, 1998; Ignatiev, 1995; Morrison, 1994; Warren and Winddance-Twine, 1997; Yancey, 2003). We cannot overlook how this binary has permeated our history and continues to hold significance for racial hierarchy today. It is a defining paradigm for race relations today just as it was over a hundred years ago for European-descent immigrant populations.

Other scholars challenge this idea that Asians and Latinos are achieving whiteness in this country. For instance, some argue that Asians, as a group, are constructed as "model minorities" (Lee, 1996; Takaki, 1989; Tuan, 1998). Others note how the way in which society lumps all Latinos/Hispanics into one ethnic category hides the racial diversity and racialized experiences of members of this group. For instance, a study on Dominican-Americans, who are predominantly racialized as Black in the United States, reported that this segment of the Latino population seems to be losing economic ground in the last decade. Reportedly, between 1990 and 1996 Dominicans experienced a 23 percent income decline. Although Dominicans are the fastest growing segment of the Latino population, only second in number to the Puerto Ricans in the Eastern United States, they suffer a disproportionate amount of economic disparity. They are

overwhelmingly confined to the manufacturing industry, which in recent years has experienced a considerable decline as more U.S. companies are moving their production sites overseas for an even cheaper, more exploitable labor force.

While I agree with the assessment regarding the vast diversity within both Asian and Latino groups, I find it pressing to look also at research on assimilation to assess to what degree are new immigrant populations making strides towards crossing racial barriers. There is enough research indicating that Asian and Latino immigrant populations are gaining social assimilation and acceptance into white America and distancing themselves from African-Americans. Residential patterns demonstrate that Asian and white or light-skinned Latinos have a higher percentage of integration into white neighborhoods. In a survey study (Zubrinisky-Charles, 2000) on residential preferences, white participants indicated they were open to living near Asian Americans and Hispanic Americans but preferred not to live among Black Americans. Black Americans were the group least likely to be chosen as neighbors by the other racial groups. Asian and Latina/o populations also show a much higher degree of interracial marriage with white Americans. These interracial unions were deemed more socially acceptable or desirable than Black/white couplings. Both Asians and Hispanics showed indifference towards interracial unions with Blacks (Yancey, 2003). Mindiola, Niemann, and Rodriguez (2002) further support this theory through their research on Mexican immigrant and Chicano communities in Texas. They found, however, that Chicanos had a higher degree of acceptability of Black Americans than Mexican immigrants in Houston that resulted in cross-racial unions and alliances.

Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2004) proposes that we begin to understand the construction of racial hierarchy and race relations within a caste-like system. The strength of this argument lies in the way it underscores the significance of pigmentocracy or colorism for granting power/privilege on a multi-tiered color-coded hierarchy. They conclude that an “honorary white” collective is rising which includes: white middle-class Latinos and Chinese, Japanese, Asian Indian and Arab Americans. The lowest social caste or “Black collective” includes: African Americans, African and West Indian origin immigrants, dark-skinned and poor Latinos, reservation-bound Native Americans, Filipinos, Vietnamese, Hmong, and Laotians (Bonilla-Silva and Glover, 2003, p.3). Much like we find in the Latin American context of racial hierarchy, the middle group becomes the buffer between the bottom and top of the social order. To the extent that this group is complicitous in the social arrangement, they receive some honorary white status including more power/privilege than those groups relegated to the bottom. Like European immigrants, they benefit from the “psychological wages of whiteness” as they are distanced from the Black collective. The lighter-skinned or mixed race caste (“mulatto” & “mestizo”) has historically served as the buffer group in Latin America and the Caribbean (Degler, 1971).

It is within this context of selective incorporation that the United States can make claims about the lack of racial inequity, since there are indicators of Asian and Latino acceptability in the dominant society. Assimilation has been attributed to the social mobility of Asian and Hispanic communities. This is strategically utilized against the “Black collective” and any claims they might make about the need to continue addressing racial injustice in this country is met with denial about the existence of racial problems

since other “minorities” are doing fairly well considering their status as “newcomers.”

What is missing from this analogy is the way in which social mobility and social acceptance have been and continues to be acquired for new immigrant populations. It is not much different than a century ago with other European immigrants. What we have on the horizon is a more dynamic color-caste social order combined with a colorblind, creating the potential to neutralize race-conscious movements.

### **Global Anti-Black Ideology**

In, *Globalized Anti-Blackness: Transnationalizing Western Immigration Law, Policy and Practice*, Vilna Bashi (2004) considers how the global politics of immigration demonstrate not only a preference for white immigrants but a concerted effort to severely restrict transnational movement of Black identified people. Bashi mentions that there is no question that Western nations have favored European-descent immigrants, and at various times in history have even courted their migration. By contrast, African-descent or those immigrants with notable African phenotype have found greater restrictions on their ability to immigrate to Western nations. By focusing on how individual nations demonstrate a preference for white or non-Black immigrants, scholars ignore the macro effect of global policy and a practice designed to restrict movement of African-descent people. Collusion between Western nations has often been characterized by how one responds to one another through the adoption of similar policies and practices, ensuring a rigid wall against Black immigration.

In nations like Canada and England, Black Caribbean immigrants have often first entered as part of a temporary pool of labor, with the expectation that their stay is seasonal in nature. In 1965 when immigration laws in the United States experienced

significant change and retreat from the racist language of the pre-Civil Rights era, the immigrant population increased dramatically over the next several decades. Yet, even in the midst of this transformation of U.S. immigration laws, the Black immigrant population has remained much lower than other non-Black immigrant population. Bashi found that predominantly Black nations, like the West Indies, have to meet more restrictive criteria which limit the number of people eligible to move abroad to Western nations. Beginning in 1965 family reunification was given much greater priority than occupational based claims, which meant that those who had family members in the United States were given preference over those who simply requested entry. As the population of Black immigrants has always been lower in the U.S. as compared to other groups, this meant there were fewer opportunities available for Black-foreign born to gain legal permanent status in the United States.

Tanya Hernandez notes that restrictions also often occur through more hidden racial practices, such as denying visas to persons of a certain “appearance”. She provides as an example a case in which an American embassy official in Brazil sued the U.S. government, citing that a standard practice at the embassy was to deny visas to people who were darker skinned and potentially poor. The effect of this was that more often darker skinned Brazilians were less likely to be granted U.S. travel visas.

Hernandez (2001) and Bashi (2004) both challenge the idea that race is not implicated in immigration patterns. Bashi concludes that racial and pigmentation privilege (lighter-skinned over darker-skinned) is implicated in who ultimately becomes part of the immigrant population in the first place. This is an important and often

overlooked point. Bashi finds an, "...enormously consequential anchoring of black persons to the bottom of the racial and 'world systemic' hierarchies" (p. 601).

The global construction of anti-Blackness is also part of national identity in non-U.S. contexts. In *Race and Reflexivity: The Black Other in Contemporary Japanese Mass Culture* (2001), John Russell unpacks the significance of globalized anti-Black ideology in his study of Japan. He argues that quite overt anti-Black imagery is often displayed through the media and other forms of Japanese popular culture. In constructing a genealogy of the Black "Other" in Japan, he points out that the association of Black people with apes and characterizations of them as subhuman date back several centuries. He also notes that like historical representations, contemporary ones characterize the Black "Other" as infantile, primitive, hypersexual, bestial, naturally athletic, mentally inferior, psychologically weak and emotionally volatile (p. 6). Modern Japanese cartoons create gross caricaturizations of Black phenotype. While publicly this may be described as innocent, insignificant and even playful, Russell argues that these representations should be understood in light of Japan positioning itself in a global white racial ideology and that doing so requires they construct themselves in opposition to what is the antithesis of whiteness, that is, Blackness. Russell mentions that often when anti-Black representations are challenged in Japan as racist, the prevailing perspective is that Western countries, in particular the United States, export these negative stereotypes to Asian countries via television and Hollywood movies. This supposedly strongly influences Asian countries, like Japan. However, Russell notes that while it is true that anti-Black imagery emerges through popularization of American movies and television shows in Japan, the fact that negative images about Black people are accepted should be

seen as more than just U.S. power to control media in foreign countries, it also says something about those who choose to consume these images. The adoption of stereotypical Black imagery in popular Japanese culture should be seen as making the Japanese a group claim about relative superiority in a global hierarchy.

Similarly, in *Anti-Black Racism in Post-Mao China*, Barry Sautman (2007) reveals the animosity and violence leveled against African university students. He describes an increasingly violent anti-Black environment at a number of Chinese universities, beginning with the first highly publicized clashes in 1979. What he makes very clear is that African students were targeted, while other foreign (non-Chinese and non-African) students were not. These were not isolated incidents, as they occurred repeatedly through the 1980's and were actually well planned anti-African protests in different cities. African students reported that they were subjected to taunting, slurs and other forms of overt racial terrorizing by students, teachers and school administrators. In other incidents African students were barricaded in dormitories, attacked with bottles, foreign objects and severely beaten. At question, according to those interviewed, was the threat posed by the potential of sexual relationships between Black men and Chinese women. Ironically, this relates well to the system of racialized terror carried out in the South during Jim Crow when many Black men were imagined as sexual predators and subsequently lynched because of a perceived threat they posed to the sexual purity of white women and the masculinity of white men (Baldwin, 1965; Daniels, 1997).

Sautman (2007) found that much of the commentary explaining the violence was linked around the idea of a general xenophobic fear against *all* foreigners and was therefore not specifically anti-Black. In other commentary it was thought to be related to

historical association of dark skin with the poverty and backwardness of “uncivilized” Indigenous Chinese peasantry. Due to the dark skin of the African university students, they inadvertently became associated with negative stereotypes related to China’s rural peasant class, in particular the idea that peasants are poor and backwards. In either case, as Sautman points out, the analysis overlooked the possibility that there might be any consequential anti-Black thought constructed around a superior (Chinese)/inferior (Black) ideology. Ultimately, the author found that understanding these incidents as general xenophobia or as class/ethnic prejudice against peasants was misguided. Xenophobia could not explain why Black Africans were specifically targeted. He also stated that “culture” was implicated in ways that masked ideology about racial supremacy. In response to those who cast this as framed by cultural tension, Sautman comments that “Culture and intelligence are among the characteristics most salient to attitudes on race. Racial hierarchization has long been based on claims that the backward cultures and low intelligence of certain peoples brand them as hereditary inferiors” (p. 430).

These studies reveal the historical presence of anti-black ideology in non-U.S. contexts and the manifestation of a racially based hierarchy. Rather than finding that anti-Black racism is a recently imported phenomena to non-Western countries via the influence of modern United States media, these studies suggest strongly that there is a global history of anti-Black racism.

### **Ethnicity and the Structuring of Race**

Ethnicity theory has its origins in the study of immigrant group identity and assimilation processes. Sociologist Milton Gordon (1964) identified stages of assimilation for immigrants. This theory proposed that immigrant assimilation occurred



in a straight-line fashion as newcomers relinquished their ethnic cultures for American (Anglo-Saxon) culture. Cultural assimilation would naturally lead to structural assimilation. Cultural assimilation was characterized by the association with the behavioral patterns, social attitudes, moral codes, values, language, and so forth, of the more dominant group. Structural assimilation was indicative of new immigrant groups gaining institutional privileges ordinarily extended to only the dominant group. Educational, residential and labor force patterns of the immigrant group would now reflect those of the dominant group. The third stage, marital assimilation, would naturally facilitate the next stage of identificational assimilation. The final stage would be civic assimilation, signifying absence of prejudice and discrimination as well as power or value conflicts (Gordon, 1964).

Omi and Winant (1994) question the salience of the ethnicity paradigm for racialized minorities who are not able to fit into traditional assimilation models. They are critical of ethnicity theory that attempts to corral all people into ethnic groupings without any acknowledgement of the importance of race for many U.S. minority groups. They conclude that ethnicity theorists continue to use immigrant analogies, perhaps relevant for European descent immigrants of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, as paradigms for analyzing non-European Americans through a “bootstraps model.” However, the bootstraps model does not fit in the case of many racialized minorities who have encountered strong resistance and barriers preventing them from pulling themselves up. Omi and Winant also note the inadequacy in analyzing African Americans as an ethnic group, since it rarely happens that African Americans are understood that way, even by devout ethnicity theorists — at least not in practice. African Americans seem to defy ethnicity paradigms as “African

American” and “Black” are often synonymous in most of the scholarship on ethnicity theory. Whereas ethnicity is an option for most other groups, it is a curious construction in relationship to Black people. Omi and Winant comment that,

With rare exceptions ethnicity theory isn't very interested in ethnicity *among* blacks. The ethnicity approach views blacks as one ethnic group among others. It does not consider national origin, religion, language, or cultural differences among blacks, as it does among whites, as sources of ethnicity (p. 22).

The unique way in which Blackness is constructed in the United States identifies African-descent Americans as a racial group without ethnic diversity. No more clear is this than in the way African-descent immigrants have been incorporated into the United States.

A number of scholars have questioned the extent to which African-descent immigrants should be *relegated* to a Black consciousness and thus a subordinate status in our society (Kasinitz, 1992; Portes & Zhou, 1993; Waters, 1999). Other African-Caribbean scholars have highlighted the ethnic differences between these populations and African Americans. Cultural differences, as some scholars conclude, often interrupt what some might expect to be *natural* affiliations and/or loyalties (Rahier, 2003; Vickerman, 1999). Hintzen's (2003) recently published anthology includes work from a number of African-Caribbean scholars who conclude that more attention needs to be given to ethnic differences within the U.S. Black population. For these scholars, culture rather than race is a more relevant determining factor for unifying *and* dividing groups of people. Furthermore, magnifying cultural differences for African-Americans is thought to be a useful tool for shielding African-descent immigrants from racism.

Other scholars, like Sherri Butterfield (2004) find that both ethnicity and race are important identity constructions for the Black foreign-born population. In her research on West Indians in New York she describes how study participants identified as Black but not African American. West Indians in her study describe the salience of race and problematic construction of Blackness in the United States. Butterfield highlights the point that identity is complex for this population given that they often maintain strong ties to their non-American ethnic heritages but find there is little acknowledgement of this complexity in the United States where racial ascription takes precedence over ethnic identity.

Butterfield comments that her study challenges typical identity constructions which often do not acknowledge the salience of ethnicity for Black immigrants. I agree with her comments regarding the general lack of attention given to diversity within the Black racial group. Blacks are often understood along a one dimensional monolithic continuum, lacking any complexity. Her study highlights the relevance of race for immigrants in the United States. Butterfield attempts to answer the question, Can one have meaningful ethnic and racial identity constructions at once? Butterfield's study however fails to problematize why West Indians might demonstrate such an aversion to being identified with African Americans. For example, a common theme among her participants was that they felt particularly troubled with being mistakenly labeled as African American. And though the implication was that this was *only* in an attempt to point out the diversity of Blackness, one has to question why the heightened agitation about misidentification with African Americans?

Butterfield (2004) writes,

Interestingly, it was more common than not that the second generation [West Indians] did not appreciate the assumption that they were African American. The respondents felt that that was a denial of their ethnicity and who they were as individuals. What is most striking about this is that while second generation West Indians long for acknowledgement of their ethnic heritage, this is in stark contrast to many second generation Asians who are tired of being asked where they are from and whether they speak English or not (p. 83).

Though Butterfield does not interrogate the point, one could question, to what extent does a hyper awareness around establishing ethnic difference hide problematic ideologies about African Americans that strives to establish distance through discourse about difference or diversity. For example, in the above mentioned quote Butterfield comments that while Asians are tired their perceived foreignness, West Indians want to raise more awareness about their foreign distinction. The question is, why? Unfortunately, Butterfield fails to explore this potential positioning and instead focuses on ethnic differences surrounding food, ritual and traditions.

Ethnicity, however, has always been a more available option for those of European descent. In the United States, ethnic identities become visible in non-threatening ways such as food, dress, rituals, holiday celebrations, music and dance. For example, Waters' (1990) study of ethnic identities within the white racial group demonstrated how ethnicity meant little in terms of power relations between members of that group. However, in her ethnographic study of West Indians (1999), she found this population desperately clinging to their ethnic identities in an effort to create some social distance relative to African Americans. For Black immigrants, ethnicity becomes an

issue of power and privilege and prevention against racism. Race trumps ethnicity in a racialized social order. This means that a white supremacist system can work against African-Caribbean, Afro-Latino or Ghanaian immigrants in the same way as African Americans without paying particular attention to the ethnic uniqueness between the groups. Ultimately, she found that clinging to an ethnic identity did not suffice in shielding West Indian immigrants from racialized discrimination.

A *New York Times* article written by Mirta Ojito (2000) tells the story of two Cuban friends, one Black — the other white. The article underscores the limits of ethnicity theory for understanding the significance of race within the same ethnic group. The author highlights the salience of race for two Latino friends in Miami. Though they were both Cuban, grew up in the same neighborhood in Cuba and were long time friends, they found themselves separated by race. While the white Cuban friend assimilated into a white Cuban social group of Miami, found stable employment and enjoyed the benefit of a large social network, the Black Cuban friend struggled to find a similar kind of experience. He spoke of the anti-Black *racial* discrimination he had experienced as a Black Cuban American, as well as how anti-Blackness is operationalized in the white Cuban American community.

A similar point is highlighted by Ginetta Candelario (2007) in her study of Dominicans in the Washington D.C. She found that the Dominican immigrant maintained strong ethnic and racial identities. They made alliances with African Americans to challenge anti-Black racism. One particular point made was that Dominicans spoke about anti-Black racism they encountered from both Anglo Americans and the Central American Latino immigrant population in Washington D.C. This

highlights the persistence of race and hierarchy within ethnically defined groups, like Latinos.

