

Latino Racial Formations in the United States: An Introduction

Like much of the Latino Studies scholarship by sociologists, political scientists, and literary or cultural critics, anthropological research on “Latinos” (or “Hispanics”) in the United States is often trapped by a tendency to subsume its subject under the conceptual frameworks of “culture” or “ethnicity.” Indeed, anthropological research, due to predictable disciplinary inclinations, may be especially susceptible to the appeal of “culture” or “ethnicity” as preferred analytic categories. This volume, however, is concerned to foreground the questions of social inequality and political subjugation that are more frankly examined through an incisive analysis of the social productions of “race” (or racialized difference) in everyday life. Culturalist explanations of intra-Latino “ethnic” identifications tend to presuppose substantive, if not essentialized, commonalities *internal* to groups with origins in Latin America, and thereby also take for granted their a priori status *as groups*. Our perspective on “Latino racial formations,” in contrast, focuses on the dynamic and relational processes of power inequalities and subordination to a white supremacist state that account for the eminently historical production of these “groups” as such, and thereby situate them within a wider social field framed by the hegemonic polarity of racialized whiteness and Blackness in the United States. Thus, the “Latino” (or “Hispanic”) label tends to be always-already saturated with racialized difference. With these considerations as an organizing theme, this collection of essays investigates both the possibilities for and limits to pan-Latino identity (*Latinidad*) and identification (*Latinismo*) within the broader framework of racialization.

The intrinsic incoherence of social categories such as “Latino” or “Hispanic,” combined with their persistent meaningfulness, are telltale indicators of the ongoing reconfiguration of “Latinos” as a racial formation in the United States. It is commonplace among many commentators, not the least of which is the U.S. Bureau of the Census, to assert that Latinos are not a “race” and that Latinos may be, variously, white or black, or “some other race” that presumably

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entails any number of conceivable “interracial” mixtures. Yet these claims inevitably take refuge in rather anachronistic crudely biological notions of “race” and overly simplistic naturalized reifications of “racial” difference understood in terms of phenotype and “color.” The legacy of Latin American *criollo* nationalisms that promote ideologies of *mestizaje*, similarly, does not really supply a viable alternative; while they abide by a contrary logic of racialized distinction and meanings, these official endorsements of the racially “mixed” character of their respective “nations” share the same fundamental premises of discrete originary races whose innumerable combinations have yielded identifiable phenotypic categories. As an effect of these conceptual lacunae, many of the prominent contributions to the Latino Studies scholarship opt instead to rely upon the analytic categories of “culture” or “ethnicity” in order to specify and theorize “Latino” identity and community formations, and thus evade the question of “race” and racialization altogether.

Relying upon biological or phenotypic notions of discrete racial categories, the U.S. Census has explicitly reserved the “Hispanic” category as an officially non-“racial” one. By treating “Hispanic” as an “ethnic” designation, Latinos are thereby encouraged to identify “racially” as white, Black, or Native American—in short, as anything but Latino. Nevertheless, this hegemonic “ethnic” distinction instituted by the U.S. state has been particularly instrumental for the allocation of affirmative action entitlements, deliberately constructing “Hispanics” as an effectively homogenized “minority” population analogous to African Americans. Thus, the “Hispanic” status of Latinos is widely treated as a racial condition all the same. Latinos’ responses to the “race” question on the Census confirm precisely this fact of their everyday social experiences: while a significant number, confronting the peculiar and narrowly limited options available on the form, readily identify as “white” (even if many may never do so on virtually any other occasion), what is more revealing is that a comparable number opt instead for the nondescript, “none of the above”

category of “Some other race.” Consequently, social categories such as “Hispanic” or “Latino” are notorious for the ambiguities and incongruities they entail for efforts in the United States to identify and name diverse groups of people with origins in Latin America. Nonetheless, these labels have become pervasive and increasingly salient, both for hegemonic projects that homogenize these groups as a “minority” population, a political constituency, or a market segment, as well as for efforts that seek to produce community and build strategic coalitions for self-representation.

