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in the United States

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## "The Enduring Ambiguities of Race in the United States"

Tomás Almaguer and Moon-Kie Jung

### Introduction

In 1903, the distinguished sociologist W.E.B. DuBois prophetically proclaimed that the "color line" would be the principal social divide in the United States during the twentieth century. As we approach the century's end and the start of a new millennium, DuBois's unsettling prediction certainly appears to have an unabated saliency, as the voluminous social scientific literature on racial inequalities continues to affirm.

Though concurring with the assessment that race has been and will continue to be a central organizing principle of U.S. society, this paper shifts the focus from the powerful effects of the "color line" to the "color line" itself. Although the vast majority of sociologists and other social scientists no longer view race in biologicistic terms -- that is, as biologically 'real' and trans-historically constant -- this consensus has not had a uniformly sweeping impact on how they carry out social scientific research, much of which still employs racial categories *as if* they were biologically given and fixed. The straightforward way in which normal social science continues to unreflexively study race obscures the continual ambiguities and contestations over how racial lines have been drawn historically and are being re-drawn contemporarily.

One does not have to fully embrace recent postmodern approaches to race (e.g., Omi and Winant 1986; Stoler 1995; Takagi 1993) or critical race theory (e.g., Delgado 1995; Haney López 1996) to recognize that "race" is fundamentally a socio-historical construct, the categorical boundaries and meanings of which have varied widely across space and time. Because race is a socially conferred status whose biological underpinnings are dubious at best, how and where the racial lines are drawn are open to question, and the possibility for contestation always exists. Hence, the outcomes of struggles to define various peoples in racial terms are largely contingent on the collective powers of the groups involved. Lacking any clear, "objective" criteria, conflicts over the racial designations of groups often

devolve into questions over which groups have enough power and influence to enact their interests (Almaguer 1994).

A distinct, few sociologists have long appreciated this underlying societal context of competition for scarce resources and rewards, in and through which racial matters are contested and negotiated. Writing in 1958 -- when mainstream sociology still equated racism with race prejudice which was, in turn, conceptualized as an irrational manifestation of individual pathology -- Herbert Blumer perspicaciously focused on the process of competition as a struggle for "group position." In his classic work "Race Prejudice as a Sense of Group Position," he argued that "the sense of proprietary claim" of the dominant racial group rested primarily on "either exclusive or prior rights in many important areas of life. The range of such exclusive or prior claims may be wide, covering the ownership of property such as choice lands and sites; the right to certain jobs, occupations, or professions; the claim to certain kinds of industry or lines of business; the claim to certain positions of control and decision-making as in government and law" (Blumer 1958; p. 4). Most recently, sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (1997) similarly called for and outlined a structural theory of racism.

However, on the other side of the same, indivisible coin, we must be cautious to avoid the temptation to reduce race to a utilitarian logic. Race is "not a matter of bread alone" but also inextricably about how people "come to look at the world," themselves, and others (Roediger 1991, p.10). While scarce resources may inevitably invite competition, the fact that the competition often takes place on the basis of race -- rather than on the bases of class, skill, or other identities -- should not merely be assumed as a given but questioned and explained. As Stuart Hall writes, "This gives the question of culture and ideology, and the scenarios of representation -- subjectivity, identity, politics -- a formative, not merely an expressive, place in the constitution of social and political life" (1992, pp. 253-54).

Given its empirically well-documented centrality in U.S. history, *how* has race, a biological fiction, become so ingrained in the constitution of social, political, and economic life? A necessary component of the answer lies with the state, in large part through which seemingly arbitrary

classifications, like race, come to be accepted as "real," as a naturalized part of social reality. As sociologist Pierre Bourdieu argues,

[T]he state makes a decisive contribution to the production and reproduction of the instruments of social reality....[I]t imposes and inculcates all the fundamental principles of classification....Through the framing it imposes upon practices, the state establishes and inculcates common forms and categories of perception and appreciation, social frameworks of perceptions, of understanding or of memory, in short *state forms of classification*. It thereby creates the conditions for a kind of immediate orchestration of habituses which is itself the foundation of a consensus over this set of shared evidences constitutive of (national) common sense (1994, p. 13; emphasis in original).