Andersen (1999) offers a counter argument to the ethnicity discourse in her article, “*The Fiction of Diversity Without Oppression: Race, Ethnicity, Identity and Power.*” She notes that ethnicity, like race, is also socially constructed. Social science scholars are reluctant to use the concept of race because they see it as unnatural, but then we must ask ourselves what makes ethnicity so inherently natural or real. She notes that ethnicity is not useful for understanding the dynamics of power and privilege based on a racialized social hierarchy. If we want to understand this phenomenon, we must be able to understand race differently from ethnicity and what it means to be a member of a particular racial group. Doing away with discussions on race will leave us without the tools for understanding a system of racial oppression.

### **Structuring Racism**

In, *Rethinking Racism: Toward a Structural Approach*, Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (1997) argues for theoretical analysis of racism grounded in structural analysis. He finds that traditional approaches to studying race have fallen short by focusing on the phenomena of racism rather than understanding racism as a feature in a larger organizing system. For example, postmodern theories on race focus on understanding how each racialized group experiences racism. Analyzing racism in a postmodern context would require that different groups become “centered” in an effort to unveil the uniqueness of their racial histories and experiences. Postmodern theories on race often speak of *racisms* to indicate the notion of multiplicity (e.g., see, Alcoff; Darder and Torres, 1999; Johnson, 2004; Martinez, 1993; Mutua, 1999). Bonilla-Silva also challenges the idea that racism is

prejudiced behavior based on ignorance, as these kinds of analyses presume that the anti-racist response lies in teaching tolerance through increased contact with the “Other.”

Arguing that racism should be understood as a process of racialization, he proposes his theory of a racialized social system as a framework for understanding racial phenomena. He finds there is a network of relations granted privilege (social, material and otherwise) and power to groups based their placement in a structure. He notes that, “in all racialized social systems the placement of people in racial categories involves some form of hierarchy” (p. 469). He further adds that while ethnic groups may or may not be entwined in a hierarchical social structure, racial groups indeed are.

Related to Bonilla-Silva’s theory of a racialized social system, much of the earlier work in the field of critical race theory (CRT) proposes that racism be understood as related a hierarchical racist structure. For instance, a core concept in CRT is Derrick Bell’s theory of racism realism (1992). Racial realism is premised upon an awareness for the dynamic effects of a racialized social system. Although race may be a social construct, the social outcomes produce concrete forms of hierarchically structured inequality. Bell also concludes that racism has such a dynamic in our society that it is unlikely that Blacks will achieve full equality since American society is premised upon a system of white racial domination. This ideology penetrates American consciousness to the point that no institution, individual or group has not been touched or affected by it. The fabric of America has been weaved upon a white supremacist ideology and the legacy of this continues with us today (Harris, 1993). Racism will always re-invent itself in such a way as to maintain the hierarchy and protect white privilege. According to Bell (1992), Blacks are particularly situated at the bottom of the racial hierarchy.

## The Construction of the Black Body

In *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), W.E.B. DuBois wrote about the alienating experiences of being Black in America. He found that African Americans lived within two conflicting consciousnesses:

After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with the second-sight in this American world — a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness — an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (p.2)

DuBois notes that part of the Black experience is having to see oneself through a white supremacist and anti-Black logic — and more importantly, to accept this as natural and unquestionable. In *Spirit Murdering the Messenger: The Discourse of Fingerpointing as the Law's Response to Racism*, Patricia Williams (1987) points out that Blacks historically have been expected to accept discriminatory laws and methods of enforcement as acceptable when it is to protect whites. For example, when Blacks become victims of white violence, it is asserted that white people need to protect themselves from the *potential* threat of Black rage, even when there was no presence of any such rage. This is often cited in cases in which Black customers have been shot,



attacked and even killed by store merchants. The implication is that the Black body represents a potentially violent threat and therefore must be acted upon violently. Discrimination occurs, but it should be understood by all, even by Blacks, as justified, given the potential “threat” Blacks pose to innocent whites/non-Blacks. Williams (1987) writes, “The cultural domination of blacks by whites means that the Black self is placed at a distance even from itself...So blacks are conditioned from infancy to see in themselves only what others who despise them see” (p.141).

The Black body as threat is also explored in Toni Morrison’s (1992) *Playing in the Dark* where she examines the construction of the African “Other” “in the imagination of white America. The demonization of the African in America happens in relationship to the production of a white America. Morrison notes that “It was this Africanism, deployed as rawness and savagery that provided the staging ground and arena for the elaboration of the quintessential American identity” (p. 44). Morrison metaphorically paints the relationship as one in which Black savagery serves as backdrop to white superiority. Thus, the African American as savage, as threatening, is fundamentally part of American society and is continually redeveloped, remodeled and redistributed.

Black slavery enriched the country’s creative possibilities. For in the construction of blackness and enslavement could be found not only the not-free but also, with the dramatic polarity created by skin color, the projection of the not-me. The result was a playground for the imagination. What rose up out of collective needs to allay internal fears and to rationalize external exploitation was an American Africanism—a fabricated brew of darkness, otherness, alarm, and desire that is uniquely American. (Morrison, 1992, p.38)

Law scholars, Patricia J. Williams (1988) and Cheryl Harris (1993), have written about the relationship between race and property. Williams (1988) discusses the taboo associated with the Black body.

These taboos describe boundaries of valuation. Whether something is inside or outside the marketplace of rights has always been a way of valuing it. When a valued object is located outside the market, it is generally understood to be too “priceless” to be accommodated by ordinary exchange relationships; when in contrast, the prize is located within the marketplace, all objects outside become “valueless”. Traditionally, the Mona Lisa and human life have been the sorts of subjects removed from the fungibility of commodification, as “priceless”. Thus when black people were bought and sold as slaves, they were placed beyond the bounds of humanity. (p.16)

Williams emphasizes the devaluation of the African body as it has historically been associated with an object to be possessed by another. Echoing this, Cheryl Harris’ (1991) *Whiteness as Property* introduces the idea that whiteness too is an object, but it is unlike Blackness in that it has absolute value. Like Williams, she finds that enslavement of the Black body created the special conditions through which blackness was deprecated and whiteness elevated. Harris writes, “Race and property were conflated by establishing a form of property contingent on race — only Blacks were subjugated as slaves and treated as property” (p. 1716). Whiteness became a property right in that those who possessed it had certain inalienable rights, not granted to those who did not. Important among those rights is a claim to its “use and enjoyment” as well as the right to police its boundaries and include, exclude or “alienate” others at leisure. Whiteness therefore has

characteristics that make it a valuable possession that whites protect as normative legal doctrine. The ability to enjoy and exclude or include is a crucial point in that if everyone who wanted it could acquire and enjoy whiteness, it would lose its value.

Historically, the African body, marked by its phenotype as property, has been excluded or alienated. The excluded Black body stands as a critical point of reference in the relationship of race and property. The implications of this do not simply frame a structure of relations between Blacks and whites but is also relevant for the ways in which other non-Black/and non-white or non-Anglo groups are positioned in the United States. Similar constructs about the Black body appear to have shaped racial ideology and the structuring of race relations in other parts of the world, like Latin America and the Caribbean.

Anthony Farley (1997) discusses how the Black body serves as a site of race pleasure. He writes,

The image of the black is ubiquitous. Whites return and return and return again to this fetish in order to satisfy a self-created urge to be white. The satisfaction of this will-to-whiteness is a form of pleasure in and about one's body. It is a pleasure which is satisfied through the production, circulation, and consumption of images of the not-white. The body is contested territory in the conflict over symbolic representation. 'Nothing exists in itself;' whiteness composes itself out of images of blackness. Whiteness is pleasure which has woven itself into all aspects of our culture and our identities. Visions of black subalterns dance through our dreams, our literature, our arts, our sciences and our films... (p. 463).

As Farley points out, the Black inferior 'Other' must be readily juxtaposed against a white superior other in order that the status of each, in its respective role, is preserved. This idea is implicated when bell hooks (1992) describes the need to "eat the Other" as a way for whites to get next to and "taste", yet not become the Other. In many ways, this need to experience the "Other" can be understood as a need to feel how much one is not Black or get in touch with what whites repress in themselves and project onto Blacks (Haymes, 1995).

### Chapter 3: Blacks as Nativist

Anti-subordination theory is rooted in the development of a critical theory of race beyond the Black/white binary. They contend that racial binary thinking prevents the histories and experiences of other racial minorities from analysis. Asians, Latinos and other racialized “others” are understood (and theorized) as either Black/white or they are simply made invisible, without any thought to their uniqueness. Anti-subordination theory, organized by LatCrit and AsianCrit work, highlights how contemporary (e.g. post-1965) racism has created a racial dynamic between people of color that is often undertheorized.

In particular, 1965 marked the year of monumental changes to immigration law, which culminated with the largest wave of immigrants since the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This wave of immigrants, however, was unlike previous waves in that many of those who came were of color. A number of critical race theorists draw our attention to the fact that this will have significant impact on the future of racial ideology and, more importantly, the field of race relations in the United States, which up until point had been largely characterized in Black and white terms.

Anti-subordination theory proposes that we look at racism by locating all racial minorities in a field of relations that dynamically shifts depending on the issues of language, national origin, geographic location, religion and culture. In this chapter I explore the concept of nativism, as presented in anti-subordination (LatCrit and AsianCrit) theory. I begin here because critical scholars contend that nativism is a new and particularly virulent form of racism that is organized around anti-immigrant ideology. It is one of the prevailing themes in LatCrit & AsianCrit theory and it attempts to engage

intellectual thought towards a more critical reflection on interethnic dynamics and tensions, which as they advance is becoming more relevant, given the expected rise of Latino and Asian populations in the coming decades.

The dialogue on nativism is premised on the idea that the native-born Americans fear an invasion by foreigners who do not culturally assimilate but yet utilize valuable and limited resources. Chang (1993) notes that historically nativism was often discussed as a phenomena independent from racism. However, due to the racialized nature of today's immigrant population, contemporary nativism, organized against immigrants of color, is founded in racist ideology. This ideology casts immigrants as foreign, inassimilable and ultimately alienates them from American identity — at least one that is authentic. The irony is that part of American identity is constructed around an analogy that locates the strength of the nation in the spirit of industrious, hardworking immigrants. This, however, does not mean that immigrants have not encountered barriers to full citizenship. In fact, as many scholars note, today's immigrant faces a uniquely hostile path towards inclusion that European immigrants previously did not encounter. One point that anti-subordination theory makes is that anti-immigrant and nativist racism is also enacted against native-born Asian and Latina/o descent Americans, as they are also constructed as foreign intruders (Chang, 1993).

LatCrit and AsianCrit scholars have been instrumental in challenging anti-immigrant sentiment by unpacking the nature of nativism and its implications for existing racial phenomena. However, much of this work problematically theorizes African Americans as the principle architects advancing nativist/racist ideology against immigrants and other non-Black people of color. The attention given by LatCrit and

AsianCrit scholarship to xenophobia in the African American community is curiously distorted and often ends up colluding with historically stereotypical images and messages about African American people and their communities. Given that these scholars usually emphasize the importance of developing a diverse movement to end the oppression of all oppressed peoples, theorizing in a manner that socially distances many groups from African Americans is troubling.

Critics of the Black/white binary find that African American fears about job competition with immigrants are not only nativist but also unfounded. Lisa Ikemoto (1993) writes about the Black/Korean conflict presented during the 1992 Los Angeles riots. Her work describes how each group has historically been victimized in our white supremacist society. She proposes that each group sees and responds to the other through a lens tinted by white supremacist ideology. She finds that in a society in which both Koreans and Blacks have been subjected to racist treatment, it is not surprising that they behave defensively towards one another, thus becoming complicitous in the oppression of the “other”. In other words, the internalization of the white master narrative orchestrates the hostility between the two groups. I agree with this point by Ikemoto. However, her next point is that Blacks operate from a sense of entitlement. To highlight this she quotes African Americans who express their dissatisfaction with: the exploitation, disrespect and abuse that happens in the Black community in the context of local merchants; the ways in which Blacks are denied loans to invest in their own communities while non-Black minorities enjoy greater support; and feelings of anger about the general demise of Black communities. Ikemoto writes:

One common explanation circulated during the aftermath of the uprisings that had to do with competition between Korean Americans and African Americans for a too small piece of the economic pie. The issue became one of entitlement. In the fray, many different claims to entitlement were made. Some complained that Korean Americans had, in effect, cut in line. The premise was that African Americans have been waiting in line for a longer time, and that more recent arrivals must go to the back [of the line]. (p. 1586)

She later continues with:

In part, this story asserts that Korean Americans do not understand the plight of Blacks in America, and that if they did, they would wait their turn. This assertion assumes knowledge of the history of white oppression of Blacks stemming from, but not limited to, the practice and laws of slavery. It also expresses the idea that more recently arrived immigrants do not understand because they are less “American”. (p. 1587)

In yet another characterization, Ikemoto, claims that when African Americans make complaints about poor treatment in Korean stores, inflated pricing of goods/services, and the lack of Korean investment (human and otherwise) in Black neighborhoods, they are invoking nativist privileges by casting Asians (in the case of her study — Koreans) as outsiders to Black insiders. She continues by stating that,

The claims draw a boundary around the Black community as the in-group, relative to the Korean outsiders who can gain admission only by purchasing it — by giving back value. Jobs and respect are the local currency. It describes the Black community as the in-group with the authority to set the standards for



admission, yet by claiming victimhood status for the Black community, it places the Black community behind Korean Americans in the breadline. (p. 1588)

Ikemoto reinvents stereotypical concepts surrounding African Americans. However, if you don't pay attention, and read carefully, it is easy to underestimate the effect of her characterization of Blacks in contrast to Koreans. She discusses entitlement, special treatment, and a perception of victimhood in the context of African Americans.

The image of African Americans feeling entitled to special treatment, based upon something that happened to their people centuries ago, is a familiar one in American society. It gained particular momentum in the decades following the Civil Rights Movement. The presupposition is that African Americans continue to maintain they are victims, even with all the "handouts" they've received since the 1960's. More importantly is the idea that these perceptions are overstated. The ideology behind perpetual victimhood means they will never harness their own effort to make positive changes to their lives. This sentiment is a reinvention of the bootstraps model. In a sense, African Americans become the cause of their own condition due to their own lack of effort.

Then there is the question of how Ikemoto uses the concept of entitlement in relationship to African Americans. Entitlement is mentioned frequently in anti-subordination theory and almost exclusively regarding African American attitudes. Now, Ikemoto also implicates Korean Americans in the issue of entitlement but the tone of the characterization changes to one that is more akin to naïveté, which I shall return to in a moment. Entitlement calls to mind the idea that one wants something for which they have not worked. There is a sense of demanding preferential treatment based upon some

feature that others cannot possess. There is a sense of unfairness, which contradicts the very basis of a meritocratic society, like the United States. Of course, entitlement does not have to be used in a pejorative sense. But given post-Civil Rights racial discourse, Blacks are negatively associated with preferential treatment/entitlement. The backlash against Affirmative Action policies has been publicized as a need to end special (i.e. unfair, unjust, anti-democratic) treatment reserved for African Americans. Even though white women have received far greater benefits through affirmative action legislation, it is still publicized as privileging African Americans over hardworking others who are more deserving.

This description of African Americans is in sharp contrast to that given to the Korean Americans in the study. For Ikemoto, Korean entitlement is situated in the pursuit of the American dream. In this pursuit, they (Koreans) assume that those left behind deserve their position because they have not worked as hard or contributed as much. Korean Americans, in this context, buy into the American dream that has been “sold” to thousands of immigrants throughout U.S. history. In other words, they collude in the perpetuation of the myth of meritocracy. What is interesting about Ikemoto’s analysis is that for all the attention given to the racially tinged actions of Blacks in this conflict, there is rather insufficient exploration of racial motivations influencing why Korean Americans responded to African Americans as they did. For example, there is a racial (racist) element in the American dream ideology that provides that only certain groups have a right to even pursue the American dream. Historically, Blacks were not thought worthy of pursuing the American dream. Their very existence meant that other European immigrants were allowed to pursue the American dream. For this reason,

working class European immigrants were concerned with the continued denial of rights to Black Americans, it suggested that less desirable European ethnics (e.g. Irish and Italians,) might just make it (Ignatiev, 1995; Jacobson, 1998). For the American dream to hold credibility you have to believe that some people are flat out denied. Blacks have historically held that position in our society. I would suggest that they continue to hold that position, and that this does not go unnoticed by immigrants who believe so deeply in the American dream.

Scholars, like Ikemoto, who are working to move beyond the binary, have a tendency to characterize immigrants as racially innocent. In her attempt to construct a full picture of how racism constructs how each group responds to the other, she shies away from fully analyzing how Koreans see Blacks in racial terms. Though they may simply believe too much in the American dream, as she concludes, this alone does not adequately explain the conflict she highlights. The theme of racially innocent Asians and Latinos is consistent in beyond the binary (BTB) or anti-subordination theory.