The process by which particular Latin American groups have come to be homogenized as “Hispanics” (or alternatively, as “Latinos”) cannot be divorced from the ways in which such pan-Latino labels were first formulated by the U.S. federal government. The “Hispanic” label was devised by the U.S. state as a deliberate strategy of erasure with regard to the more particular histories of Chicanos and Puerto Ricans, precisely at that historical moment of political crisis characterized by the racial militancy of the 1960s and 1970s (Oboler 1995; cf. Omi and Winant 1986). In 1969 U.S. President Richard Nixon’s proclamation of a “National Hispanic Heritage Week” served to conflate the different historical experiences of Mexicans and Puerto Ricans at the precise juncture when Chicanos and Puerto Ricans were each engaged in increasingly militant and often nationalist acts of cultural affirmation *as distinct groups*, with particular histories of subjugation and resistance, and emphasizing their specific (and potentially divergent) political demands (Oboler 1995:81–84).¹ The heightened public awareness in the aftermath of the Civil Rights era—at both local and national levels—of the existence and increasing political assertiveness of historically disenfranchised groups of Latin American descent, was unprecedented in the history of the United States (Oboler 1995:83). At a historical juncture when there were still only very small numbers of other Latino nationalities in the United States, however, the federal government’s efforts to submerge the two major Latin American national-origin groups under the unitary and homogenizing “Hispanic” label reveals an insistent effort to undermine the specific demands of Chicanos and Puerto Ricans. Furthermore, the invention of “Hispanic” homogeneity also created an unprecedented opportunity for the numerically small but remarkably influential community of Cuban exiles (who were predominantly from elite or professional middle-class backgrounds, racially white-identified, politically conservative) to mobilize their newfound “Hispanic” identity as a platform (see Acuña 1996:9; Oboler 1995:82). Thus, against Chicano and Puerto Rican affirmations of indigenous and national identities that embraced Third World anticolonial nationalism, anti-Castro Cubans supplied a vociferous “Hispanic” expression of Cold War-era anticommunism that was resolute in its newfound allegiance to U.S. nationalism and capitalism.

The promotion of a Hispanic “ethnic” identity, moreover, could serve to distract Latin American populations from mobilizing politically—on the basis of “race” or “nation”—within the United States in ways that identified U.S. military interventions and political and economic domination in Latin America and the Caribbean as the colonial or imperialist contexts for the marginalization, inequality, and racial subordination experienced by migrants from Latin American countries and their U.S.-born or raised children. The Hispanic “ethnic” construct was rapidly institutionalized ideologically in homogenized multiculturalist representations, largely produced and disseminated through educational curricula as well as the mass media. These representations reduced Latino “ethnic” identity to a collection of “cultural” elements that sustained essentialist constructions of the presumed values, beliefs, and everyday practices purportedly shared by members of all Latin American nationality groups. Hence, public education institutions have performed a kind of officially mandated “cultural sensitivity” through the implementation of multiculturalist curricula, often incorporating the recognition of “Hispanic Heritage Month” through celebrations and discussions that focus on “traditional” foods, music, family values, and folkloric displays, while neglecting any meaningful consideration of the social, economic, and historical contexts surrounding the racialization of Latinos as “minorities” in the United States.

The proliferation of mass-mediated marketing images of homogenized “Latinos” or “Hispanics,” though not exclusively a top-down process, likewise, has been historically inseparable from the state’s historical attempts to homogenize the militant particularisms of Latin American nationality groups during the Civil Rights era. Both the Latino and Hispanic labels, but especially the more aggressively de-politicized Hispanic label, increasingly became hegemonic categories of capital with the construction and cultivation of specialized Spanish-speaking market segments. Commercially-motivated constructions of “the Hispanic audience” for advertising purposes produced a largely undifferentiated or massified notion of Latinos as a discrete and unitary racialized market, notably conflating racial nonwhiteness with a presumed dominance of Spanish language that served as a proxy for “low” socioeconomic status (Rodríguez 1998). By focusing on the Spanish language as a paramount basis of *Latinidad*, furthermore, “Hispanic marketing” and “Hispanic-driven media” have repackaged Latinos through images that effectively “render them pleasing to corporate clients,” fashioning them as “traditional and extremely family-oriented,” and by implication, “stubbornly brand-loyal consumer[s]” (Davila 2002:4). This recasting of Latinos as rigidly tradition-bound embodiments of cultural “authenticity” contributes to Hispanic marketing’s role in promoting a simplistic, generic, and depoliticized *Latinidad* that is readily disseminated and eminently marketable (see Davila 2002; Rodríguez 1998).