The power of the state to legitimate racial categories and frame them as the national common sense is empirically borne out, for example, by the history of access to citizenship rights. As historians James Barrett and David Roediger point out, the "sustained pattern of [conferment and] denial of citizenship" based on race -- that is, the state's decisions concerning "whiteness" and hence "racial fitness" for citizenship -- "provides the best guide to who would be racialized [as white and non-white] in an ongoing way in the twentieth-century U.S." (1997, p. 187).<sup>1</sup> Not just important in the construction of racial subjects, even a cursory examination of U.S. history reveals that these state decisions have had tremendous material consequences, determining who could become a naturalized citizen, run for public office, legally vote, testify in courts of law, own homestead land, sit on juries, attend public schools, attend certain public schools, join labor unions, marry, etc. As legal scholar Ian Haney López writes, the state "translates ideas about race into the material societal conditions that confirm and entrench those ideas" (1996, p. 14).

Because it plays such a central role in instituting race "both in things and in minds," both in "social structures" and in "mental structures" (Bourdieu 1994, p. 2), the state has been a major site for

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1 The pattern of denial included the racial prerequisite court decisions denying naturalized citizenship to immigrant Asians (discussed below) and the state-sanctioned denial of various citizenship rights to Blacks under Jim Crow and to large segments of the Mexican population in the Southwest.

racial struggle, especially during the past four decades, as the civil rights movement -- recognizing that the state "had historically maintained and organized racial practices" -- focused on the state as its "chief...target" (Omi and Winant 1994, p. 105). However, long before the civil rights movement opened up the state to minority claims, the state's racial classification schemes have been, from their inception, subject to question and contestation, provoked by ambiguities in society: both the "little society" of contemporaneous biological and social sciences and the "big society" of our nation-state" (Wacquant 1997, p. 222). Through the enactment of its classification schemes, the state equilibrated these societal ambiguities and established them as the national common sense, however temporarily and contingently (Omi and Winant 1994, p. 84).<sup>2</sup>

This paper examines some of the historical and contemporary ambiguities, and rigidities, in the state's necessarily elusive attempts to ensnare race in an ever more refined, more correct classification scheme. It focuses on two of the groups the state officially recognizes as non-white -- African Americans and Asian Pacific Americans -- and on Latinos whom the state defines as a multi-racial "Hispanic" ethnic group.<sup>3</sup> For obvious reasons, the ambition of this paper is not to chart comprehensively the always arbitrary, at times rigid, and intermittently shifting racial boundaries around and within these three categories. Instead, the following discussion seeks to provoke the reader

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2 For example, as Barrett and Roediger argue, "The power of the national state gave new [European] immigrants both their firmest claims to whiteness and their strongest leverage for enforcing those claims. The courts consistently allowed new immigrants, whose racial status was ambiguous in the larger culture, to be naturalised as 'white' citizens...." (1997, p. 186). Largely, though not entirely, the state's resolution of the ambiguity by racially classifying Eastern and Southern Europeans consistently as "white" had the eventual effect of transmuted it into a national consensus.

3 In recent years, there has been a surge of interest and scholarship on the making of "whites," seeking to study the hegemonic and hence previously unproblematized racial category. While we agree with this line of research, the racialization of whites, in general, and the state's attempts to categorize them, in particular, are beyond the scope of this chapter. Similarly, there is a growing literature on the post-World War II formation of a supra-tribal American Indian identity, which we do not address in this chapter.

See Allen (1994), Frankenberg (1993, 1994), Ignatiev (1995), Roediger (1991, 1994), Sacks (1994) and Saxton (1991) for recent writings on white racial formation; and Cornell (1984, 1988), Nagel (1995, 1996), Nagel and Snipp (1993), and Snipp (1986, 1989) for recent writings on Native American racial formation.

to question the past and future stability of the racial lines, which social scientists as well as the lay public often take for granted.<sup>4</sup> It is organized, somewhat loosely, around a major theme concerning each of the three groups; as it will become apparent, the three sections overlap implicitly, since the issues raised are not necessarily confined to particular groups. The first section deals with African Americans and the rule of hypo-descent. The second section concerns the inter-ethnic stability of the pan-ethnic racial category, Asian Pacific American. The third section examines Latinos and the clash of differing cultures of race.