Sumi K. Cho (1993) also makes similar claims in her study of the Korean American and African American conflict. She concludes that African American belief in the myth of the model minority breeds resentment and contempt for Koreans, ultimately, all Asians become associated with the myth in the minds of Blacks. I would certainly agree that casting Asians as model minorities limits the full scope of Asian history and experience. For sure there are racist implications for its use. As I have so often heard, not all Asians do well. And they, too, are victims of racism. Cho concludes that in the conflict between African Americans and Koreans, Koreans are caught in the middle between Blacks and whites. For Cho, Koreans become racist targets for both whites and

Blacks. However, Korean racial ideology becomes rather ambiguous and based on what they learn and adopt from American presentation of Blacks. For instance, in speaking about Korean ideology about Blacks, Cho writes:

When Koreans immigrate to the U.S., internationalized stereotypes are reinforced by negative depictions of African Americans in U.S. films, television shows, and other popular forms of cultural production. This stereotype, combined with the high crime rate inherent in businesses such as liquor or convenience stores (regardless of who owns them), produced the prejudiced, paranoid, bunker mentality of Soon Ja Du who shot Latasha Harlins, a 15 year old African American girl, in the back of the neck during a dispute over a bottle of orange juice. Since 1 January 1990, at least 25 Korean merchants have been killed by non-Korean gunmen. (p. 199)

Global white supremacy has certainly exported anti-Black ideology around the world. However, Cho's justification for Korean anti-Black ideology almost relieves them of any conscious agency on their part. If Koreans are anti-Black, it is because of the U.S. transferring these messages abroad, allowing others to adopt them. What does not follow is that there is no explanation for why anti-black depictions make sense in Korea or any other part of the world. For instance, if I take Cho at her word, about the powerful influence of negative representations of Blacks abroad, I question why she does not explain why this kind of anti-Black imagery might be appealing to Koreans in the first place? In other words, is there a pre-existing context which makes it not entirely foreign?

Cho (1993) also implies that crime ridden neighborhoods where Koreans have businesses might too explain why they treat their customers with suspicion. Cho, like Ikemoto, is interested in moving beyond the Black/white binary to make more visible the experiences of other racial minorities. However, they do not seem to want to implicate Asians as racial actors. To the extent that they do, they then return to the very same binary they want to eradicate. At that point, racism is about Black and white people, *others* are seemingly caught up in the middle. Those caught in the middle are paying a heavy price for a dynamic that began with slavery, that is, something in the past. Those in the middle had nothing to do with how this dynamic began, nor take responsibility for the on-going relationship between Blacks and whites. They charge that Blacks seem to unwittingly blame those caught in the middle, whom they feel do not understand the history of U.S. slavery, and thus do not respond sensitively towards the Black condition.

Critical scholars like Ikemoto and Cho often arrive back to a place of analyzing these dynamics as examples of how each could learn more about the other's racial history. The conflict is reduced to a matter of cultural misunderstandings. Blacks do not understand the Korean cultural practice of not touching strangers. For instance, when Korean store merchants do not wish to have their hands touch a Black customer, it is a matter of maintaining cultural practices and not racial animosity. In this case, Blacks have misunderstood the cultural context. By similar token, Koreans should learn more about Blacks and U.S. history of slavery. Supposedly this will help them understand why Blacks are so angry and why Koreans, and Asians in general, become stand-ins for their misdirected rage and hostility.

Beyond the binary theorists, like Ikemoto and Cho, seem to arrive at the similar conclusions. Those caught up in the middle become somehow explicated from structure and become weapons or scapegoats (depending on the group) in a battle between Black and white America. In reference to those caught in the middle they often use statements like “they get used” or “white America pits them against other minorities”. However, I think they are too quick to see those “caught in the middle” as lacking agency or operating from a sense of group position, and this implicates them in racial prejudice against those who they see as lower positioned, in this case, Black Americans.

James Loewen’s (1998) historical study of Chinese immigrant merchants in Mississippi unpacks racial positionality of an Asian immigrant merchant class in relationship to a larger African American working class. He makes the point that precisely because there was such social distance between white and Black Mississippians *and* stigma attached to white merchants operating in Black communities, Asian immigrants were able to position themselves in between the two. However they, too, recognizing the stigma associated with Blacks also sought to maintain social distance from them, preferring instead to build relationships with the white community in hopes of gaining white privileges. For example, the Mississippi Chinese community sought to have their children attend white schools, arguing on the basis that they did not want their children to attend the local Black school (Wong, 1996).

Perhaps the most problematic aspect of beyond the binary theory in relationship to African American nativism is the assumption that animosity is solely based on xenophobic sentiment around foreign invasion and the preservation of the American nation. There is an over-determined interest in constructing African Americans as

ideologically assimilated with white Americans, and thus having similar intentions towards immigrants. I find this conflation misguided. In this light, BTB theorists find middle group minorities positioned in urban poor Black communities cast as doubly victimized, from racism above and below.

An earlier study on African American nativism towards European immigrants, during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, states that unlike Anglo anti-immigrant sentiment, Black nativism was often born from a frustration regarding how new immigrants also expressed anti-Black ideology (Rubin, 1978). A number of historical African American newspapers reported that rather than finding comradeship with poor European immigrants, Black Americans found that not only were European immigrant groups uninterested in joining them, but that they virulently expressed anti-Black sentiment and worked arduously to create social distance between themselves and Blacks. This positioned them above Blacks, even though their non-Anglo ethnicity and low social class still cast them low in terms of the social hierarchy within the white racial group (Hellwig, 1995; Rubin, 1978). This is a point I think BTB theorists forget. There is also social hierarchy within the white racial group. That suggests that not all whites are equally positioned, nor equally privileged. Though this point may seem overstated, it does not appear to be relevant for beyond the binary theorists. They seem to become caught up in proving that not all Asians, Latinos or other non-Black minorities receive privileges equal to white Anglo Americans. The outcome, as they contend, is that the middle group does not exist authentically as a middle group but rather as one that is either positioned next to African Americans or much lower, as they feel unique from both white and Black Americans and unable to identify with either. All of this relates to how

structure is related to the ideology of racism, which is where I find beyond the binary theory particularly troubling. Racism is more than just negative feelings towards other groups or thinking one's own group is better or more "American".

Civil Rights are another issue that beyond binary thinkers cite as too organized around racial remedies for Black oppression. Many propose that a new Civil Rights movement will have to better articulate the needs of a growing diverse population of people who are non-Black. LatCrit scholar, Kevin Johnson, has suggested that the 21<sup>st</sup> century will see an end to Civil Rights due to its inability to understand different forms of racialization. Contemporary racism, complicated by nationalism and nativism, creates a new racial dynamic, with a new formation. For beyond the binary theorists, Civil Rights legislation is perceived in terms of equality and justice for African Americans. This, in turn, limits the opportunity for others to speak about racial discrimination that is not African American related. Furthermore, they conclude that this means other non-Black people (including poor whites) are not benefitting from Civil Rights legislation equal to benefits granted Black Americans. Ultimately, beyond the binary theory calls for a centering of immigrant issues, cultural and class-based definitions of racism and remedies grounded in such kinds of definitions of racism (Chang and Aoki, 1997; Delgado and Stefancic, 2000; Johnson, 2002; Johnson 2006).

One of the more problematic themes presented within this construct is the idea that African Americans have somehow benefitted more than any other group from Civil Rights legislation. Take for example Richard Delgado's (1998) comment regarding Blacks being hired over Latinos due to the "special" protection given African Americans



under Civil Rights Affirmative Action policies not afforded other non-Black minorities.

He proposes the following as a consequence for Hispanics of a Black/white paradigm:

Let's say you're an employer or state bureaucrat. You are distributing assets — things of value, like benefits, contracts or jobs. You can give a job, say, to one of two equally qualified candidates. One's a black, the other a Hispanic. You probably give it to the black. The black can sue you. He or she has all those civil rights statutes written with him or her in mind. To be sure, courts have held that Hispanics may also sue for discrimination. But the employer may not know that. And the Equal Protection Clause does not protect brown litigants as unconditionally and amply as it does blacks. The binary makes the black the prototypical civil rights plaintiff (p. 369)

The fact is that Affirmative Action has not produced *more* gains for African Americans than Latinos or other groups. White women have gained substantially more from Affirmative Action policies than Blacks (West, 1999). Another study conducted in Houston found that Hispanics benefitted more often than Black from Affirmative Action policies (Mindiola, Niemann and Rodriquez, 2002). Equally important is the fact that Affirmative Action policies were not written solely to redress racial problems. It is not likely that employers in fear of legal retaliation from Blacks are forced into hiring them.

Linda Alcoff (2003) defends Delgado's comments by stating that he is really pointing out the fact that the spirit of Civil Rights remedies are thought of only in respect to African Americans, whether they have truly benefitted over other minorities is unimportant. How society thinks of the Civil Rights Movement and subsequent legislation for protection is more important. And this, according to them, is always in

relationship to Black Americans. Ultimately, our society sees them as the only racial victims and therefore, more deserving of any racial remedies. I disagree with the idea that the implementation of the law is not as important as the thought behind it. Outcomes do matter. The implication that Blacks are more often considered is of little significance if it is not tied to any redress of material inequality.

I do agree that Blacks are often the first people that come to mind with regards to Civil Rights issues like Affirmative Action, but only when it is often to characterize Blacks as taking “goods” away from other people who are more deserving because they have actually worked for what they have. In many ways, Blacks are invoked in Civil Rights issues almost exclusively in an effort to repeal, dismantle, eliminate or prove that social programs are at a loss or threaten other non-Black people’s gain (which they incidentally have worked harder to achieve). The most problematic aspect of presenting such an idea as fact other than reinvigorating hatred toward African Americans is that it simply is not true.

Beyond binary theorists present the issue surrounding Civil Rights as one of coverage. That is to say, the point of decentering Blacks is solely for the purpose of acknowledging the ways in which “other” people have also been oppressed and have Civil Rights claims. However, their purpose here, I contend, is an attempt to disconnect non-Black people of color (Asians, Latinos, both native and foreign-born) from responsibility in a system that differently privileges groups based on race. One of the points made is a very familiar theme: Blacks think they are owed more because their ancestors were slaves, but that this is between Blacks and whites — no one else. We didn’t own any slaves. We haven’t any responsibility to respond to what happened back

then. This is similar to the complaints of many whites, both conservative and liberal. Since neither they nor any of their family in recent history owned slaves, they haven't any responsibility to Black people for amending what happened then. The fact that there is a benefit to them, because of a system that began hundreds of years ago, is of little significance. That was then, this is now. Not surprisingly, they have built up contradictory notions around their hard work as to why they should continue to gain in the current system. In other words, even when there is acknowledgement that perhaps there is a legacy that has left them with greater privilege than others, they hold to the idea that they somehow deserve it because they have now worked for it. If it came immorally, that's okay because they now work hard and thus deserve what they have acquired. With this sentiment, whites produce the myth of what is now their earned privilege. I would characterize this as nativist ideology.

Herbert Blumer (1958) describes how groups develop a sense of group position in relationship to other groups. He describes four feelings (or sentiments) that are always part of the dominant group's ideology about their social position: (1) a feeling of superiority, (2) a feeling that the subordinate race is intrinsically different and/or alien, (3) a feeling of proprietary claim to certain areas of privilege and advantage and (4) a fear and suspicion that the subordinate race harbors designs on the prerogatives of the dominant race. All of these would be characteristic of nativist sentiment. Beyond binary theorists propose that nativism is under-analyzed as a foundational aspect of contemporary racism. However, they conclude that nativist ideology is only characteristic of native-born white and Black Americans. Based on their rhetoric they are seemingly concerned by Black nativism. Native-born, non-Black people of color

(including Asian Americans, Latino Americans, & Native Americans) do not appear as nativist. Therefore, the most important qualities are that a group is native-born, has a position of privilege, wants to protect that privilege from newcomers or are seen as foreign and are white or Black. However, I propose that “newcomers” also gain a sense of nativist ideology based upon the idea that they too have something they have acquired and do not want to protect from others. Can they also be operating from a sense of group position and use similar kinds of ideology about the foreign, un-American nature of *others*? In other words, how long does it take for a group to sense that they now belong and have a position they too want to protect?

In, “Centering the Immigrant in the Inter/National Imagination”, Chang and Aoki (1997) examine the struggle of immigrants in having their histories and experiences take center stage in racial debates. They describe how post-1965 immigrants from Asia and Latin America have struggled to gain acceptance and equality in the United States. This demonstrates the hypocrisy inherent in the differential treatment of immigrants today and the waves of European immigrants. They offer that nativism creates a special subject position for Asians and Latinos who are not able to find their causes articulated in a modern Civil Rights movement. Much like Du Bois’ (1903) notion of double consciousness, the authors describe how the border serves as a literal and figurative metaphor for how immigrants exist in the United States. In the second part of their essay, they analyze how the Asians and Latinos worked cooperatively to integrate a predominantly white neighborhood, Monterrey Park in Los Angeles. Notably, their analysis highlights the potential for racial coalitions that effect structural outcomes, which are to be applauded. During the course of several decades, Asian and Latino

activism created an avenue for integrating a predominantly white and middle class neighborhood. An interesting point is that the authors also note that once Asians and Latinos worked together to create inroads into an affluent community, they then aligned to keep Blacks out. The authors write:

Asian Americans and Latina/os may implicitly or explicitly also unite to locally to protect their property values by continuing to promulgate institutional practices that exclude African Americans from communities such as Monterey Park. Monterey Park's African American population remained at or below 1% from 1960 to 1990, even while Asian American and Latina/os made significant inroads into the previously all-White residential housing market. (p. 358)

The authors then continue by suggesting that in spite of all this (as though this is a minor issue), these groups (African Americans, Asians and Latinos) must find a way to work together against white supremacist strategies to equally oppress all racialized minorities, pitting one group against another. This conclusion by the authors completely overlooks the activation of nativist ideology asserted by those Asians and Latinos who aimed to keep Blacks out. Buried in a footnote (p. 357) is an explanation for why Asians and Latinos in Monterey Park would logically (and perhaps innocently), like whites, keep African Americans out of their neighborhoods. They conclude that there is a larger social issue here, but that is between Blacks and whites and does **not** include immigrants. Property values are associated with whiteness and the ultimate lack of Blackness. The authors conclude that when Asians and Latinos colluded to keep Blacks out of Monterey Park, they were simply protecting the value of the assets that they had worked hard to acquire. They were "caught up" in a system of oppression against Blacks that whites,

and not immigrants, manufactured and implemented. They are not implicated in the creation of the system that gives appreciated value to property in neighborhoods without Black people. Because they did not create the conditions, they bear no responsibility for the outcomes. They do have a right, however, since they too were historically victimized by racist Americans, to protect the property they worked hard and sacrificed to acquire. This means that they have a right to maintain a neighborhood without Black people, in order to protect their assets. The implication is that they have worked hard, did nothing wrong, and have a right to a valuable property. Blacks should take their fight to whites, who have maintained this kind of devaluation and disinvestment in Blackness since slavery.

Aoki and Chang characterize the context as a class issue, rather than a race issue since all parties, African Americans, Asians and Latinos are people of color and have been subjugated to racist intentions from whites. They believe that Blacks would be mistaken to see this as a race issue, since Asians and Latinos in Monterey Park also dealt with a white hierarchy in their attempts to gain access to the community. It is sort of like saying that one cannot take up a racist sentiment towards another, if one has been victimized by racism. But they forget that racism is about a hierarchical power structure. It is not simply prejudicial sentiment between people that is expressed as ugly words and unkind thoughts. They make light of the fact that issues of power are implicated as groups establish their position relative to other groups. It is unreasonable to believe that non-Black people of color, whether they are foreign-born or native-born, are not racial actors too. If nativism is staking a claim to something, then it makes no sense that this can only happen with African Americans. It can also be implicated in contexts such as

that of Monterey Park which demonstrated an ideology about hardworking immigrants who have been victimized too and thus have rights in protecting their gains from more oppressed Black people.

In discussing the need for a new Civil Rights movement that is inclusive of immigrant issues, Johnson and Ong (2007) find there is a need to have more African Americans involved with immigrant rights protests. Though they are calling for a joining in solidarity between groups, by each understanding how they can find commonalities and work together, their comments surrounding Blacks nihilism are disturbing — in that they recreate culturally stereotypical accounts for why Blacks are poor. They agree with Michael Piore who a couple of decades ago wrote about the problem of Black poverty as related to their rejection of any jobs that represented low social status. Piore stated that,

Employers perceived a change in black attitudes toward the work, which made them difficult to manage and recruited migrants to replace them. Black attitudes changed because an older generation, raised in the rural south with a background and motivations similar to immigrants of today, was replaced by a new generation who grew up in northern urban areas. These younger workers associated the jobs with the inferior social status to which their race had been condemned in the United States and feared that they would be confined in them permanently through prejudice and discrimination. (Piore, as cited in Johnson and Ong, p.122)

Johnson and Ong continue by stating that while immigrants for the most part do not displace Blacks from jobs, they do find that new immigrants are located largely in the secondary labor market (as janitors, hotel employees, restaurants, day laborers, and so forth) and that to some extent this may mean that Blacks are unable to carve out any

niche there. They determine, however, that the inability to establish a niche in the secondary market is largely a result of white employers responding to Black attitudes towards work. Johnson and Ong reify familiar racist themes about Blacks that conclude they are lazy and uninterested in working, unlike immigrants who continue to maintain a healthy attitude about the payoffs of hard work. What is most telling is that the quote from Piore implies that once upon a time Blacks had an attitude and spirit much like immigrants. In the old South they worked hard but now want things easy. And in a nation that links together its meritocracy with hard work Blacks become un-American — not because this is true but because it becomes a useful myth for explaining away racist inequality. Johnson and Ong make a nativist claim on jobs for immigrants of color while casting Blacks as outsiders to the American dream. At the same time, they place the blame on white employers, thus enacting the very same binary they again say they wish to dismantle. Yet again, the fight should be between whites and Blacks, regarding social positioning of Black people. Thus, while perhaps benefiting from the social arrangements, non-Blacks have not any responsibility in it.