The homogenized cultural markers and historical experiences of “the Hispanics” which have been largely “invented” and propagated by politicians, uncritical social science, and the mass media and advertising sectors, have certainly inspired some to ambivalently question or frankly repudiate such generic labels as Hispanic or Latino altogether. Others have nonetheless come, to varying extents, to internalize these terms, or at least to strategically appropriate them for various purposes of self-identification and self-organization (Aparicio 1997; Aparicio and Chávez-Silverman 1997; Jones-Correa 1998; Oboler 1995; Padilla 1985). The names of social collectivities, and racialized groups in particular, of course, are sites of struggle between hegemonic labeling and efforts at self-representation. Upon its introduction, in addition to supplanting specific national-colonial heritages, the term “Hispanic” served as a surrogate for such prior administrative-demographic categories as “Spanish-surname” and “Spanish-speaking,” both of which had inevitably failed to adequately encompass the anomalies of U.S.-born English-speaking Latinos, Latinos with non-Spanish surnames, or the nonwhite children of “interracial” marriages—all of whom belonged to the fundamentally racialized category for which these other terminological alternatives had been deployed (see Jones-Correa and Leal 1996:217). Although one criticism of the “Hispanic” label is its transparent Eurocentrism and the implication that the people of the Spanish-speaking Americas are fundamentally apprehensible as derivatives of their former colonizer, the term *Latino* (although it arguably allows for the inclusion of Portuguese-speaking Brazilians) is not strictly any less Eurocentric.² *Latinoamericano* (rather than *hispanoamericano*) is, however, the far more frequently used term *within* Latin America. It is precisely for these reasons that “Latino” has been the widely preferred category among those who embrace a pan-Latin American identification but reject the “Hispanic” label imposed historically by the U.S. state.

The adoption and internalization of a pan-Latino identity among Latin American nationality groups in the United States are often central to processes of middle-class formation and articulations of upward social mobility aspirations among Latinos (Oboler 1995; cf. Acuña 2000:386–421; Foley 1998). Unlike many working-class people in Suzanne Oboler’s research (1995) who frankly rejected the Hispanic label as a strategy to facilitate their subordination, many upwardly aspiring middle-class Latin Americans embraced the more inclusive category as a way to mobilize together and coordinate their efforts in order to achieve the privileges of the white middle class. Various formulations of *Latinismo*, or the strategic deployment of a Latino or Hispanic identity, in addition to the more parochial maneuvers of privilege and status that may unify middle-class people beyond their nationally-inflected particularities, have also been shown to enable cross-class efforts at political

mobilization. While Felix Padilla's analysis (1985) of Latinismo as a mode of coalition-building between "Mexican Americans" and Puerto Ricans in Chicago largely neglects any critical consideration of class formation or the politics of citizenship as such, his study calls attention to the potentially effective political mobilization of a strategic and "situational" Latino identity that can serve as an oppositional organizing principle to ensure public visibility, mobilize electoral influence, and thereby cultivate the responsiveness of those who broker political power. In Michael Jones-Correa's study (1998) of Latino politics among predominantly South American (noncitizen) migrants in New York City, however, transnational commitments and the reluctance to relinquish citizenship in their countries of origin, coupled with the exclusions of U.S. citizenship, produced a redoubled political marginalization. Thus, a dual sense of identity, sufficiently capacious and flexible that it could enable Latino-identified coalitions with respect to local politics in the United States alongside enduring national identities, mediated the ambiguities and ambivalences of a sociopolitical condition of indefinite marginalization. In this sense, Latinidad as a principle of racialized (or "ethnic") organization can acquire unprecedented meaning in the production of an oppositional *political* identity aimed at securing substantive citizenship rights, entitlements, and electoral representation, much as it may serve the more tentative ends of sustaining a considerably more circumscribed political identity for transnational Latino migrants systematically relegated to political existences in the interstices between states and citizenships.