### The "One-Drop Rule" and African Americans

More than any other racial group, including whites, the racial line drawn around African Americans has been the most rigidly enforced in the U.S. From around the middle of the 19th century to the present day, Blacks have been subject to, what anthropologist Marvin Harris has termed, the "hypo-descent rule" or, more informally, the "one-drop rule" (Harris 1964; Davis 1991).<sup>5</sup> That is, if a person has any African ancestry, s/he is considered to be Black. No other racial group in the U.S. is defined in such rigid terms, nor does any other nation define "Black" in such rigid terms; this "color

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4 Here, we are not confining our criticism to the unquestioning usage of race as a categorical variable in quantitative survey research (which not coincidentally mirrors the state practice of the census). Historically minded social scientists have a tendency to project today's racial categories onto the past and also become complicit in naturalizing the categories in the process. For example, Barrett and Roediger (1997) point out that many contemporary analysts are retroactively dismissive of historical evidence, including coeval social scientific evidence, in which turn-of-the-century European immigrant groups are referred to as races (e.g., Italian race), thereby treating them as if they *arrived* in the U.S. as "white" ethnic groups. Similarly, the recent historical scholarship on pre-statehood Hawai'i tends to falsely assume that 'Asian' or 'Asian American' was a meaningful racial category (Jung, forthcoming).

5 "In the United States, the mechanism [of racial categorization] employed is the rule of hypo-descent. This descent rule requires Americans to believe that anyone who is known to have had a Negro ancestor is a Negro....We admit nothing in between....'Hypo-descent' means affiliation with the subordinate rather than the superordinate group in order to avoid the ambiguity of intermediate identity....That a half-white should be a Negro rather than a white cannot be explained by rational argument....The rule of hypo-descent is, therefore, an invention which we in the United States have made in order to keep biological facts from intruding into our collective racist fantasies" (Harris 1964, p. 56).

line" is a uniquely American invention. So widely has this one-drop rule been applied and accepted in the U.S., its obviousness renders it virtually invisible, leading many to believe that this rigid "color line" around Blacks has always been and will always be. In this section, we look to the past and show how the one-drop rule has not always been uniformly iron-clad. And, we suggest that the rigidity of the Black category has also become somewhat less assured since the civil rights movement. But, ultimately, this category is most likely to continue as the most stable of all.

To illustrate the fact that the one-drop rule has not always been so ubiquitously applied, we begin by examining persons of mixed "white" and "African" ancestry in parts of the South during the colonial and antebellum periods.<sup>6</sup> Although the first Africans' legal status may have initially been that of indentured servants, not unlike many Europeans, they were soon singled out for chattel slavery, unlike their European counterparts.<sup>7</sup> Undoubtedly, the racial boundary between whites and Blacks became increasingly rigid with the institution of slavery. However, as widespread "miscegenation occurred in the early colonial experience wherever there were slaves and free blacks," the racial status of people of "mixed" parentage remained somewhat ambiguous, especially in the upper South (Davis 1991: 33). For example, the colony of Virginia in 1662 passed a law aimed at discouraging miscegenation, penalizing inter-racial fornication more harshly than fornication between two whites. At this time, mulattos born to slave mothers were relegated to slavery. But, contrary to the rigidity of the hypo-descent rule, mulattos born to white mothers were *free* until 1681. After 1681, the white "mother had to pay a fine of five years of servitude, and the child was sold as an indentured servant until the age of thirty." (Davis 1991, p. 33).<sup>8</sup>

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6 The initial Africans brought to the U.S., of course, did not think of themselves as "African," "Negro," or "Black." They were of diverse ethnic groups, including Twi, Agante, Fulani, Yoruba, and Ibo, who spoke different languages, practiced different customs, and were not necessarily even on peaceful terms with one another.

7 For differing but not necessarily mutually exclusive explanations for the Africans' being singled out for chattel slavery, see Williams (1944) and Jordan (1968).