This is similar to a study conducted by Grenier and Castro (2005) which highlights Cuban and African American hostility towards one another in Miami. They note that while African Americans did not initially see Cubans in an adversarial way, this changed within a decade or so as Cubans gained power and then systematically shut Blacks out. Blacks were portrayed as criminals, lazy and dependent on hand-outs. On the other hand, the Cuban community was portrayed as having strong Hispanic family values, hardworking, industrious, independent, self-reliant... basically all the elements of the “bootstrap model” and what immigrants are suppose to represent. Grenier and Castro



comment that when Blacks complained of the insensitivity of Cubans, who seemed to take the side of whites, a Cuban organization (the Federation of Hispanic Employees of Dade County) charged back with an open letter to the newspaper, *Hispanews*, stating:

Our answer is that it may be okay with Anglos [referring to them as insensitive], since, historically they are guilty of enslaving and degrading blacks for centuries; they owe blacks. But, folks, we Hispanics owe Blacks nothing: what are we guilty of? Of hard work, not only as bankers and entrepreneurs, but also as humble laborers and peddlers? Keep it clear in your head that we have never coerced assistance from anyone, but much rather roam the streets of Miami selling limes, onions, flowers, peanuts, etc. Some folks should try this, it is hard work, but not bad. (p. 151)

This sentiment is representative of an ideology that entitles immigrants to claim a stake to the American dream and all that it offers. Unfortunately, it also reinvents the myth that Cubans worked independently to secure their future. And this is not true. This is reminiscent of whites who conveniently forget about the social programs that helped whites secure mortgages and property (adding to white wealth) that were simultaneously denied to Blacks. Cubans arrived to the United States in the early 1960's receiving assistance and governmental support to establish a strong community in Miami as part of Cold War policy against communism. They were able to take advantage of segregated colorlines that did not care about culture but did care about race. For example, Black Cubans found themselves on the dark side of the colorline along with a segregated African American community. BTB theorists would argue that all people of color, though differently racialized, are equally oppressed. Because Cubans, whether Black,

white, light-skinned or other are all oppressed, first as political refugees and then as cultural outsiders, in their suffering is no less than that of Blacks in a white Anglo nation.

Toni Morrison (1994) describes how the path towards American identity for immigrants has included social distancing from African Americans. Many writers describe how this took place for European immigrants by coming together, across diverse ethnic lines, in the construction of a white racial group. European ethnics were able to overcome what divided them ethnically, and begin defining themselves racially as a monolithic group. Though again, I emphasize that this does not mean that all were (or are) created equal within the white racial group. However, what did happen was that the competing tensions between class, gender, ethnic culture and socio-economic status were overshadowed by what would draw them together — un-identification with Black Americans. Understanding Blacks as non-white, non-privileged, subordinate, inferior, second-class, and even an inhuman species meant that whites Europeans would never occupy that social space and Black people always would. It guaranteed privileges for whites, even poor ones, who would now have a group to position themselves above. The psychological benefit allowed poor whites to overlook the root of their poverty and focus their attention on Black Americans. Social distancing is not simply turning away from or ignoring, but is also actively engaged.

Beyond binary theorists contend that contemporary immigration patterns and immigrant experiences are far different from those of the past. Contemporary immigrants emerge from nations that have been shattered by U.S. and European imperialism and colonialism; the impact of a growing global economy; and 1960's fear of communism. Most importantly, today's immigrants are predominantly from Asia and Latin America,

are non-European and non-Anglo. BTB theory calls into question their attainment of whiteness or even their future ability to attain full-fledged white status, as many Asian and Latino immigrants continue to not achieve on par with their white counterparts. They offer this as proof that today's immigrant population is racially constructed as foreign through culture and ethnicity. This is important because I believe it defines how beyond the binary theory colludes with other kinds of anti-black sentiment. Most importantly, the ways in which they theorize about culture is more closely aligned to how European ethnics claimed whiteness by socially distancing themselves from blackness.

Beyond the binary theory is concerned by white obsession with Blacks and how this overlooks other racialized groups who are not Black. However, BTB scholars fail to theorize about why white Anglos might obsess over Black Americans and how other non-Black and non-Anglo people are implicated. As much as this "obsession" is described in the beyond the binary thought, there is inadequate explanation for why Blackness and its subordination plays such a critical role in American identity, so much so that escaping from it becomes a priority even for new immigrants. Even after proposing that there is an overemphasis on Blacks in U.S. racial thought, BTB theorists commit the same practice. They too seemingly work to ensure they are not cast as Blacks. The idea behind differential racialization may be presented as a post-modern approach to naming how each racialized group has been racialized differently and has had a unique history and experience with whiteness. And while this is certainly true and is useful for understanding how each group has been constructed within white supremacist ideology, there is something about how BTB theorists invoke differential racialization that makes me question if that is really the intention. For one thing, there is a drawing of boundaries

around all other people of color as an in-group, based on their status as immigrants and a generalized immigrant identity and experience, even when this analogy is only symbolic. For example, Juan Perea (1997) places Latinos, Asians, Native Americans, and Gypsies as groups who have similarly shared interest in that they have been denied presence due to the over-presence of Blacks in U.S. racial discourse. The one piece that holds the immigrant identity together for Perea is that these groups are not Black. Kevin Johnson (1997) concludes that coalitions will happen but questions between whom. He then goes on to write about the similarities between Asians and Latinos that should serve as a catalyst for uniting these two groups in particular. Similar to Perea, he determines that there are natural alliances between Asians and Latinos and that this should be explored.

What they manage to do is create an insider group identity based on a symbolic immigrant identity that carries across many lines but that bounds groups together based on an outsider identity unaffiliated with Black Americans. Much like European immigrants who allowed their ethnic differences to take a back seat to the construction of a larger white racial group identification, that formed in opposition of an already constructed Black racial group, I would say that beyond the binary scholarship performs a similar feat around the construction of an immigrant identity. Immigrant identity becomes a category of identification that is able to cross many lines but is unavailable to others. The one point that is consistent in beyond binary field of thought is that immigrant identity (symbolic or otherwise) does not include African Americans and does not see shared interests between them and other non-Black racial minorities. Whereas there are shared interests between all other non-Black people of color, the point of BTB

scholarship is in drawing relationships between non-Black groups while disassociating from Blacks.

The justification is in the name of differential racialization; however, upon closer scrutiny the intention appears to be about drawing boundaries between African Americans and other people of color. For example, for all the avowing of differential racialization, it is curious that it is not applied to understanding differences between immigrants. For instance, wouldn't Asians be racialized differently than Latinos too? What about racialization of more Spanish-looking (i.e. white) Cubans and those of obvious African-descent (e.g. Afro-Cubans)? How do Indigenous people fit into BTB theory and an immigrant analogy?

European immigrants drew similar boundaries between themselves and Black Americans by coalescing within a white racial group. However, the point was not just to become white, but that white, by definition, also meant distancing from Black people. Likewise, the line drawn by BTB theorists calls for the relinquishing of racial, ethnic and other differences for the development of a larger immigrant group identity. This too accomplishes the goal of social distancing from African Americans and blackness, much similar to the paths of other European immigrants of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the same way that European immigrants allowed their ethnicity to become backdrops to their racial identity, BTB theorists argue that today's immigrants are poised to allow their ethnic identities to take backdrops to a larger immigrant group identity that transcends other social markers, including race. This has the problem of hiding how race operates within the larger immigrant group.

Take for example, the immigration context of Cubans and Haitians in Miami. This example tells a story as much about race as it does about immigrant experience in general. When Cheryl Little (1999) points out that unequal treatment has historically existed between Haitian and Cuban immigrants in Miami, her research is criticized by Elizabeth Iglesias who does not disagree that Haitians have been treated poorly but counters that this is how other non-Haitian immigrants have also been treated (e.g. Central Americans) and has nothing particularly to do with the influence of race in immigrant experience. Though race is not used explicitly, the implication is clear from both of the authors. Cheryl Little is making a general claim about the condition of Black immigrants vs. white ones. Iglesias interrupts any hint of this kind of discourse by implying that other non-Black immigrants have been treated the same. In other words, there should be no acknowledgment given to race within the immigrant analogy. Iglesias continues by suggesting that to even bring this up as an issue of differential treatment of Latino and Haitian immigrants is only an attempt at returning to Black/white binary thinking and is ultimately divisive for coalitions within the immigrant community. In other words, an immigrant identity can transcend the boundaries of race. Clearly, the message is, if you do mention this discrepancy, then you are not transcending race but still theorizing from an “outdated” and oppressive binary.

Beyond the binary theorists are little interested in unpacking how Blackness is operationalized by non-Black people of color. It is important to understand this not just in the context of what happens on U.S. soil. For example, it is misguided to only consider how non-Black immigrants may naively become influenced by U.S. attitudes towards Blacks. What ideology about Blackness exists abroad? If transnational

identities construct how immigrants experience and act in the U.S., then it should be relevant to analyze the constructs of Blackness in a transnational context. To this topic, I shall return in the next chapter.

Immigrants do not transcend race. It is important to keep in mind that white Cubans may also have an interest in a power structure that is white and Cuban dominant and Black subordinate. Beyond the binary theory harshly criticizes traditional CRT theory for its essentializing of racial identities. However, it commits the same error by essentializing immigrants into a monolithic group that clearly has racial divisions that are in alignment with the very same “traditional” racial structure they suggest no longer exists.

This does not in any way suggest that they are calling for an end to ethnicity or ethnic identities. However, it does mean that in relationship to Blackness, an overarching immigrant identity transcends the particulars of ethnic group identities. For this reason, theorists like Kevin Johnson (1997) and Robert Chang (1996) can argue that there are similarities between Asians and Latinos because of their history and oppression as immigrants and this will lead to natural coalitions between these groups. At the same time, this relationship between these groups and Blacks is questioned, since Black Americans are not immigrants. Juan Perea (1995) believes that most racial problems that plague immigrants do not operate against African Americans, who by his account, take up a position relative to Anglos in the United States. It is clear that the paths may be different, but the outcomes are quite similar, the creation of larger group identities that are socially distant from African Americans. Whereas the rallying point for earlier immigrants may have been race, the departure point proposed by BTB theorists is culture.

Culture and how it operates as race oppression takes a central role in BTB theory.

Culture is what links together diverging groups and potentially competing interests.

Beyond binary theorists submit that assimilation is not taking place — nor will it — for immigrant and immigrant-descendant groups because of the strong interest in maintaining non-Anglo cultural heritages. This is one of the major differences they cite between post-1964 immigrants and the mass wave during the first part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Cultural racism is yielded against racial minorities. I do not agree with beyond binary theorists when they maintain that this is somehow a unique feature of anti-immigrant, anti-Asian, and anti-Latino racial prejudice. They conclude that this kind of racism is not hurled at African Americans, who they seem to believe are Anglo, at least culturally.

In a dialogue between Jorge Klor de Alva and Cornel West on Black-Brown relations (1999), Klor de Alva comments that a culture is more salient than race for everyone except Blacks, who continue to see themselves in reductionist ways. Thus, for Klor de Alva, blackness or a black identity is associated with degradation and devaluing of the black body. Klor de Alva says,

We have, in the United States, two mechanisms at play in the construction of collective identities. One is to identify folks from a cultural perspective. The other is to identify them from a racial perspective. Now with the exception of black-white relations, the racial perspective is not the critical one for most folks. (p. 503)

BTB theorists commit a series of errors in their analysis regarding culture, its relationship to racism and the implications for Black people. First, culture is itself a



complicated term that is used frequently in this field, yet is not explained. Beyond the binary theorists seem to understand culture as language, food and religious practices (Martinez, 1993). The most discussed aspect around culture seems to be its connection to language, and the use of a language other than English, appears to be an indicator for a group's non-Anglo identity. English speaking Black Americans supposedly do not feel the sense of alienation due to language that non-English speakers feel. This feeling of alienation also includes those who are native-born bilingual Latino and Asian Americans who are restricted from communicating in their heritage languages and those who have lost native languages. Beyond binary theorists conclude that language is one of the major issues dividing African Americans from Asians, Latinos, Native Americans and other communities who are oppressed through English-only policies and practices. This gulf, according to anti-binary theorists extends to Civil Rights issues around schooling and education. Anti-binary theorists find that integrated schools may not be the best option for immigrant or immigrant-descendent families who desire "strategic segregation", that is to say, culture based education that allow students to study their heritage languages and maintain their native cultural funds of knowledge. This does not correspond to an African American history that has always fought for integration into white schools. BTB theory also finds religious restrictions as another aspect of cultural oppression. Latinos, by and large are Catholic, whereas Anglos are largely Protestant. Additionally, Cuban and other Caribbean immigrants may practice religions like Lukumi, Santeria, or Voodoo. Though I find repression of these religions has more to do with their African-based belief system since they can also have negative connotations in Latin American and Caribbean nations related to their identification with African heritage. Elizabeth

Martinez (1993) states that Latin American food is not respected in U.S. society. She tells how Mexican youths are exposed to ridicule and humiliation when they eat traditional foods like tacos, tortillas and beans. All of this kind of phenomena allegedly creates a special condition of cultural oppression for non-Anglo Americans that is supposedly not applicable to the ways in which African Americans are racially oppressed.

I disagree with BTB theorists when they assert that cultural racism is not simply about groups not having their culture highlighted in the mainstream. It is not just about opening the mainstream door in order to have particular foods or music become part of pop culture. This kind of “respect for our culture” attitude is exactly what multiculturalism aims to do. Unfortunately, that does not eradicate racism nor seriously threaten a hierarchal racial structure. And as much as I can understand the empowering thought behind language maintenance and understanding English only policies as an assault on immigrant populations, I do find that the focus on language, by anti-subordination theorists, as the major thrust of cultural racism is shortsighted. For one, I do not have as much confidence as they do that maintaining heritage languages will somehow eradicate a racial hierarchy? Also, the implication is that Black Americans, by virtue of being English speakers somehow now rise to the level of white America in terms of power and social position. Yet, Asian, Latin and Native Americans who are also English dominant or monolingual English speakers do not take this same position along with Black Americans. Somehow speaking English gives Blacks special consideration as full-fledged, powerful, higher positioned Americans, not granted other non-Black people of color.

I have always found this argument a bit curious, mostly because I think they are implying something that is not being said. I can remember sitting in a Women's Studies course a number of years ago. On one occasion we watched a film about Native Americans and their fight to maintain their heritage. In the closing of the film there were scenes of a street parade and Native Americans performing a dance to tribal music. The ending scenes were emotional and uplifting until the narrator ended the film by saying that it is important for Native American people to maintain their heritage, not assimilate and become like other people who were lost—and then the camera immediately shot over to a close up shot of a Black child. I can also recall some years later as a doctoral student sitting in a class discussing the relationship between language and identity. When a student in the class asserted that once you lose your native language you lose your identity, I commented then how does that hold for African Americans who do not speak native-African languages — without saying it directly she again implied that African Americans were lost and without an identity. The implication is that African Americans are assimilated, though language, into white America. However, it should not follow then that African Americans as a group are socially at the bottom, English speaking or not. The assumption, though not explicit, is that African Americans haven't a culture to maintain, at least not one that is authentic and have willingly given up their native African heritage in a bid to become white, making them a lost people. This had led some to comment that the future of race struggles will be waged by issues surrounding citizenship, language, nationality and the divide between those who are culturally assimilated and those who are not (or do not wish to become so).

Beyond the binary theorists argue that contemporary racial justice struggles must transcend “thin” racial identity politics. They have been critical of CRT, describing it as a movement that is orchestrated around the politics of an essentialist Black identity. Francisco Valdes comments that part of the purpose of LatCrit and all anti-subordination theory is to decenter Black identity politics in order to create space to develop more radical ways of thinking about race and identity. He argues that Black identity politics has the potential to submerge all people of color, including foreign-born Blacks, into a universal experience that does not adequately capture the reality of their lived experiences or histories. His intention is not to eliminate Black radical identity, but to understand it in light of many other possibilities in a larger agenda around racial justice struggles.

BTB proposes to develop non-essentialist identities that challenge our notions around race and ethnicity. Scholars, like Juan Perea argue that CRT problematically, forefronts the study of race, when ethnicity may be a more salient category for those who are multiracial. Anti-subordination theorists propose that we look at race and identity from a more multidimensional and complex way that stays away from universal and essentialist perspectives...and consider how those who live in the ambiguous space of mixed-racedness can offer a new way of understanding that multidimensionality.

## **Chapter 4: Blacks as Essentialists**

Multiracialism began gaining ground as a consciousness movement during the 1960's and into 1970's Civil Rights activist period in the United States. The Civil Rights Movement, anchored by radical Black consciousness, created public space that facilitated the development of new ways of thinking about racial identity. Ironically, the goals of the Civil Rights Movement were redefined in such a way as to move future racial justice struggles away from any implication of race at all. We've seen this happen as ideas like colorblindness were co-opted by the Right wing to retreat from race discourse while enforcing its structure. At the same time, a new backlash has come from the Left and liberals who too are more concerned with redefining race struggles around anything but race. I am concerned that multiracial politics or what can also be labeled as the influence of mestizaje ideology in the United States creates yet another avenue to retreat from racial consciousness. Yet, the language is so flowery that it is almost enticing.