Not only have Latinidad and Latinismo been promoted as bases for oppositional organizing in relation to institutionalized politics, but also as viable strategies in the everyday processes of community formation. In an effort to problematize narrow notions of politics, the analytical concept of "Latino cultural citizenship," initially articulated by Renato Rosaldo (1994; cf. Flores and Benmayor 1997), has emphasized the need to formulate how Latino "cultural" specificity—in its divergence from the normative ideals on which U.S. citizenship and "American" national identity are premised—may be upheld as a vital and enduringly visible dimension of Latinos' struggles for political empowerment and social incorporation. Given that, even as U.S. citizens, Latinos have not reaped the purportedly universal benefits afforded by citizenship, but actually have been rendered suspect as a potential menace to national unity, the claims of cultural citizenship are presented as an alternative medium for Latinos to demand recognition, expand entitlements, and deepen the meanings of social and political membership, without succumbing to assimilationist mandates to surrender their specific "cultural" identities. By developing a wide array of distinctive forms of collective assertion and visibility, including everyday processes of community formation as well as grassroots activism that retain nationally-inflected particularities and simultaneously

cultivate a shared sense of *Latinidad*, this perspective posits that Latinos are better situated to claim rights in a manner that expands the boundaries of social inclusion and eventually secures political entitlements (Rosaldo and Flores 1997). A serious potential shortcoming of this vision is that it ultimately seems to sustain rather than subvert the basic premises by which racialized inequality is organized and managed through the multiculturalist rhetoric of the U.S. state, whereby the effective normalization and subordination of “difference” is facilitated through its accommodation. Nevertheless, the “cultural citizenship” perspective has important potential advantages for simultaneously addressing the racialized subjugation of both citizen and non-citizen Latinos. It affirms the possibility and necessity of political agency that is not confined to the state’s formal constructions of juridical citizenship and rights, and resituates virtually every aspect of Latino community formation within a broadly conceived understanding of the political.

The prospect of community formation among distinct national-origin groups on the basis of a shared sense of Latino identity, however, never ceases to be problematic. Struggles over hegemonic labeling and efforts at self-representation are not only oriented “outward” beyond the group’s variously conceptualized boundaries, but also simultaneously operate internally among contending claims among presumed “Latino” subgroups. A politics of inclusion and exclusion, therefore, is at stake in competing productions of who can be counted as “authentic” or “legitimate” Latinos. As Juan Flores (2000:141–165) argues, the viability of pan-Latino categories of identification hinges on their inclusiveness toward the full range of social experiences, including the divergence between contemporary configurations of Latino “immigrant” groups in contradistinction to the “native born.” In the context of the “New Nueva York,” for instance, the possibility for a tenable *Latinismo* faces the significant challenge of extending notions of language and cultural authenticity to include the experience of English-dominant Puerto Ricans, in particular, as well as U.S. Puerto Ricans, more generally, whose social identities have been partly formulated in relation to African Americans as well as other Francophone and Anglophone Caribbean communities, in addition to Puerto Ricans “over there” on the island (Flores 2000:164). The Latino label, therefore, is inevitably configured in diverse ways in relation to the particular Latin American groups who vie with one another in specific locations. Furthermore, one of the central conflicts over the constitution of these locally-inflected notions of *Latinidad* ultimately involves the racialized stigma of an abject “minority” status that is unevenly distributed among distinct Latino groups.

The boundaries of inclusion and exclusion with the Latino category, then, are remarkably elastic and contested. Indeed, much of the principal analytical theorizing of *Latinidad* has relied upon a notion of Latino identity as a kind