8 In this part of the paper, we draw extensively on F. James Davis's important book, *Who Is Black?*, which is, according to its author, the only book-length study of Blacks and the hypo-descent rule. See also Williamson (1980).

A rise in the number of manumissions during the period of the American Revolution, "enlarging and darkening the free mulatto population," led the whites of the upper South to draw firmer racial distinctions. Still, the legal fate of those with mixed ancestry remained uncertain. A decade after the Declaration of Independence, the Virginia legislature, like most other upper southern states, defined a "Negro" as a person with a Black parent or grandparent. Hence, people of less than one-quarter Black ancestry could claim to be white and were entitled to legal protections not afforded their "Negro" counterparts, although they were mostly not accepted by unmixed whites socially (Davis 1991, p. 34).

Even in parts of the deep South, most notably in South Carolina and southern Louisiana, the racial classification of people of mixed African and white ancestry, up to as late as 1850, was not as unambiguous "Blacks." In South Carolina, a colony (and later a state) in which whites were outnumbered by people of African descent by 1708, free mulattos -- persons not necessarily of half-white and half-African ancestry but persons of mixed ancestry -- were considered a third racial category between "unmixed" Blacks and whites. Sociologist F. James Davis points out that South Carolina's early white settlers and early slaves were both from the Barbados, where a similar three-tiered racial order had prevailed (1991, p. 35).

The courts of South Carolina also recognized the distinction of mulattos from Blacks but did not fully resolve the ambiguities of their racial status. For example, in 1835, a judge ruled that the free mulatto in question, who was not only of "known" Black ancestry but also had "some visible Negroid traits," was indeed white. He went further to state that a slave mulatto could not be white but that a free mulatto could be if s/he were accepted by the white community (Davis 1991, pp. 35-36). This ruling shows that the South Carolinian government did not yet abide by the one-drop rule; apparently, neither the white nor the Black categories had to be strictly "unmixed" at this point. But, perhaps adumbrating the eventual adoption of the hypo-descent rule, the ruling also shows that the state was attempting to legally fit mulattos into a two-category scheme, white and Black, although they were socially considered as a third racial group. Similarly, the one-drop rule did not apply in southern Louisiana, where free mulattos also comprised a third racial category. But, unlike in South Carolina, their "in-between" status was even legally recognized by the state. For example, the Louisiana Civil



Code of 1808 not only prohibited free mulattos -- "free people of color" -- from marrying whites but also Blacks (Davis 1991, p. 36).

As seen above, the institutionalization of slavery did not necessarily or immediately lead to a uniform acceptance of the hypo-descent rule by the society at large or by the various colonial and later state governments. Rather, the *defense* of slavery against its critics, especially leading up to the Civil War, forged the rule's acceptance. In the 1850s, the South drew a clearer line between whites and Blacks, increasingly arguing that Blacks were naturally meant to be slaves. And, in the process of drawing a clearer line between unmixed whites and Blacks, the mixing of the two drew a more consistent and persistent reproof, even though explicit arguments that mulattos, like Blacks, were "naturally slaves...were avoided." Hence, the whites' uneven acceptance of mulattos in some parts of the South changed to "guarded reject[ion]" (Davis 1991, p. 42). This shift also had the effect of altering the mulattos' sense of identity, increasingly identifying with Blacks rather than whites. Following the Civil War, the alliance between mulattos and Blacks grew deeper, as the "mulatto elite leaders began to speak for Negroes as a whole and to lead the development of new American black institutions and a black culture" (Davis 1991, p. 43; see also Genovese 1976, p. 430). And, as competition between whites and Blacks for jobs, land and political power intensified during the Reconstruction, whites' racism against Blacks drew decreasing distinctions between Blacks and mulattos.

In the ensuing Jim Crow era of legal segregation, the one-drop rule quickly found social and legal acceptance. Especially concerned about miscegenation, since it would lead to the blurring of the color line, various southern states explicitly adopted anti-miscegenation laws which defined "Negro" to mean a person with "any Negro blood at all" (Davis 1991, p. 55). "In some states the operating definition of black has been limited by statute to particular fractions, yet the social definition -- the one-drop rule -- has generally prevailed in cases of doubt" (Davis 1991, p. 9).