As an intellectual field of thought, multiracialism has garnered more attention in the last decade as an outgrowth of postmodern theory and its desire to deconstruct all truths. Additionally, with the 2000 Census and a growing concern around the invisibility of people who did not wish to commit to any particular racial affiliation, there was much more public debate regarding people having the right to define themselves outside narrow boxes. The year 2000 marked the first year that a multiracial category was included in the national Census. In support of this action was a growing number of people, mixed-race and not, who advocated that we begin to complicate racial matters in this country to reflect the reality of our population. That fact was that many people identify as

multiracial and wish to refuse the “racial game” that has historically dominated the United States (Root, 1996; Spickard, 2003; Texeira, 2003; Williams, 2003; Zack, 1992)

While I can certainly appreciate certain aspects of the idea about giving voice to those marginalized, decentering universalities, empowering people to name their experience, and define their realities, I am also concerned that implicit in much of these claims is a desire to retreat from Blackness, even when there is an explicit denouncement of white supremacy. This chapter explores the rise of multiracial or mestizaje consciousness in the post-Civil Rights United States. Though mestiza ideology is a uniquely Latin American concept, it takes a prominent place in contemporary U.S. multiracialism politics. More concretely, I examine the potential for multiracial or mestiza consciousness to, as it asserts, transform the U.S. racial structure and how it casts the position of Blacks in its vision. I assert that mestizaje or multiracial politics may collude in the racial status quo. I contend that this happens as much through a discourse surrounding ambiguity as it does through more overt anti-Black discourse.

### **The Politics of Ambiguity**

In 1987 Gloria Anzaldua proposed that mestiza consciousness was a new way of living in the world. Her work influenced borderlands theory as well as other fields like ethnic studies, Chicano studies, American studies and women’s studies. I first read Anzaldua’s *Borderlands: La Frontera* as a graduate student in a women’s studies course. At the time, I recall seeing her work as powerful in its challenge to patriarchy and the oppression of women. Initially, I read her work as one of affirmation and empowerment. In some ways it reminded me of DuBois’ work on double consciousness and the idea of reconciling the tension inherent in being a person of color (often despised) in a white

world where one must live each day. In many respects, Anzaldua's notion of mestiza consciousness speaks to this existence. However, her work takes the step of attempting to reconcile this tension through the development of a new consciousness, connecting multiple truths and leading to a state of enlightenment.

Anzaldua draws from Mexican philosopher Jose Vasconcelos' vision of a "Cosmic race". She concludes that his vision is one of inclusivity, and it challenged white Aryan racial superiority. Vasconcelos' philosophy about the Cosmic Race in Latin America certainly challenged the idea of white Aryan superiority, but it too is also an argument about racial superiority. The Eugenics movement influenced how Latin Americans saw themselves in relationship to dominant people in Europe and the United States. At a time when Europe and the United States used white racial superiority to justify their worldwide dominance, and "destiny" to rule the "lesser" people of the world, Latin American intellectuals constructed their own race philosophy to account for a large mixed-race population, many of whom were now part of the elite class. Vasconcelos affirmed Latin America as a people willing to amalgamate, unlike the United States where there were sharp separations between the races. He envisioned Latin Americans mixed-racedness as potentially superior for its ability to draw the best from all races and redevelop into the 5<sup>th</sup> race, the Cosmic Race.

I see spiritual implications for Vasconcelos' reference to the 5<sup>th</sup> race as Cosmic. The implication is that the 5<sup>th</sup> race is ordained from a higher power (God) and that mixed-race people have a spiritual role and special sight about the world (i.e. higher consciousness/enlightenment) that those who are not mixed-race do not possess or understand. Yet, there is the provision that mixed-race people, with their special place,

can lead others who are not. On one hand, the idea of a Cosmic Race can be read as an affirming philosophy that wants to shift the location of mixed-racedness from one of marginality, and thus negative status to one of empowerment. At the surface level it appears to be inclusive of all races and advocate interracial integration between all people. However, at a deeper level, Vasconcelos also makes assertions about the greater importance of some races within the cosmic mixed-race. For instance, white blood is infinitely more desired than Indigenous or African blood. In fact, the hope is that African-descent features will become diluted over time and diminish significantly. This represents a form of aesthetic eugenics. Vasconcelos views Black Latin Americans as having substantially less to offer. He hopes that their physical appearance will disappear with continued whitening. In fact, Latin America has an immigration history similar to that of the United States in that they have often attempted to whiten the population through immigration policies that favored European or white immigrants, simultaneously restricting immigration from non-white people. What is clear is that the idea of a Cosmic Race is concerned with the presence of Black blood. This bears a striking resemblance to United States racial ideology about the “taint” associated with Black blood. In the United States the answer was to forbid mixing and institutionalize segregation. The Latin American concept of the cosmic race responds by attempting to dilute blackness. In either case, the negation of black presence is implicated.

Anzaldúa revitalizes the idea of mestiza consciousness as a way of thinking and existing in the world that embraces multiple identities, locations, subject positions. In describing the struggle from the borders, Anzaldúa writes, “Because I, *a mestiza*, continually walk out of one culture and into another, because I am in all cultures at the



same time” (Anzaldua, 1987, p. 99). Anzaldua sees mestiza consciousness as a subjectivity empowered by its tolerance for ambiguity.

The new mestiza copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity. She learns to be an Indian in Mexican culture, to be Mexican from an Anglo point of view. She learns to juggle cultures. She has a plural personality, she operates in a pluralistic mode — nothing is thrust out, the good, the bad and the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned. Not only does she sustain contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something else. (p. 101)

Anzaldua feels strongly that mestiza consciousness is the hope of a utopian future because it is only the mestiza who can dismantle divisive paradigms that are in a constant state of conflict, struggling one against the other. The mestiza is uniquely capable of dismantling paradigms because she is acclimated to living between multiple cultures.

Related to this idea Anzaldua states,

The work of the mestiza consciousness is to break down the subject-object duality that keeps her a prisoner and to show in the flesh and through the images in her work how duality is transcended. The answer to the problem between the white race and the colored, between males and females, lies in healing the split that originates in the very foundation of our lives, our culture, our language, our thoughts. A massive uprooting of dualistic thinking of the individual and collective consciousness is the beginning of a long struggle, but one that could, in our best hopes, bring us to the end of rape, violence, of war. (p. 102)

Anzaldua suggests that mestiza consciousness is positioned to create a more harmonious relationship between racial groups through incorporating many diverse perspectives and

positionalities. At one point, Anzaldua asks a very poignant question—Which collectivity does the daughter of a dark-skinned mother listen to? I take this to mean that the mestiza must decide exactly which side to take in a given context? How this is operationalized is important. Ambiguity is slippery and may conceal collusion with the status quo. Rather than understanding ambiguity as a high moral ground, I see it as opportunity to take the most advantageous side, depending on the way the pendulum swings. Within a racialized social structure (Bonilla Silva, 1996) ambiguity does little to transform hierarchical relations of power. Anzaldua concludes that mestiza consciousness freely merges opposing sides and unifies divisive paradigms. She finds that mestiza consciousness is uniquely positioned to transform oppressive relations of power through its ability to be indecisive, non-committed to any one perspective or vision. She finds that,

It is not enough to stand on the opposite bank, shouting questions, challenging patriarchal, white conventions. A counter stance locks one into a duel of oppressor and oppressed; locked in mortal combat, like the cop and the criminal, both are reduced to a common denominator of violence. The counter stance refutes the dominant culture's views and beliefs, and for this, it is proudly defiant. All reaction is limited by and dependent on, what it is reacting against. Because the counter stance stems from a problem with authority — outer as well as inner — it's a step towards liberation from cultural domination. But it is not a way of life. At some point, on our way to a new consciousness, we will have to leave the opposite bank, the split between the two mortal combatants somehow healed so that we are on both shores at once and, at once, see through serpent and eagle

eyes. Or perhaps we will decide to disengage from the dominant culture, write it off altogether as a lost cause, and cross the border into a wholly new and separate territory. Or we might go another route. The possibilities are numerous once we decide to act and not react. (p. 101)

In the last decade there is more interest in understanding to what extent mestizaje or multiracial consciousness is able to articulate an identity available to African Americans. Although Anzaldua very honestly confirms that there is a denial/rejection of Blacks in the borderlands (metaphorically speaking), she too fails to fully engage how mestiza consciousness will address this rejection. It is not enough to simply acknowledge that it exists, particularly when there is so much confidence in mestiza consciousness as representing a fluid connection between dissimilar and conflictual subject positions.

There are BTB scholars proposing more critical theorizing from the multiracial identity movement. However, it too takes up a problematic position. For instance, Ronald Sundstrom (2008) argues that multiracial consciousness movement must not focus solely on recognition as its ultimate goal. Recognition of multiracial people should be the first step in a larger political project that positions multiracial consciousness as taking a leading role in transforming social relations. Like Anzaldua and Vasconcelos, he regards multiracial people as having greater potential for developing a transformative consciousness that is derived from the state of mixed-racedness. Mixed-race people enter a world in which they are perceived as “broken” and thus alienated by multiple communities. The path towards reconciling these broken pieces is full of tensions, conflicts and uncertainties. Developing an ability to not only negotiate multiple worlds but to make peace with the fact that there are many perspectives in the conflict and each

side needs to be respected, heard and understood, rather than punished or shunned is important.

Sundstrom (2008) uses South Africa as a metaphor for how multiracial consciousness can be radically transforming. In the case of South Africa's dismantling of apartheid, restorative justice preceded redistributive reparation. I take Sundstrom to mean that restorative justice means first focusing on reestablishing healthy individuals (i.e., all people are "*unhealthy*" in an oppressive system — the lines between the oppressed and the oppressor become blurred) before we can begin to do any other kind of work. The problem, however, is that the redistributive piece does not happen, not later — and likely, not ever. In the case of South Africa power relations did not change as white domination continues to flourish even with the changes in Black political leadership. The very same people who encouraged and maintained a system of racial apartheid were perhaps invested in doing the "becoming healthy" work by talking about the need for change, were also uninterested and uncommitted to give up any of their material wealth, prestige, privilege or power. In the end, they protected their dominant position. We must ask, should this serve as a model for multiracial consciousness?

The fact that mixed-race people have had to do this "personal work" in the journey towards self-realization and social awareness, and have often had to do this within their families, means they are uniquely qualified to break ground in leading this kind of consciousness movement. This is similar to what philosopher Linda Alcoff (2000) argues. Using her own experiences as a Panamanian American woman, she finds that mixed-race people, more than any other group, understand the concept that race is socially constructed. She has found that with Panamanians and Cubans her whiteness

may become more salient, however this changes in the presence of Anglos where, depending on the circumstances, she may feel more Latina. She describes how she found herself in conversations with white Anglos who were denigrating other people of color (of course, not recognizing she too was a person of color). She had been “mistaken” for white. She recalls how she wanted to expose the fallacy of race by revealing her own multiracial heritage. She points out that border crossing is a gift for multiracial people in that they are living examples of why race is unstable. She points to Latin America as an example of how border crossing happens quite effortlessly. She writes,

Mixed-race persons probably notice more than others the extent to which “race” is a social construction, ontologically dependent on a host of contextual factors. The meanings of both race and such things as skin color are mediated by language, religion, nationality, and culture, to produce a racialized identity. As a result, a single individual’s identity can change across communities, and a family’s race can change across history. In the Dominican Republic, “black” is defined as Haitian, and dark-skinned Dominicans do not self-identify as black but as dark Indians or mestizos. Coming to the United States, Dominicans “become” black by the dominant standards. In the United States, I generally pass as a white Angla; as soon as I land in Panama, I am recognized as Panamanian. In England, South Asians are identified as blacks. The point here is not that racial identities are misidentified, but that race does not stand alone; race identity is mediated by other factors, political as well as sociological ones. And appearance is also socially mediated; the dominant perspective in the United States on a person’s racial identity or whether they “look” Latino or black is not natural. Appearances

“appear” differently across cultural contexts. (Alcoff, as cited in Bernasconi and Lott, 2000, p. 156-157)

What Alcoff fails to do is a more thorough analysis on why people might choose a particular identity versus another, nor does she unpack why, even in the context of Latin America mestizaje ideology, there is a resistance towards blackness. For example, she comments that in the Dominican Republic Haitians are Black while darker skinned Dominicans become Indians. But, if this kind of seemingly innocent fluidity takes place, where there are no risks involved with taking on one identity versus another, why would darker Dominicans want to be Indian and not Black? Why are Haitians thought to be Black? The fact that people make choices about identity has to be based on some principle(s). To imply that identity choices are simply made serendipitously does not get at the issue of why one is chosen versus another. Identity choices happen because there are social and material risks and advantages attached to choices. Furthermore, there is an illusion about choice that permeates most of this discourse.

This kind of acknowledgement without engagement is also a recurring theme in anti-subordination theory, where one finds comments about anti-black prejudice in Latin America or admission about disdain for dark skin and African phenotype. However, there is little more than acknowledgement that it exists (typically in little more than a sentence or two), as though the presence of anti-Black discourse in a mixed-race/multiracial context is more benign, natural, and unorganized. There is little attempt to understand a relationship to a permanent structure of subordination. It appears almost as though it takes place informally (e.g. comments at the dinner table) but does not travel

outside of the personal and private sphere. However, there is a greater magnitude of social and material disadvantage for Blacks in Latin America.

Often in Latin America the issue of class is thought to have a greater impact upon an individual's place in the social structure than race. The idea is that race is mediated through class. African-descent people have an opportunity to ascend from blackness if they have the material resources to allow for it. As often as I have heard this argument used to suggest that race is not a significant factor in multiracial Latin America, it still does not explain why there are a disproportionate number of African-descent people who are poor. Nor does it explain how this same disproportionate group of people will be able to change their lot, since they are least able relative to other social groups to control opportunities that could affect their lives. More recently, Afro-Latinos are calling attention to the myth of racial harmony. They are also exposing the myth of an encompassing national identity in Latin America. Black identity movements have a history in Latin America and continue to have presence contemporaneously. These groups explain the social circumstances for Black Latin Americans. They argue that anti-Black racism is quite pervasive in Latin American countries. However, public discourse would have one believe that it does not exist. This is important because one of the charges is that when people who are not multiracial or are not "insiders" to mestiza or multiracial consciousness, like that of Latin America, they are unable to understand it and want to analyze race through an American lens without understanding the difference in contexts. Of course, racial ideology changes to accommodate particular conditions. Therefore, it will not appear exactly the same. This is understood. Racial ideology in the United States is also not as fixed and changes to accommodate the conditions of the time.

However, there is a similarity of racial structure that exists globally. It is important that Afro-Latinos, who are surprisingly absent from fields like LatCrit, raise awareness about the contradictions of mestiza consciousness and the presence of anti-black ideology in the Latin American context. The fact that this is ignored by most BTB theorists is problematic.

Ultimately, there is too much emphasis placed on miscegenation as an act of radicalism in and of itself. And, while there may be something to the argument taken from the standpoint that people who have a given experience are able to see it and understand it in ways that others without that experience may not, it should not be taken as a given that miscegenation creates the ability to transcend racist ideology. This is particularly true given the fact that “mixing” with/into Blackness remains undesirable in Latin America, a region of the world that prides itself on its openness to interracial unions. This distaste for blackness is also implicated in the discourse surrounding African American presence in the multiracial movement.

### **African Americans and Blackness in the U.S. Multiracial Movement**

The one drop or hypo-descent rule of hypodescent has meant that Black blood taints the individual. The taint of Black blood has a special place in U.S. history. Hypodescent and the notion of taint related to Black blood have been so influential in American history that immigrants seeking citizenship have historically had to prove they are free of Black blood (Gross, 2007).

G. Reginald Daniel (2002) advocates for multiracial identity in the African American community. He sees multiracial consciousness as a radical attack on the one-drop hypo-descent rule in the United States. Multiracial consciousness as a tool for



dismantling blackness and destabilizing whiteness is a common theme when multiracial theorists address the subject of African Americans. As we know, African Americans, like other people, are also multiracial, comprised of African, Native American and European ancestry. The idea is that white supremacy is destabilized as more people of African-descent refuse to become Black, leaving behind all of its oppressive baggage. This radical assault disempowers whiteness by stripping it of the very thing that makes it so valuable, its “supposed” purity. Like Anzaldua’s mestiza consciousness, Daniel believes that African Americans must embrace “playing the middle” as they take up an identity that is “more than just Black”. He finds that Blacks are more multidimensional than they often acknowledge. His theory about a new multiracial identity locates Black radicalism for the 21<sup>st</sup> century in multicultural/multiracial identity politics that do not commit to one point of view versus another, but rather is hybrid. He writes,

The new multiracial identity belongs to individuals who feel a sense of kinship with both the black and white communities as a result of their multiple backgrounds. Their identity is not grounded in a biological notion of race but on ancestry. Exposure to ancestral backgrounds enhances and makes real their feeling of kinship. Simple awareness of those backgrounds, however, can catalyze this sentiment, and lack of contact does not preclude its presence.