of “instrumental ethnicity,” emphasizing the U.S. state’s imposition of the Hispanic label and the deliberate subsequent deployment of symbolic markers and “cultural” commonalities for strategic political goals (cf. Jones-Correa 1998). One prominent formulation of the instrumentalist approach to Latino identity is Padilla’s concept of “situational ethnic identity” (1985:3–4). Emphasizing the significance of *Latinidad* as an innovative identity that ought not to be taken for granted as naturally or automatically encompassing all “Spanish-speaking groups,” Padilla contends that “Latino ethnicity is an emergent expression of shared structural and cultural feelings, excited as a strategic, wider-scale unit by disadvantaged people as a new mode of seeking political redress in American society” (1985:155). Despite his insistence on the contextual variability of “ethnicity,” Padilla nonetheless reverts to an explicitly semiprimordialist perspective (1985:151), retreating to an analytic privileging of the Spanish language as the presumed symbolic, if not practical, basis for *Latinidad*. Undoubtedly, there is an obvious validity to the claim that the convenience for Spanish-speaking Latin American migrants to relate to other Spanish speakers without regard to national origins holds a simple and inevitable practical appeal in everyday life. But as we have already discussed, such presuppositions must be problematized in relation to the increasing significance of English-language dominance among many U.S.-born Latinos (see Flores 2000; Zentella 1997). To his credit, Padilla acknowledges that “Latino ethnic identity is related more to the symbol of the Spanish language than to its actual use by all members of the various groups” (1985:151), and astutely recognizes that the “primordial” basis of Latino identification may be largely mythic. Still, Padilla’s instrumentalist approach requires that he take recourse to the primordialist assertion that “the unique potential of *Latinismo* or *Hispanismo* for mobilizing Spanish-speaking people as a collective ‘political force’ must stem from its appeal to sentiments of ‘common origin’ . . . Latino ethnic identity, then, needs to be based upon the reality or myth of unique culture ties which serve to demarcate them from other groups or populations” (1985:148). Thus, an emphasis on the instrumental nature of Latino “ethnicity” may appear to shift the analysis away from primordialist approaches that dominated the social sciences until well into the 20th century. Nevertheless, by foregrounding instrumental struggles to define and manipulate group boundaries, such approaches continue to either uphold essentialist assumptions about the presumed cultural “content” that is contained by those malleable boundaries or, as in Padilla, regard essentialist myths as inexorable and necessary. Thus, the instrumentalist emphasis on the strategic mutability of “ethnic” boundaries tends to naturalize the presumed substantive commonalities and coherence of “ethnicity” as a social category based on shared “cultural traits.”

If we dispense with any such culturalist essentialisms about the “content” within the infinitely manipulable boundaries of Latino “group” identity, then, what indeed is the meaningful basis for such substantive commonalities between and among distinct Latino groups? This, finally, is the organizing question that unifies this collection thematically. Broadly speaking, the basis for such commonalities must be located in an analysis of the shared historicity of peoples throughout Latin America in relation to the colonial and imperialist projects of the U.S. nation-state, in concert with the concomitant historical as well as contemporary racializations of both Latin America, as a whole, and Latinos in the United States (González 2000). Such a perspective has the advantage of situating Latino commonalities within a broader transnational perspective that connects U.S. Latinidad to Latin American history and, more specifically, to the historical specificity of the U.S. nation-state’s imperial projects in Latin America that have so commonly produced Latino migrations to the United States. The imperial history of the U.S. nation-state’s relations with Latin America has always been a preeminently political one, and moreover, an overtly racialized one. Indeed, any adequate theorization of Latino social formations in the United States demands a critical scrutiny of how the homogenizing racialized discourses of U.S. imperialism with respect to Latin America have been implicated in the organizing conceptual frameworks for the incorporation of U.S. Latinos as a generic and unitary “minority” group (Aparicio and Chávez-Silverman 1997; Burnett and Marshall 2001; Saldívar 1991, 1997).

By foregrounding Latino racial formations in the United States, this volume contributes to a density of critical dialogue in the anthropology of the United States through a concentrated focus on diverse areas of Latino research which all foreground the wider processes of racialization that mediate constructions of both national and pan-Latino identities in the United States. This collection of essays is anchored in the historical specificities of racialization for distinct, nationally-inflected Latino groups as they position themselves, not only in relation to the dominant U.S. racial polarity of whiteness and Blackness, but also in relation to other Latinos and in terms of racialized distinctions amongst themselves. The essays variously consider how racialized identities are negotiated by Latinos in relation to non-Latinos (especially whites and African Americans), as well as in spaces where “Latinismo” is promoted or contested as an alternative to nationality-based identification; how various Latino groups navigate the polarity of white–Black racial structures and how this shapes intra-Latino relations; how Latinos deploy and reconfigure notions of “Blackness” and “whiteness” *within* the formation of nationality-based identities and, moreover, *across* pan-Latino alliances.