Although the South was much more concerned with establishing a rigid division between whites and Blacks through literally hundreds of segregation laws, the institutionalization of the one-drop rule via the powers of the state was not confined to the South. For example, the racial categories used by the federal decennial census lent credence to the increased application of the hypo-descent rule

throughout the U.S. In 1830, the census, using a nationally uniform printed schedule for the first time, distinguished "free white persons from free colored persons" (Espiritu 1992, pp. 112-113). In 1850 and 1860, the census distinguished white, black and mulatto for free persons and black and mulatto for slaves but did not define the term mulatto (Davis 1991, pp. 11-12; Espiritu 1992, pp. 112-113). In the 1870 and 1880 censuses, mulatto was defined to include "quadroons, octoroons, and all persons having any perceptible trace of African blood." By 1920, the census dropped the mulatto category altogether and defined Black as all persons with *any* Black ancestry (Davis 1991, p. 12). Similarly, in the landmark Supreme Court decision, *Plessy v. Ferguson*, which constitutionally sanctioned Jim Crow segregation of public accommodations, the court ruled against plaintiff Plessy's contestation of an 1890 Louisiana legislation "providing for separate railway carriages for the white and colored races." Plessy's contention was partly based on the fact that he "was seven eighths Caucasian and one eighth African blood" and "the mixture of colored blood was not discernible in him" (163 U.S. 537 (1896)). Though not directly defining the Black racial category, the court "took... 'judicial notice' of what it assumed to be common knowledge: that a Negro or black is any person with any black ancestry" (Davis 1991, p. 8).

Since World War II, much changed in the relations between whites and Blacks. The U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* and other cases and the civil rights movement of which they were a part successfully dismantled Jim Crow segregation during the 1950s and the 1960s. In 1967, the Supreme Court also ruled that state laws prohibiting interracial marriages was unconstitutional, indicating a reversal in its position vis-à-vis the principle of hypo-descent.<sup>9</sup> Also, beginning in 1960, the federal census became self-enumerated. That is, the counted also became the counters; the heads of households chose the racial categories of the household members, whereas census enumerators had classified people racially by observation in the past. At the same time, racial categories and problems of undercounting associated with them became points of heated contention, as "Congress, federal court judges, and public officials turned to census statistics to administer civil rights

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9 "Twenty-two states, including many Northern states, still had anti-miscegenation laws in the early 1960s" (Davis 1991, p. 68).

laws" including the detection of patterns of discrimination and the execution of affirmative action programs (Espiritu 1992, p. 114-115).

Attesting to the Blacks' having accepted the one-drop rule themselves over the years -- both because it became naturalized through customs and the law and because the Black community thus created provided a basis for political as well as cultural solidarity -- the self-enumeration on the census has not thus far "introduce[d] any noticeable fluctuation in the number of blacks" (Davis 1991, p. 12). But, the *de facto* maintenance of the hypo-descent rule is certainly not entirely, or even predominantly, due to its acceptance by Blacks. There is little indication that whites' perception of the racial line between themselves and Blacks has shifted significantly. For example, although *de jure* segregation of the Jim Crow era has been broken, *de facto* segregation has not relented: As sociologists Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton find, "there has been remarkably little change in the status quo since 1970....In both 1970 and 1980 there is little evidence of a significant process of spatial integration among blacks in large metropolitan areas." Signaling African Americans' singularity in this regard, the same study reports much higher levels of integration for Latinos and Asian Americans; the major exception *and* affirmation of this statement are Black Latinos, whose experiences more closely resemble those of African Americans' (1987, p. 823). Similarly, the rate of Black-white intermarriages lags far behind those of either Latino-white or Asian-white intermarriages, only accounting for around 2% of all marriages involving at least one Black partner in 1980 (Sanjek 1994, pp. 113-114).