(Daniels, 2002, p.106)

For Daniel it is a matter of African Americans recognizing their mixed race history. He continues by stating,

Individuals who claim the new multiracial identity are neither totally dependent on nor completely free of the cultural predispositions of any given racial group in

their backgrounds. Their style of self-consciousness shapes their identity through “incorporating here, discarding there, responding situationally. They maintain no rigid boundaries between themselves and the various communities in which they operate. They are liminal individuals whose identity has no fixed or predictable parameters. It has multiple points of reference but no circumference because it manifests itself on the boundary. (p.106)

For Daniel, African Americans need only to feel a sense of kinship with their white ancestry in order to access the treasure of their multiracial heritage. Yet, it is unclear how this sense of kinship unfolds between groups when it appears all the responsibility for seeking community lies with African Americans and there is the expectation that with this “knocking at the door” will result in acceptance. This is where the illusion of choice is most problematic. There is a prevailing idea that identity is about choice.

However, as Cheryl Harris (1995) notes, part of what makes whiteness valuable is that it is not available to all and only those who have it are entitled to make decisions about who can acquire access. Multiracial identity has these same trappings. Black or African phenotype does not have the same currency in multiracial politics. Tanya Hernandez (2004) comments that while critical Latino movements have embraced their Indigenous heritage, they have been much more reluctant in embracing their African ancestry. During the first half of the last century, European immigrants made strategic identity choices that aligned them within a larger white racial category. There is an ongoing debate regarding whether or not today’s post-1965 immigrants are following this same path. Some suggest that they are, through greater integration and interracial

marriages, changing our very notions about whiteness (Gans, 1999; Winddance-Twine & Warren 1997, Yancey, 2003). Martinez (1993) however, finds that this is not the case. She notes that post-1965 immigrants, unlike earlier European immigrants, are retaining their languages and cultural traditions — in essence, they are making choices about their identity.

In, *the Racial Middle: Latinos and Asian Americans living beyond the racial divide*, Eileen O'Brien (2008) suggests that Latino and Asian participants are more likely than African Americans to border cross and see race through multiple lenses. This is reflected in how the participants in her study develop hybrid identities. Developing a hybrid identity was often about choice. Like earlier immigrants, there is the power of choice in hybrid multiracial identities. And while I do not contend that there is equal power to make choices within multiracial communities, I do contend that this kind of choice making about identity has not been particularly relevant for the Black experience. Unlike those who allege that this is largely due to Black Americans rejection of hybridity, I propose that it is due to a more profound rejection of blackness and African-descent people.

When BTB theorists propose that African Americans move beyond Blackness, this same approach is typically not proposed to other groups. Asians, Latinos or Native Americans are being encouraged to maintain their racial and/or ethnic identities, as they are symbols of anti-essentialist politics, inclusivity, racial tolerance, and resistant to domination. The presupposition is that multiracial or mestiza identity would not be essentialist because of its openness to diversity and its natural politics of inclusion. More precisely, there is an assumption that multiracial people cannot produce racist ideology

because they acknowledge and respect the multiple heritages embodied within them. Even though a more critical body of multiracialists work problematizes the idea of a Cosmic Race, it often still holds considerable influence in explaining why multiracial consciousness is a form of radical inclusiveness. For instance, Sundstrom (2008) links the obligation of multiracial people to developing an inclusive identity to their need to honor their mothers and grandmothers. He writes,

The assertion of obligation to the memory of our mothers links us to obligations to the memories of our African American, Asian, Latina, Native American and Anglo grandmothers to their and their children's welfare. This is a special obligation that multiracial children must face that is grounded in their experience and family ties". (Sundstrom, 2008, p. 130)

There is an assumption that the multiracial body will naturally lead to the development of a compassionate understanding for multiple subject positions. Part of the claim is based on an assumption about interracial unions. Multiracial consciousness is seen as being based on an openness and strong advocacy for interracialism. Though interracial unions have grown in measure and acceptance in the post-Civil Rights era, this has not extended to include African Americans. Whites continue, even in the post-Civil Rights era, to strongly reject interracial unions with African Americans (Bonilla-Silva, 2003). However, it is also true that multiracial Latinos, Asians and Native Americans more often reject African American partners (Yancey, 2003). Rejection of Blackness is often implicated in residential/housing and education patterns where non-Black groups seek neighborhoods and schools that are not integrated with African Americans (McClain et al, 2006; Mindiola, Niemann and Rodriguez, 2002; Nguyen, 2004). As much as it is

argued that this sentiment towards African American people only develops as a consequence of a Black/white paradigm, which somehow forces non-Black people of color to adopt prevailing white attitudes towards African Americans, this explanation is not satisfactory. A preference for interracial interactions with whites may also be based on an ideology in support of particular positioning.

Richard Delgado (2004) has commented that the fact that interracial unions more often happen between Latinos, Asians and whites but is not inclusive of Blacks should not be taken as social indicators of a rising middle group since, as he describes, these unions may be based on stereotypical traits associated with these groups. Whites could be choosing Asian and Latino mates because they are acting out racial fantasies about docile Asians or hot Latinos. Delgado find that because we cannot truly determine the motivations for these unions, they should not cause us to believe that they lead to any better social positioning for non-Black people of color. It is true, we cannot know the true motivations for why someone marries another person. Certainly people adopt and act upon racist ideology, even in their decisions about marriage partners. Choices we make in our private lives are also implicated in racial thinking. At the same time, this does not mean that these unions do not lead to greater social group positioning, particularly when there are demonstrative patterns to people's choices. A pattern of choices has structural effect and potentially creates shifts in racial ideology.

I recall a radio discussion that I heard while living in Baltimore. This was in 2008, during the campaign of Barack Obama, whose ascendancy seemed to confirm the potential of multiracial politics. The question put forth by the host of the radio show was, why do African Americans continue to show slow progress in interracial unions? The

consensus from callers and the show's hosts was that it was something problematic about African Americans and their continued desire to maintain rigid identity lines that would be destroyed if they allowed themselves to freely engage in interracial unions. Of course, because this was during the presidential campaign, there was a heightened interest in topics around colorblindness and multiracialism. But there was also a keen interest in constructing African Americans as opponents of interracialism and thus 21<sup>st</sup> century racial progress — the new order, as if whites and other non-Blacks play no role in these dynamics.

The idea that African Americans should find liberation through a multiracial identity is based on problematic assumptions. One of the more problematic aspects of this is that often the focus is on locating the problems of African Americans within African Americans themselves. African American problems, therefore, stem from their inability to live beyond themselves, their history or their Blackness. At its most basic level it models the idea that African Americans can escape their Blackness (and subsequent social position) if only they wanted to. And the fact that they don't implies that they don't want to, thus confirmation that there is something inherently wrong with them. This argument is not new, though it has gained strength in the post-Civil Rights era. It is implied in concepts like: "moving beyond Blackness"; "transcending Blackness" or "more than just Black".

In many ways this kind of theorizing reconstructs aspects of the bootstraps/American dream ideology, which proposes that all those who want to step up can, if only they had the values, motivations, and desire to do so. Assimilation is the first step. However, this is a complicated argument regarding African Americans.

Assimilation is often analyzed through concepts like culture, language and identity shifts. However, even still African Americans continue to maintain a disproportionately disadvantaged status in U.S. society. Explanations often refer back to familiar arguments — the idea that they are to blame for their condition, for not moving on (i.e., transcending race). For some, adopting a multiracial consciousness represents the kind of transcendence that needs to take place for African Americans to disassociate from blackness.

I recall attending a graduate course in which the instructor commented that the only way to end racial problems is for darker people (pointing to me in the classroom) was to mix things all up. As she stated, if we mix things all up, we won't know who is what. This could be freeing for Black people. Proposing this implies that African Americans are not already multiracial, just like all other people. This reduces thought about African Americans to biological constructions. This trend follows even in the more critical multiracial thinking.

In response to the criticism that multiracial identity politics play right into conservative ideology, Sundstrom (2008) states that this should not affect multiracial consciousness movements, because it is not their intent. Nor should they be blamed for the co-optation of a radical ideology by conservative elements pushing for a colorblind society. The fact that this occurs should not limit their actions to create a movement around multiracial consciousness. I would agree with Sundstrom regarding the potential for multiracial ideology to be co-opted by colorblind advocates. However, it would be irresponsible to not interrogate why this is useful to further colorblind white supremacist politics. What makes it so attractive?

Sundstrom also concludes that the future of multiracial consciousness in the United States will depend on multiracialists not allowing themselves to be used and instead occupying that third space that is always in motions, shifting between identities and subject positions. Yet, this too is insufficient, precisely because of its slippery nature as it also colludes with the status quo, if it does not clearly articulate a stance against anti-Black ideology. This means critiquing its deployment within its own consciousness movement. For example, it is not enough to say that anti-Black racism is implicated in white rejection of African American people, when this same ideology arises beyond white communities. This needs to be challenged not only among whites but also within multiracial consciousness. Multiracial consciousness cannot be assumed to operate outside of structure. I am concerned when I hear statements that hint at the idea that anti-Black racism will diminish as Black people relinquish their “essentialist” race politics and transcend into the new multiracial order. I am concerned because it denies the fact that Black racial consciousness has its origin in a shared history of oppression and survival amidst every attempt to dehumanize Blackness. The negative construction of Blackness has global presence. Multiracialism contends that it responds to the multidimensionality of oppression, yet it is rather slippery in its response to anti-Black racism. Moving forward it must attend to this part of its discourse — in particular, because it is gaining momentum as a 21<sup>st</sup> century response to racism and creating a more utopian vision of race relations. The focus cannot be solely on non-confrontational reconciliation that is primarily interested in not taking any particular side and shifting allegiances/affiliations as needed.



## Chapter 5: Blacks as Pathogens

During winter break of 2009, I sat with my family to watch movies. During this time there was a lot of buzz about the film, *Precious*, a story about the traumatic experiences of a young girl in an abusive relationship with her family and her struggle to find self-worth. Though the story centered on the young girl, the character that received overwhelming critical acclaim was the actress Mo’Nique playing the role of the abusive mother, Mary. Media reports commented that the role of the abusive mother was so artfully played that it was almost breathtaking. The actress Mo’Nique won a Golden Globe, Screen Actors Guild and an Oscar Award for her portrayal of abusive Mary.

At the same time another film, *The Blindside*, also received critical acclaim. This was based on the true story of NFL football player Michael Oher. Though the film was to center on his struggle in becoming a professional football player, this too was overshadowed by the central role motherhood took in the film. The actress who played his adoptive mother, Sandra Bullock, also won an Oscar for her portrayal.

Both films revolved around similar themes: motherhood, family, community, race, class, values, aspirations, and the hope of education. Both films made an effort to play down the role of race, while emphasizing the role of culture in one’s life. Yet there were strong racial undertones throughout both films. Both films seemed to imply that achieving the American dream had cultural implications — that is to say, that certain cultural values are the most important assets for reaching one’s dreams. The implicit message is that white communities have cultural values that are valuable and thus good, while Black communities are culturally deprived, pathological and thus incapable of reproducing anything that is not the same.

As I watched both actresses receive awards on the night of the Oscars, I could not help but notice the brilliant contrast. Both films won awards for their heartwarming and realistic interpretations. Both actresses won awards for their realistic interpretations of motherhood. The operative word here is *realistic* or the advancement of the idea that these “cultural” images, though cinematic, are *real* accounts of the people and their respective communities.

These cultural messages extend beyond the nation and have a global appeal. The film *Precious*, for example, won awards in Europe and Canada. So we have to ask ourselves, how these images become attractive not just nationally, but seemingly satisfy the appetite of people the world over. I would argue that it is not just because they are human stories, as so often is stated. It’s not just that everyone can relate to these images, because I would argue that is really not the case at all. In fact they are so appealing because most people can relate to them. They represent very specific images of Black people that most have been told and long to see. For many they confirm many ideas about Black people and why they deserve so little.

One might have expected that with the election of the first African American president these images might have been challenged, yet quite the opposite has been the case. More than ever media attention has become dedicated to “exposing” the supposedly inherent pathology of Black culture. Perhaps this is done in the event anyone read too much into the fact that the president is African American. However, rather than highlighting it as specifically Black and racialized, the language is coded with phrases like, “Well, this is part of *the* culture.”

## **Culture in Educational Theory**

Cultural deprivation theory emerged in the 1960's as an explanation for poor academic achievement among Black American youths. Black American communities were thought to be plagued by cultural habits that prevented their assimilation into mainstream society and locked them in a cycle of poverty and marginalization. Cultural deprivation, like other assimilation theories, attempted to explain why Black Americans had not followed paths similar to other European immigrants. Cultural deprivation theorists sought explanations to social problems by examining the cultural heritage of Black communities, which were seen as producing psychologically damaged children (Deutsch and Associates, 1967). The characterizations of Black families and communities were problematic and would be challenged by other theories, but this scholarship has had an enduring effect on constructions of Black youths in educational theory and pedagogical practices. At the time, it was seen as a step away from Eugenics oriented thought about racial inferiority. By making a statement on culture, deprivation theorists created space for thinking about how groups could be manipulated into taking on the right kind of cultural values. In other words, the cycle could be interrupted by acquiring the right cultural knowledge. The focus, however, was still towards changing something about Black Americans. Therefore, the problem continued to lie within Black people. Cultural deprivation theory continued to fall back into a biological argument for explaining the Black social condition.

Cultural difference theorists exposed that schools are not neutral spaces. Because schools typically are modeled on white middle class cultural ways of being, those without this kind of heritage, such as poor and minority children, are incapable of understanding

the rules and expectations of them in schools. Teachers, largely white and middle class, also do not understand the important and often hidden role that culture plays in their classrooms. Cultural difference theorists argue that cultural conflict is the outcome when educators do not understand how students mediate the world around them through their cultural backgrounds. The strength of this work is that it highlights how white middle class values are embedded in most school curriculums. More importantly, they reveal how teachers interact based on the cultural baggage they bring into their classrooms. Educators, according to difference theorists, must begin to understand the culture of their students in order to achieve more harmony. Culturally relevant pedagogy became instrumental in challenging cultural conflict in the classroom. For others, the point was to understand the ways of thinking of culturally “impoverished” groups in order to transform their way of thinking.

### **Culture in the Sociology of Education**

Sociology of education, though committed to structural analysis, has also been influenced by cultural frameworks for understanding academic achievement and underachievement. Segmented assimilation theory is concerned with understanding the relationship between assimilation, immigrant experience and academic achievement. They respond to the question, what patterns for assimilation are post-1965 immigrants of color demonstrating? What is the relationship between these patterns and their academic achievement? Segmented assimilation theory draws together studies on immigrants, race, ethnicity and education. Most significantly, their work has sought to theorize about the relationship between structure, culture and aspirations in educational outcomes for youths

of color. Another piece is the implications of this theory for race relations between non-Black immigrants of color and Black Americans.

Segmented assimilation theory is useful analysis for understanding the racialization process for immigrants in the United States. It exposes the fact that immigrants of color have had a pattern of incorporation unique from earlier waves of European-descent immigrants due to their racialized status in the United States. Race is important for immigrant experience and there is a process of racial assimilation that takes place for immigrants. They argue that many of today's immigrants experience a bumpy, rather than straight-line assimilating pattern. Assimilation is taking place but not without contestation, struggle and challenge. Theorists argue that the racial structure of the United States has proven to be formidable for post-1965 immigrant youths as they negotiate transnational identities, seek to maintain non-Anglo cultures and become American. Also, they point out that within the immigrant group, there is a hierarchy in terms of social mobility.

For example, some segments of the Mexican immigrant population typically encounter greater obstacles in the U.S. than some segments of the Asian immigrant community, who as a group have achieved greater social mobility. African Latinos are more socially disadvantaged as a group than white or lighter-skinned Latinos. This detail is important because they highlight the fact that there is no one immigrant path of assimilation or experience in the United States. Immigrant experience and ultimately social mobility depends on the racialization process for immigrants. Post-1965 immigrant youths subsequently have to negotiate, learn and react to an imposing ideology about race. Theorists argue that race is understood differently than what they

experienced in their home countries. Though this point has been challenged, nonetheless, immigrants are having to think about how racial ideology may differ from their home countries.

Segmented assimilation theorists argue that it will be important for today's immigrants of color to draw distinguish themselves in order to lessen the effects of racialization (Basch, Schiller & Blanc, 1993; Kelley and Schauffler, 2000; Portes and Zhou, 1992; Waters, 1999). Culture is the focal point for distinguish themselves from native-born people of color, particularly Black Americans, who they contend are culturally pathological — the antithesis of good American values. They find that the cultural characteristics of immigrants is really quite similar to that of previous European immigrants in that they have good work ethic, want to achieve the American dream, believe in their potential for success, have high aspirations, healthy attitudes and are motivated to achieve more than what they had in their home countries. Parents of the second generation immigrant youth have high expectations that their children will become well educated and acculturated, though not necessarily assimilate, and live as transnational people.

In many ways this potential to live multiple transnational cultural identities relates well to the ideas put forth by multiracial theory, and BTB field of thought. However, it too has problematic discourse on African Americans and warns immigrants to disassociate themselves, both physically and ideologically away from African Americans. However, the discussion is often situated in abstract language about deviant neighborhood, ghetto culture and depraved communities. Take for example Min Zhou's comments regarding young men in urban neighborhoods:

The creation of concentrated low-income neighborhoods has had social consequences for the people who live in these locales, and particularly for young people who form their expectations from the world they see around them.