In our own essay, “Latino Rehearsals: Racialization and the Politics of Citizenship Between Mexicans and Puerto Ricans in Chicago,” based on a

collaborative ethnography drawn from two distinct and independent research projects, we examine the constitutive way that the unequal politics of citizenship produced by the U.S. nation-state for Mexican migrants and Puerto Ricans has entailed radically different relations to the U.S. state on the part of each, and thus, has engendered significant divisions between their two experiences. Likewise, these divergent relations to U.S. citizenship have come to be racialized in distinct and historically specific ways—including in the ways that the two groups are positioned, and position themselves, in relation to one another. Ultimately, we are concerned to identify racialization and the inequalities of citizenship as crucial fault lines underlying the possibilities for, as well as the obstacles to, the emergence of a shared sense of *Latinidad*.

In “Suspension of Deportation Hearings and Measures of ‘Americanness,’” Susan Coutin discusses the suspension of deportation hearings of undocumented Mexican and Central American migrants as a context in which U.S. citizenship, constructed as an ostensibly neutral category of juridical membership, systematically privileges dominant racial, ethnic, gendered, class, and heteronormative meanings. Drawing from fieldwork in the legal service departments of three major Los Angeles–based Central American community organizations, Coutin claims that these hearings require that undocumented migrants, in order to be successful in their pleas, construct themselves to be as “unmarked” as possible by presenting lives that approach an ideal proto-citizen and by emphasizing not only an “American” identity that approximates a version of Anglo U.S. culture, but also an identity that clearly reflects a rupture with the migrants’ countries of origin. An applicant’s ability to perform her or his “deservingness” is routinely required to approximate “cultural whiteness” and the heterosexual nuclear family. As Coutin makes clear, these criteria of “deservingness” profoundly curtail full legal and social inclusion not only for undocumented migrants, but also for various cross-sections of others who are already nominally U.S. citizens.

In “Puertorriqueñas Rencorosas y Mejicanas Sufridas: Gendered Ethnic Identity Formation in Chicago’s Latino Communities,” Gina Pérez focuses on how Puerto Rican women in Chicago construct their own “gendered ethnic identities” in relation to *mexicanas* who live in close social proximity as neighbors, family members, partners, and coworkers. These identity construction processes are inseparable from a political-economic context of limited employment, punitive welfare reform measures, and a paucity of affordable housing that have characterized the everyday lives of poor and working-class Puerto Rican and Mexican women. Drawing from ethnographic research in a GED program housed in a cultural center in Chicago’s West Town neighborhood, Pérez examines the gendered dimensions and limitations of *Latinidad*, as well as providing a glimpse into how women of color are enmeshed in

varying discourses of racialized sexuality that ultimately reinforce dominant perceptions of them as “sexually immoral, dangerous, and inferior to white Americans.”

In their study “Changing Constructions of Sexuality and Risk: Migrant Mexican Women Farmworkers in California,” Xóchitl Castañeda and Patricia Zavella examine the multiple contradictions of a racialized “political economy of risk,” as it impacts upon migrant Mexican women’s bodies and gendered sexuality in predominantly farmworking communities in rural California. Drawing from ethnographic research largely based upon focus groups, life histories, and observations at health clinics and social service agencies, Castañeda and Zavella illustrate how poverty, migration, and sociocultural constructions related to sexual behavior and the body account for increased risks of sexual harassment as well as sexually transmitted infections among Mexican women. Castañeda and Zavella argue that the transgressions of hegemonic boundaries based on the politics of sexual inequality actually serve as critical moments of “remapping” where poor Mexican women contest dominant gender discourses and create their own “poetics of desire.” Challenging external attempts to control their sexuality, the Mexican women in Castañeda and Zavella’s research delineated conflictive notions of the body and practices and meanings that situated them as subjects in relation to their transnational racialized lives in Mexico and in the United States.