Increasing unemployment has resulted in a decrease in the number of marriageable men in a community and a corresponding increase in single female headed households. Without middle-class models, without roles in economic production, and without roles in families, young men in low-income communities tend to become marginalized and alienated. Social isolation and deprivation have given rise to an “oppositional culture” among young people who feel excluded from mainstream American society and oppressed by it. (Min Zhou, 1997, p. 986)

She finds that certain sectors of the immigrant population may find themselves located in or near urban communities that do not display immigrant attitudes about achievement and social mobility. Though Min Zhou and other segmented assimilation theorists argue that racism and structure play a powerful role in social mobility, they still believe in the bootstraps model as a reasonable model for immigrants. They reify the most troubling aspects of American dream ideology without acknowledging the implications of what they are proposing. Min Zhou states,

In a disruptive urban environment caught between rising hopes and shrinking opportunities, younger members of native-born minorities have become increasingly skeptical about school achievement as a viable path to upward mobility and have thus responded to their bleak futures with resentment toward adult middle-class society and with rejection of mobility goals.

Min Zhou, like other segmented assimilation theorists, relies on culture as a tool that can be used for strategic advantage. Though they clearly understand that immigrants too are limited by the power of whiteness, they also appear to be banking on another fact—that they will at least be better received than African Americans. In many ways, this repeats similar paths towards incorporation of previous European ethnics, though the point of departure may have changed from race to culture — both avenues require positionality in opposition to some other entity. Segmented assimilation theorists are correct when they scrutinize the idea that today’s immigrants of color are assimilating easily into whiteness as did European ethnic immigrants of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. They are also correct in pointing out the barriers encountered by the largely Asian and Latino U.S. immigrant population. However, while they confront and are critical of the barriers encountered by immigrants of color, they are not critical of the barriers created between immigrants of color and African Americans. In fact, they contribute to the construction of these barriers. This may have been done through racial superiority discourses, as was the case with European immigrants, but is now organized around culture superiority discourse. Culture becomes a stand-in for race, particularly when it becomes something that is fixed permanently to a group of people and marks one group as superior to another. It constructs a hierarchical ordering based on an ideology about culture. They are not critical of hierarchy, only fearful that immigrant youths will abandon the values that make immigrant cultures relatively superior.

In a study conducted by Zhou and Bankston (1998) on Vietnamese immigrants in the city of New Orleans, they concluded that Vietnamese immigrant youth were poised for greater social mobility due to their cultural background and social networks. They



found that, though the Vietnamese population entered New Orleans poor and often were situated in or near poverty stricken African American neighborhoods, there was hope and expectation that they would succeed in their climb towards the middle class. Education was the key tool through which they sought middle class status. Zhou and Bankston propose that, in terms of material resources, the Vietnamese community was rather similar to the New Orleans' poor African American community. However, the Vietnamese youths were achieving academically at a far greater rate and generally had better interactions with teachers. The local school teachers reported that the Vietnamese youths had fewer problems in school, were hardworking students and potentially had bright futures ahead of them. In contrast, African American students located in the same schools fared much worse and were characterized in far less positive terms by teachers. School officials saw the problem as one of discipline and behavior control for African American students.

Zhou and Bankston found that two parent households, which they compare to the pattern of one parent household in African American families and other "cultural" characteristics such as the practice of shaming those who may appear to be adapting to or identifying with the surrounding social environment, helps to maintain an insular Vietnamese community. A more insular community tends to identify with its own other members and not often with those outside of its group. Social networks within an insular community are useful for those who are members of the group, not outsiders. More importantly, as Zhou and Bankston discovered, strong social networks also helped in enforcing the boundaries of appropriate cultural values and acceptable behavior of Vietnamese youth. Acceptable behavior often signaled disengagement from African

Americans. The issue of insularity is important. Zhou and Bankston, at times, attempt to construct their discourse in benign, unproblematic, neutral language. They talk about the problems of the “surrounding community”; the social deviance of the underclass or the potential for Vietnamese youth to level *down* into ghetto environments and take up cultural identities that resist achievement or reject middle class status.

In much of this work, there is a tendency to talk about environments, particularly ghetto environments, as the problem. There is an active attempt to tone the language down from overtly racial tones to seemingly more amiable ones. However, the result is the same. Environments themselves are inanimate. Using terms like ghetto conjures up particular images of not just objects and undesirable things, but of people. It is not that the environment is undesirable but that the people in the environments are the undesirable objects. Zhou and Bankston (1997) comment that,

In our view, immigrant cultural orientations are not only rooted in the social structure of the immigrant community but also are responsive to social environment surrounding the community. In disadvantaged neighborhoods where difficult conditions and disruptive elements are often found, immigrant families may have to consciously preserve traditional values by means of ethnic solidarity to prevent the next generation from assimilating into the underprivileged segments of American society in which their community is located...we conclude that social capital is crucial and under certain conditions, more important than traditional human capital for the successful adaptation of younger-generation immigrants. (p. 842)

What Zhou and Bankston propose here has problematically reproduced anti-Black racial discourse. More recently this kind of discourse was implicated in stories about the resilience of hardworking Vietnamese immigrants who did not wait for government handouts to rebuild their communities in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. They returned on their own, without any government assistance, and began rebuilding their lives through sweat and hard work — traditional cultural values. This was contrasted to “others” who apparently waited around for others to bail them out and lack any quality of culture. They are not hard working, only want handouts and are fundamentally lazy. Of course, without saying so explicitly, the “Others” referred to are African Americans. There is no need to be explicit. The fact that people generally can attribute coded cultural discourse such as this to a defined group of people is evidence of the powerful influence of race.

The issue of the African-descent foreign born in segmented assimilation theory supports the notion that race is more salient than culture. Most of the work has focused on the African Caribbean and Afro-Latino immigrant populations. They suggest that the only way for African-descent immigrants to achieve any level of social mobility will be through a more strategic perpetuation of their ethnic identity in order to distinguish themselves from African Americans. Sociologist, Mary Waters, argues that by maintaining languages, distinctive dialects, and holding onto any distinct cultural characteristics, African-Caribbean people will draw boundaries between themselves and African Americans. She cautions African-descent immigrants that their immigrant paths will be remarkably different from that of non-Black immigrants because assimilation for them will mean a spiraling down into Blackness. Waters is concerned that racial

consciousness of the Black foreign-born will lead to identifying with the problems and plight of African Americans. However, she also seems doubtful that culture alone will save them. She finds that they are more likely, with subsequent generations, to identify not ethnically but racially as Black. They are also more likely to find themselves situated with African Americans and therefore more often subjected to an identity shift, than other immigrants groups. As much as Waters hopes that African-Caribbean will rise above African Americans, she laments that present patterns demonstrate a greater chance for their becoming Black without any perceivable immigrant particularity.

Waters determined that schooling contributes significantly as many African-descent immigrant youths find themselves in neighborhoods, and subsequently schools, integrated with African Americans. Another factor is that society treats them as though they are African American, as people initially respond to phenotype. However, they should attempt to draw attention to the cultural difference, hoping that white Americans will see African-descent immigrants as any other immigrant group with an “immigrant” culture that discerns African Americans, values hard work, education — essentially the pull yourself up by the bootstrap American dream ideology that does not see barriers as structural but internal.

Segmented assimilation makes a noteworthy contribution in its effort to highlight the significance of race for immigrant incorporation into U.S. society. They underscore that there is no essential immigrant experience. Immigrants today encounter racial barriers that European immigrants have historically not had to encounter. Whiteness is not within reach to the same extent that it has been for European-descent immigrants. Whereas they may have found an advantage in relinquishing ethnically distinguished

identities, today's immigrant of color does not have to follow the same path. Not only do they not have to follow the same path, segmented assimilation theorists argue that it is to their advantage to maintain their non-Anglo cultures and develop transnational identities. They argue that this is particularly true for the immigrant population, who through assimilation, adopt and/or become associated with native-born minority groups, particularly African Americans.

The discussion around African Americans as pathological and threatening for immigrants of color is rather striking in this body of scholarship. For, while it is obvious they are concerned with immigrants of color becoming victims of American racism and denied the opportunity to achieve the American dream, they also collude in anti-Black racism. In fact, they ostensibly promote racist reactions by immigrants of color towards African Americans when they contend that immigrants must distance themselves from African Americans both physically and otherwise. They collude with the idea that African Americans are culturally deprived which builds upon the resurgence of Eugenics grounded biological arguments about Black inferiority. The methods only differ in that they approach the argument through culture rather than genetics. Yet, there is an inherently fixed quality to Black culture. Whereas other groups appear to have options available to transform culturally by adopting to whatever makes the most sense at a given time, Blacks appear in this body of work as stagnant, unable to transform culturally or make similar decisions about identity. They are not dynamic beings in the same way as every other group. Not only are they not dynamic but it is as if they cannot be. For Black people, a dysfunctional, even deviant culture seems to be transferred one generation to the next, much like any other genetically inheritable feature. The final

outcome is that anti-Black discourse guides their cultural analysis. Blacks are the “Other” against which their analysis takes its form and meaning. There is an allowance for racial hierarchy as long as Blacks remain at the bottom. Given that they indicate that Blacks do not have a cultural heritage that is oriented towards American values for success (e.g., they are anti-school, anti-middle class, deviant, lazy), the implicit assumption is that Black people are deserving of their placement and treatment in society. This is important because American dream ideology, so pervasive in national identity, could not categorically deny people *unless* there was good reason to do so. American dream ideology rests on the idea that everyone is granted fair and equal opportunity — and that this is required in a free and democratic country. However, the truth is that not all are deemed equal members of society. A superior status is afforded some over others. The key is in constructing the other as less deserving, due to their own effort or lack thereof. Segmented assimilation theory does not challenge this construction but instead promotes it.

The implications for this were made apparent to me when I lived in Baltimore and found my son attending a new public charter school that served a low income predominantly African American student population. The neighborhood was also near a growing Central American immigrant neighborhood. The original idea behind the development of the school was to create a supportive educational environment for Central American immigrant youths. However, this shifted as another neighborhood school serving African Americans was closed by the state. This population of African American students sought inclusion in the new charter school, which they ultimately gained. During the second year that my son attended the school, there was less Central American

families than the previous year. When I asked another African American parent about the noticeable difference, she indicated that with each subsequent year less immigrant families were sending their children to the school. She, as well as other African American parents I spoke with thought this was racially motivated. There were no explicitly racial statements that supported their claims. However, during my son's last year at the school, there was interest in creating another charter school that might be opening on the other side of the park hopefully to better serve Central American immigrant students. They were in the initial planning stages and invited parents who might be interested to join conversations to explore the potential for the development of such a school. The fact that this idea was on the table was not in and of itself problematic.

Of course, the motivations could have been grounded in thoughtful consideration for creating a better quality education for students. I was, however, keenly interested in the language used to make the claim for the school. There was discourse around the need to preserve culture, to preserve language and ethnic identity of the immigrant youths in the community. There was no overt reference made to distancing from African Americans but it seems the intent may have been there, as the school was to be established on the other side of the park from the original school. It appeared to me that the goal was to establish a school located physically and ideologically away from the largely African American neighborhood. The point is not to suggest that this or any other ethnocentric school is automatically guided by racial motivations against other groups, but that we should be critical enough to inquire to what extent racial ideology drives such

kinds of actions. For sure, culture can be a site of resistance, but we must be critical of how cultural analysis discourse can also be a strategic tool used to push racial hierarchy.

Deficit and difference theories emerged from different perspectives about minority group culture. Both perspectives, however, arrive to related conclusions regarding poor and minority communities — their education problems are related to cultural phenomena, which imply that by adopting the appropriate kind of cultural knowledge and value disadvantaged students can achieve. Cultural difference theory maintains that students' home cultures are valuable in as much as they serve the needs of their respective communities but that academic success of disadvantaged minority students depends on educators developing culturally relevant pedagogy and students acquiring mainstream cultural knowledge.

### **Culture and Colonial Gazing**

When I began teaching in a graduate program in education in Baltimore, I discovered that most, if not all, of my students (largely k-12 teachers) were familiar with two schools of educational thought related to Black students: 1) John Ogbu's cultural ecological theory and the assertion that African Americans have developed oppositional identities in response to institutionalized discrimination and 2) the idea that Black students reject educational achievement because they see it as "acting white" and selling out. These were the predominant lenses through which they saw and understood Black youths and more broadly speaking, Black people. This was true, even when they taught in predominantly white schools. They came to class often thinking that the classes I taught on race would teach them about how to understand Blacks. They identified well with work that examined Black culture as problematic for achievement. They identified



with this work not because they saw themselves in it, but precisely because they did not. These representations of Blacks as oppositional, defiant and deviant resonated with the images they had always had of Black people and Black communities. They also allowed them to produce images (representations) of themselves, white people, white communities that were directly opposite the images of Blacks. This need to view Black culture in order to see and understand the “Other” extended to faculty and larger administration.

During my first year of teaching, the administration implemented a formal and publicly announced plan to facilitate more engagement between the university and the urban city. The implementation of the initiative extended to all academic departments, classes, special interest centers, and many campus activities. Special funding was allocated for students and faculty who wanted to research some aspect of the urban environment. The faculty was encouraged to create class assignments that would require students to think about how socially responsible education requires an engagement with the surrounding urban city environment.

Just how they were to “engage the city” became precisely clear when I attended a faculty meeting to discuss specifically how faculty could align their course requirements with the campus-wide mandate. As I sat, I heard one comment after another about the need to get the students back into the city, back into the urban environment so they could see how people live. As they expressed it, the problem was that students could not empathize with those in the urban environment because students could not see them and empathy came from seeing “them” and “their condition”. There was a whole discussion around “seeing”, and specifically the *need* to see. This discussion went on for awhile

until someone suggested a particular course requirement they implemented for their class. This particular faculty member was going to take a bus load of her students into an urban neighborhood and have them walk around and look. There began a discussion about how great this idea was, since the students needed (once again) to see. To me the whole discussion sounded like we're going to take our clean and pristine students down to come into contact with real grit. This was my first official faculty meeting, but I couldn't hold my breath any longer. I finally raised my hand and responded that the whole idea of taking a bus load of white students into a "urban" Black neighborhood so they can just walk around and "look" sounded a bit like "gazing on the natives" and the implications of this were quite problematic. I asked, what exactly were you hoping to see?

In another tangible way this issue of observing Black people was also highlighted for me upon noticing the many cameras mounted on electrical poles throughout the city's Black neighborhoods. From one corner to the next there was surveillance of Black neighborhoods. The cameras flashed as a warning that they were taping. Thought to be a deterrent to crime, they were public reminders about the character of the people who lived in these particular communities. They sent a message to the people who lived outside of those communities as much as they did to the ones who lived within them.

In *Colonial Gazing: the Production of the Body as "Other"*, George Yancey (2008) discusses how whiteness engages in a "thingification" of the "Other". He says, The European gaze was able to discern with "clarity" and "accuracy" the "truth" about certain human bodies vis-à-vis a white racist discursive regime of truth. The gaze reinforced the truth of the racist categories and the racist categories reinforced the gaze. With regard to the white gaze, it was predicated upon fictive

“race” categories that were believed to designate empirical differences. The white colonialist gaze was invested in a racist regime of classificatory “truth”. (p.2)

Similarly, objectification of Blacks takes place in culture-focused educational theory. There is a need to continually renew negative cultural images of Blacks to make the oppression seem justified and white superiority appears legitimate. As proposed by cultural ecological theory, the idea that African American people are oppositional, reject achievement, resist working, are not invested in education appealed to the students in my classes because they aligned with their ideas about the pathology of Black people. They already believed that this pathology was embodied in Black people. They wanted to read about it in order to find some kind of affirmation for what they had already thought all along. This also affirmed to them that white people are not like this. Therefore, white people have what they have legitimately.

In courses, students often longed to have readings that interpreted Black school failure by looking at culture — seemingly so that they could understand how to help Black kids. However, considering the fact that many saw the social problems of Black people as being rooted not solely in Black culture but in Black people who produce this culture, they were limited in their ability to think beyond this perspective. They also could not understand how this was implicated in their responses to students and ultimately had real life outcomes. During one semester I had several students who were gifted education teachers or specialists. We were discussing why there were few African American students in gifted or honors education as compared to other groups. Given the fact that Baltimore schools serve a predominantly Black student population, the percentage of Black students who were in gifted or honors was disproportionate. What

emerged during our class discussion was that many saw the lack of Black gifted education students as a clear and visible indication of Black pathology. But they also used the cultural deficiency models of Black communities to justify why Blacks could not possibly be granted access to gifted and honors education. During one of our discussions one of the gifted education specialist recounted how she had an African American male high school student, who was doing well academically, ask her if she would recommend him for the gifted/honors program. She told him she would think about it. When he excitedly asked her again a few days later about her recommendation, she told him that she had given it considerable thought and did not think she could recommend him...because as she stated — it would be a lot of hard work and she did not think he *would* do it. This was despite the fact that he had done well academically in general education up to that point. *Would* do the work was the optimal phrase here, since she never indicated that he could not do the work but rather than she felt he wouldn't do the required work. As we continued to discuss this point, she told how she actually had recommended white students who were doing marginal work academically, but she thought they would work hard in the program if given the chance. As she came to realize the implications, she realized her decision not to recommend the African American student was related to her beliefs about the unwillingness of Blacks to work hard.

Returning again to the faculty meeting and the suggestion that students take fieldtrip to the urban environment and walk around to see communities, the presumption was that this was a way to connect students, who are far removed from this kind of living context, to the anguished realities of poor Black people's lives. On one level there was the idea that seeing suffering creates compassion that will hopefully inspire people to

action. On a deeper level there was an interest in seeing the cause of the suffering. The cause, of course, was the ghetto culture that they would now see before their very eyes. If culture is the center of analysis, it seemed relevant, even crucial, to see Black communities displaying their culture.

What the colonizer knows about the colonized constitutes what the colonized *is*. Perception, epistemology, and ontology are collapsed. With regard to the Black/native colonized, what is *seen* is what is *known*, and what is *known* is what is *seen*. Moreover, what is *known* and *seen* or *seen* and *known* is what *there is* (Yancey, 2008, p. 7). At no point was there any thought about a link between white group privilege and Black group subordination. In the focus on culture there was only thought towards the culture of the oppressed group. Not at any point was there any critical thought to studying the culture of the dominant group. In most culture analysis based theory the focal point is drawn around the oppressed group's culture and what lies beneath that may either enhance their mobility or diminish it. In expected fashion, thoughts towards fulfilling the social justice mission rested on studying urban culture and interrupting Black cultural patterns that were thought to be the root of the problem (e.g., change Black attitudes towards education so that they may value it more; interrupting welfare mentality). The more "radical" angles included diversity initiatives, teaching educators how to incorporate multicultural/culturally relevant books in the classroom to hopefully bolster Black students' pride and self-worth. Structural changes were significantly less important, though there were a very small minority few who attempted to engage in this more challenging dialogue. The issue of race was removed from the discourse or encased in

“quotation” marks as though it made little impression, yet the “cultural” language had explicitly racialized thought.

I conclude by returning again to the film *Precious*, which captivated so many and garnered worldwide acclaim. As I read the reviews about the film, I wondered why these kinds of images of Black culture are reinvented time and time again. Even when they are criticized, they still hold interest for millions of people the world over. Cultural language allows for racist talk through more acceptable discourse. One reviewer for EW.com summed it up by saying, “*Precious* captures how a lost girl rouses herself from the dead, and Daniels shows unflinching courage as a filmmaker by going this deep into the pathologies that may still linger in the closets of some impoverished inner-city lives. *Precious* is a film that makes you think, ‘there but for the grace of God go I’. And that’s precisely the point; these cultural images of Blacks allow non-Blacks to see themselves as fuller expressions of humanity.

## Chapter 6: Summary and Conclusion

I posit that anti-Black ideology is unique from other contemporary racial frameworks, like colorblind race ideology, in that it also questions the presence of anti-Blackness in diverse, multiracial contexts. Though I argue that colorblind race politics are an integral part of racial dynamics, and are also implicated in anti-Black ideology, I do find that it does not capture the multifarious quality of a racial context that positions people of color in hierarchical relationship to one another. That is to say, colorblind race theory does not thoroughly address hierarchy between people of color or the ways in which anti-Black sentiment has a prominent position in intellectual thought emerging from what is characterized as more radical discourses on race. Much of the critical work in race theory takes the position that people of color are all positioned the same. Though their experiences with white supremacy may differ, their social location is one and the same. I do not share this perspective. I will now discuss how each chapter highlights a particular frame for thinking about anti-Black racial discourse and what this means for the position of Blacks in post-Civil Rights racial theory.

The first frame positions Blacks as nativist. In reading work from those authors that find a need to move beyond the Black/white binary, there is a tendency to focus an overwhelming amount of attention on the problems that Black presence causes for non-Black people. I wondered why this was the case and what this meant for drawing distance between Blacks and other non-Black people of color. One of the recurrent threads in the BTB body of work positioned Blacks as posing a threat to non-Black immigrants of color and that coalitions should be made between non-Black people of color to fend off that threat. The ways in which BTB scholars positioned immigrants of

color in contrast to Black Americans created a similar context as that of earlier European immigrants during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As scholars like Toni Morrison (1994) and David Roediger (1991) have noted, historically immigrant experience and inclusion was characterized by the creation of tension between immigrants and Black Americans. For earlier European immigrants this meant seeing their lot in opposition to Blacks. This also required that immigrants create both physical and social space between themselves and Black Americans.

This same move has been made intellectually in BTB theory, right down to drawing physical space. For example, fields like LatCrit and AsianCrit distanced themselves from the origins of the larger CRT movement, contending that racial theorizing about immigrants needs space separate from the larger CRT movement which had become too Black-oriented. Proposing that we need unique ways for understanding the racialized experiences of non-Black immigrants of color in the U.S. is neither problematic nor anti-Black all by itself, though it is questionable given that there is great effort in the scholarship produced in LatCrit, AsianCrit and even TribalCrit to make connections between non-Black people of color. The outcome has been the development of a large body of work engaged in reproducing the idea that, in particular, Black Americans are nativistic and thus a problem for non-Black people of color. Blacks are positioned as having too much power and are the special recipients of attention and rewards, as Richard Delgado contends. Delgado thus recreates a common stereotypical image of Blacks receiving more than their fair share — even when evidence does not support these claims, as in the case of Affirmative Action rewards. Ultimately, the consequence is that much of the work in BTB is premised upon a similar politics taken up



by earlier European immigrants — the drawing of insurmountable difference between Blacks and non-Black immigrants; while oddly drawing in-group boundaries around large and diverse populations of immigrants. Though BTB argues that we must eradicate dualistic dichotomous thinking, as it is outdated and does not fit our contemporary racial dynamics, I find that theoretically BTB theory thrives on opposing immigrants against Blacks. The effect is that rather than challenging the prevailing hierarchy, as BTB scholars might propose they do, in truth they strengthen binary thought in relationship to Blacks and immigrants.

In chapter four I discussed a second frame, the positioning of Blacks as essentialist and the implications of multiracial theory that position Black identity as problematic in contrast to multiracial identity. For some, multiracialism or *mestizaje* politics represents the kind of utopian racial vision that potentially transcends racial boundaries. However, there is a subtle hint about the submergence of Blackness in multiracialism. This is related to an idea about diluting Blackness. While the Latin American notion of *mestizaje* is more open about the politics of diluting Blackness, the U.S. concept implies that the diluting of Blackness takes place through a change in consciousness. This is particularly important because, as I argued in Chapter 4, the fact that there are far less unions between Blacks and all other racial groups, would seem to indicate how unavailable multiracialism truly is for Blacks, and that it has to take place through some other means.

I argue that the consequence of multiracial consciousness, as it is currently presented, amounts to a social disengagement from the plight of Blacks but one that occurs within the myth of a politics of inclusion. Latin America provides a telling

example. Hooker's (2005) study of Afro-Mexicans confirmed that unlike Indigenous populations in Mexico, who have been able to bring national and even international attention to their causes, Mexico's Black population has remained largely invisible, even though they are among the poorest class of people in the country. The author concluded that the problem really begins with the contradictory construction of Afro-Mexicans. The public discourse says that they are Mexican and without any racial distinction from other Mexican nationals. National identity takes precedence. On the other hand, they are socially and politically isolated and disintegrated from the larger non-Black Mexican population. In the popular media they are presented as servants, mocked and stereotyped. And though this has been characterized as innocent and not indicative of the race oppression of Afro-Mexicans, their social condition challenges the notion of innocence and confirms a system of racial hierarchy. The author notes that one of the more troubling aspects is that by being publicly defined *within* national identity discourse, Afro-Mexicans have been unable to call attention to their situation as one based on racialized discrimination and oppression. Ultimately, they are in the position of having to explain their condition through the available frameworks that disavow race as related to their social reality, even when all other evidence demonstrates otherwise. This same context is replicated throughout Latin America. I propose that the politics of U.S. multiracialism holds potentially similar consequences and problems for Blacks.

I have been asked how I could argue that Blacks continue to be racially oppressed, particularly given that a Black and white biracial president is now in office. I argue that President Obama is an excellent example of the politics of diluting Black consciousness. Obama's popularity and presence in the White House has been and

continues to be contingent upon the extent to which he will publically make race a non-issue in the specific case of Blacks. On the one or two occasions that he has, he has been publically reprimanded and has had to apologize and reinforce just how much racism is not a problem for Blacks.

The final frame, Blacks as pathogens, discussed in Chapter 5 is an integral part of anti-Black ideology. It is reinvented time and again in ways that make biological claims through cultural arguments. The idea of Black pathogens hints at the possibility, or more importantly, the desire for eliminating the pathogen. I argue that this happens symbolically through an attempt to first construct Blacks as culturally deviant or culturally bankrupt and then second to suggest that depravity is passed along from one Black generation to the next. More importantly, the implicit message is that, for the most part, there is little that can interrupt a dysfunctional and/or deviant pattern of behavior in Black communities. Even when there is an attempt to explain culture in a way that does not openly denigrate Blacks, there is often a point at which the discussion returns to the decided focus: the pathology of Black culture and a desire for its erasure, even if only symbolically.

I return for just a moment to the movie *Precious* to emphasize this point. The movie was flooded by messages related to the pathology of Black culture. However, the story also focuses on the potential attempt by its lead protagonist to escape this cycle. Quite predictably schooling is presented as the key to breaking the cycle of Black pathology — which the lead character Precious attends to enthusiastically by attending an alternative school through which she begins to turn her life around. Quite predictably, at the end of the film, just as she seems to be finding her way, there is a symbolic end to her

— she discovers she is HIV positive. There is no redemption, nor can there ever be, because behind the veil of cultural analysis there is the basis of a eugenics argument about racially inferior Black people who ultimately should die out.

I argue that this is also implicated in the other two frames as well. The subject of Blacks as pathogens emerges either subtly or openly in BTB theory; as well this emerges in the politics of multiracialism and mestizaje consciousness. It is implicated in discourse about diluting Blackness, distancing from Blackness and drawing a special category of difference around Blackness.

In order to challenge the deployment of anti-Black discourse in cultural based analysis, like cultural ecological theory, there must be more engagement with how structure creates particular kinds of schooling experiences based on race. As well, schools serve as active agents for racial reproduction. Group response to the educational system may be constructed upon historical experiences that demonstrate the ineffectiveness of the institution. Ogbu's cultural ecological theory has greatly influenced educational thinking about the influence of culture on schooling experience. Though cultural ecological theory forefronts the study of culture, there is another aspect of the theory that is inadequately explored, even by its authors, and that is the predominant role of a racist structure in producing particular responses to the educational system. Thus far, cultural-based analysis, like the work of John Ogbu, is more concerned with assigning culpability to Black people for a disproportionate share of poor academic performance among Black youths. More importantly, it has become a popular means of justifying racial hierarchy.

While other fields, like segmented assimilation, do theorize about the relationship between racialization and structure, they also are not critical of anti-Black discourse and even make suggestions that Asian and Latino immigrants should disassociate from Black Americans and strive towards mainstream America. Though they may not all at once become white, there is at least the expectation that they do not become submerged at the bottom with Blacks. Challenging anti-Black racial discourse in segmented assimilation theory would require attending to the ways in which immigrants are called upon to uphold white supremacist anti-Black ideology. It would require that more attention be given to the relevance of anti-Black ideology in other parts of the world. Anti-Black racism is also prevalent in Latin America, Asia, and elsewhere — it is a global phenomenon with demonstrable consequences.

### **Implications for Educational Practice**

Schools should be sites where racial hierarchy is challenged. More often schools are places that reproduce inequality rather than interrupt it. This begins with teacher education programs and non-critical reflection on the structure of race. Multicultural education has been a popular “critical” curricular approach adopted by many schools. Its implementation, however, is more often organized around issues of diversity, teaching tolerance and challenging stereotypes by learning about “other” cultures. Even more critical multicultural education theory and practice has not been necessarily focused on the structure of racial hierarchy. Still yet other forms of “critical” education are concerned with the maintenance of racial and ethnic cultural traditions. They talk about race as though it were culture. This means that any response is also culture related — like the idea that people of color need to maintain some kind of pure and traditional

cultural heritage and that this alone challenges racial oppression. Any one or even all of these approaches represent the methods many teacher education programs employ for teaching about race dynamics. Aside from the fact that the focus is rather exclusively on learning about the Other or the Other learning about him/herself, there is little means for developing the ability to reflect on the production of ideology. Maintaining cultural heritages and teaching about tolerance for diversity is incomplete. We also need educators capable of critiquing racist ideology in all its many configurations, including those framed as “critical.”

My study serves as a means for thinking about ideological critique in educational theory and teaching practice. For one, teacher education programs often do not present teachers as racial actors living in a hierarchical structure enveloped in racist ideology. Schools are not neutral sites where ideology doesn't shape the setting, but rather they are places where racist ideology is created, sustained and therefore guides thoughts and pedagogical practices. Teachers often do not understand themselves as ideological beings. In order to interrupt anti-Black discourse, educators must first understand how their professional practice is influenced by ideas that construct Black bodies in particular ways. However, first they must understand contemporary frames for constructing Black people. This study proposes three such frames that position Blacks as pathological, essentialist, and nativistic. Each of these frames addresses contemporary issues around Blackness including: the politics of multiracialism and mestiza consciousness, interracialism, people of color in relationship to one another, racial hierarchy in the post-Civil Rights era, the politics of theorizing about culture, media representations of Black deviance, and global anti-Blackness.

My study proposes a means for (1) guiding educators in developing consciousness for how they, as racialized bodies and actors, are implicated in anti-Blackness and (2) how anti-Black ideology is implicated in texts and the broader school contexts (e.g., interactions between Black families and school officials). Reflecting on teacher education and graduate education studies program there is a need to have students develop the ability to challenge anti-Blackness through a critique of ideology.

### **Contributions to the Field**

This study builds contributes to the body of theoretical work on U.S. racial hierarchy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. A major shift in racial dynamics began to occur in the U.S. after 1964 changes to immigration laws, which facilitated the growth of a large Asian and Latino immigrant population in the United States. Many scholars mark this as the beginning of a new dynamic of racial hierarchy in the United States. As mentioned in Chapter 2 literature review, there have been a number of predictions about the future of U.S. racial hierarchy and whether it will look like a Black/white divide, Black/non-Black divide, a contextualized hierarchy that shifts depending on the issue at hand or a multiracial and multi-tiered hierarchy with a predictably Black bottom. My work contributes to this larger debate, but is particularly aligned with those that theorize about the tri-racial or multiracial tiered hierarchy. This includes the work of Tanya Hernandez (2002) and Eduardo Bonilla Silva (2004). Each of these scholars draws from the context of Latin America as a model for the post-Civil Rights development of racial hierarchy in the United States.

Bonilla-Silva (2004) proposes that the United States is becoming more Latin American like and developing into a tri-racial racialized social system with the darker

skinned or African-descent people largely comprising the bottom of the hierarchy. He aligns this new racial structuring with the development of colorblind ideology in the contemporary United States. Bonilla-Silva's study draws from Census and other statistical data that demonstrates one group in relation to another, concluding that the development of a "buffer" or middle group creates a more nuanced racial hierarchy. The middle group, represented largely by Asians, lighter-skinned and non-Black Latinos, as well as other immigrant groups, like Arabs have social, material and psychological benefit over the bottom group comprised largely of darker-skinner and Black immigrants and African Americans.

Tanya Hernandez (2002) similarly theorizes that race in the United States is beginning to resemble that of Latin America with a hierarchical structure based upon ancestry and phenotype with the dark or African-descent population predominantly representing the bottom. She warns that race and thus racial hierarchy continue to structure social relations in Latin America; however, the public discourse would have one believe that racism is not systemic but rather present only in the occasional individual. The largely multiracial or mixed-race populace is presented as proof of the lack of racism. As well, in context of Caribbean Latin American nations the fact that some darker-skinned people occupy higher level professional positions is offered up as evidence of achieving greater equality. Hernandez concludes that,

The pejorative view of Blackness also discourages demands for additional legislation to make the existing legal structure more effective. And [those] who do speak out on issues of race are in turn labeled racists because of the ideological



equivalence drawn between discussing the taboo subject of race and [as] an act of discrimination itself. (Hernandez, 2002, p. 1144)

My study builds upon both of these theories by exposing the ideological frameworks that position Blacks at the bottom of the hierarchy. Bonilla-Silva states that racism is an ideology that supports a structure of relations. This structure grants privileges including material, social and psychological rewards based upon the positioning of groups within the structure. The important part of his theory is in marking the relationship between racism as an ideology and structure as a set of organized relations. My study contributes by defining three specific frames for understanding anti-Black ideological projects currently underway in the United States.

I conclude by saying that the relationship between these three frames is that all undermine the potential for racial justice for Blacks in the United States, yet each has been presented as radical ways for thinking about race in the post-Civil Rights 21<sup>st</sup> era. Each supposedly offer a way of thinking about race that moves beyond binary thought on race, yet each engages in similar problematic thinking about Blacks as outsiders. They too recreate prevailing anti-Black thought. My study draws other people of color into the structure as racial actors — a subject we have for the most part been unwilling to disentangle. This has gone under theorized within the traditional field of CRT, which for the most part has not analyzed people of color in relation to one another within a structured hierarchy. However, I argue that until we are willing to begin this dialogue we will be unable to offer any type of radical challenge to racial inequality. We must be committed to examining the ideological presuppositions present in our more “critical”

studies and understand how anti-Blackness may permeate these discourses. As Toni Morrison so poignantly wrote:

In what public discourse does the reference to black people not exist? It exists in every one of this nation's mightiest struggles. The presence of black people is not only a major referent in the framing of the Constitution, it is also in the battle over enfranchising unpropertied citizens, women, the illiterate. It is there in the construction of a free and public school system; the balancing of representation in legislative bodies; jurisprudence and legal definitions of justice. It is there in theological discourse; the memoranda of banking houses the concept of manifest destiny and the preeminent narrative that accompanies (if it does not precede) the initiation of every immigrant into the community of American citizens. The presence of black people is inherent, along with gender and family ties, in the earliest lesson every child is taught regarding his or her distinctiveness.

Africanism is inextricable from the definition of Americanness. (Morrison, 1992, p.65)

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