In “Boundaries, Language, and the Self: Issues Faced by Puerto Ricans and Other Latina/o College Students,” Bonnie Urciuoli examines how the linguistic practices of working-class New York Latinos are constructed as faulty and considered “disordered” at the predominantly-white elite college in a rural area of New York state where they are students. These perceptions of linguistic disorder suggest that language becomes a predominant site on which racialization operates. In the context of an institution of higher education that aims to inculcate upwardly-mobile Latino bilinguals with normative middle-class status distinctions, Spanish and English can only serve as cultural or symbolic capital when the two languages are rigidly compartmentalized, rather than exuding the “disorder” attributed to various forms of code switching. The ideal “multicultural” student at an elite college must possess only a properly ordered “Latinidad” that “educates” the wider college community about their particular “heritage” and is presumed to enhance college life for white students. Furthermore, working-class U.S. Latino students come to be viewed in stark contradistinction to students coming from Latin American countries, and whose “foreign language . . . emblemize[s] national identity *outside* the United States.” In this sense, Spanish becomes problematic only when it is a disruptive, “disorderly” presence *within* the United States. Hence, Urciuoli notes the bitter irony of how the very linguistic practices that culturally validate a

sense of *Latinidad* among working-class New York Latinos actually supply the condition of possibility for being racially marked in the normative context of the college.

In her essay “Binary Oppositions: Reinscribing Ethnoracial Hierarchies in Institutional Settings,” Vilma Santiago-Irizarry argues that “ethnoracial” groups in the institutional context of Cornell University are racialized and hierarchically organized in ways that parallel the positions these groups occupy in the U.S. national imaginary. As Santiago-Irizarry demonstrates, the process through which boundaries of citizenship, entitlement, and inclusion are drawn nationally is informed by a binary opposition that renders African Americans as the primary template for interracial relations and nonwhiteness. Santiago-Irizarry claims that an equivalent process of boundary setting is reproduced in reference to administrative configurations of “ethnic studies” departments and programs at Cornell in ways that emphasize the logics of a politics of identity and recognition that reinscribe a Black–white racial binary. By looking at how academic administrators responded to an institutional struggle over ethnic studies programs on campus in 1998, Santiago-Irizarry illustrates how Latino students and faculty had to constantly renegotiate the terms of these hierarchies with members of other racialized groups—particularly African Americans—in order to challenge institutional efforts to curtail their political power. As Santiago-Irizarry concludes, the prevalence of a Black–white binary persists as a major organizing principle that “contributes to the reproduction of ranked categories of identity” and exacerbates the racialized tensions and conflicts that ultimately serve to undermine effective political mobilization on the parts of racially oppressed groups.

Thus, this volume marshals a variety of ethnographic studies in order to explore the active social processes through which racialized distinctions and group differences among Latinos are continuously produced, reformulated, and transformed in a variety of everyday life contexts. In so doing, this collection of essays contributes to a critical anthropological knowledge of the contemporary dynamics of racialization that continue to be central to U.S. nationalism and nation-state formation.

Notes

1. For a Chicano perspective on Nixon’s “Hispanic” strategy, see Acuña 2000:389; for a comparative discussion of the discrepant nationalisms of Chicanos and Puerto Ricans, see Klor de Alva 1989.

2. Whereas the notion of *Hispanidad* was actively promoted in the Americas during the 19th century by Liberal Spain (cf. Pike 1971), parallel ideological formulations of *Latinidad* can be similarly traced to France’s political ambitions in the Americas during the era of Napoleon III (see Davis 2000:13). In contrast,

throughout the era of “Latin” American Independence struggles and thereafter, hemispheric internationalist formulations of *Americanismo* were explicitly juxtaposed to the Anglo-Saxonist usurpation of “American”-ness by the United States (see De la Campa 1999; Saldívar 1991), ranging from Simón Bolívar’s contention in the late 1810’s that “*Para nosotros la patria es América*” (Oboler 1995:181 n. 2; cf. Padilla 1990) to José Martí’s formulation in 1891 of *Nuestra América* (1979; cf. Saldívar 1991), to the revitalization of Martí’s hemispheric anti-imperialist vision by the Cuban Revolution of 1959, perhaps most forcefully articulated in the “Second Declaration of Havana” of February 4, 1962 (Casa de las Américas 1979:179–207), and reworked in Ernesto “Che” Guevara’s Third Worldist “tricontinentalism” as a reconceptualization of “Nuestra América” as the Latin American “continent” (see Guevara 1987; cf. Fernández Retamar 1976, 1981, 1989).

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