An interesting example of the persistence of the one-drop rule is the recent golf sensation Tiger Woods, whose ancestry is one-quarter Chinese, one-quarter Thai, one-quarter white, one-eighth Native American, and one-eighth Black. Although Woods's ancestry is fully half Asian, neither the white nor the Black public seriously considers him as the first great "Asian American" golfer in the United States. Similarly, despite the fact that Woods's ancestry is as much Native American as African American, he is also not defined as the first great "Native American" golfer. He remains in the media and in the popular imagination of white and Black Americans as another in the long line of great African American sports figures, albeit in a still predominantly white sport. Fuzzy Zoeller, a

fellow professional golfer, provided the most vivid example of the persistence of the hypo-descent rule following the 1997 Masters Championship. As Tiger Woods decisively won the tournament, which is held annually at a previously segregated country club in Augusta, Georgia, Zoeller derisively referred to Woods as "that little boy" and remarked to reporters that he hoped Woods would not choose fried chicken, collard greens, or "whatever the hell they serve" for the Champions' Dinner.<sup>10</sup>

Although the phenomenon of Tiger Woods is largely an affirmation of the one-drop rule, he is also perhaps a harbinger of future challenges to the rule. He has not been shy about proclaiming to be a "Cablinasian" (the nominal contraction of Caucasian, Black, American Indian, and Asian), which he presumably approximates on legal forms whenever he can. His choice of racial identity, though widely known, does not seem to have drawn vehemently negative reactions from either whites or Blacks. In fact, it only added to his popularity, as Asian Americans (as well as Asians in Asia) embraced him as one of their own.<sup>11</sup> Sensing this shift in public attitudes, Woods's primary corporate sponsor, Nike, cleverly markets him to appeal to all minorities, who have previously been marginalized or outright excluded from the white world of golf.

Personified by Woods's assertion of a multi-racial identity, there is now a substantial, grass-roots movement to gain societal and governmental acceptance of multi-racial identities. As of 1993, "more than forty grass-roots organizations in the forefront of change on this issue...[have] come into existence over the last twenty years since the dismantling of Jim Crow segregation, and particularly the

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10 Televised and written about for weeks, Fuzzy Zoeller's exact remarks to a CNN reporter were, "That little boy is driving well, and he's putting well. He's doing everything it takes to win. So, you know what you guys do when he gets in here? You pat him on the back and say 'Congratulations' and, 'Enjoy it' and tell him not to serve fried chicken next year. Got it. Or collard greens or whatever the hell they serve."

11 Interestingly enough, Woods is apparently seen as primarily of Asian ancestry -- rather than unambiguously Black -- when playing in golf tournaments in Asia. So too, of course, is professional golfer Vijay Singh, who is a Fijian of Asian Indian ancestry and racially defined as Asian/Pacific Islander in the U.S. Yet, Singh -- like Woods -- would be considered "Black" in England when playing in the British Open (because Indians and Pakistanis are so defined in that country). Hypothetically speaking, therefore, it would be possible for Woods and Singh to be seen as "Black" when playing in England one week, as "Asian" when playing in Japan the following, and then return to the United States and once again be reclassified into two separate racial categories.

removal of the last antimiscegenation laws in June 1967." Cognizant of the state's formative, rather than merely reflective, role in the construction of racial categories, these groups have targeted the Bureau of the Census and other governmental agencies to allow those who identify themselves as multi-racial to do so on official forms. Thus far, the Census Bureau has been resistant to "make 'multiracial' an official self-identification," but at least one state government and a few municipal governments have changed their classification schemes to accommodate multi-racial identities (Daniel 1993, p. 179).<sup>12</sup>

As discussed later in this paper, Latinos of African ancestry also tend not to conform to the one-drop rule. Understanding the U.S. racial classification scheme partially through the racial classification scheme employed in the Spanish-speaking Caribbean, which does not abide by the hypo-descent rule, many Latinos of African ancestry do not choose to identify unambiguously as Blacks in the U.S. Taken to their logical extremes, these two trends adumbrate the eventual blurring of the racial line between white and Black. However, given the deep entrenchment of the hypo-descent rule in the constitution of social, political, and economic life in the U.S., any shifting or blurring of the "color line" vis-à-vis Blacks is likely to be a long, contentious process.

#### Inter-ethnic Stability and Asian Pacific Americans

The contemporary category "Asian Pacific American" or "Asian or Pacific Islander" is a pan-ethnic racial designation that has come into widespread use in the past few decades, encompassing approximately fifty different national/ethnic origins in all. For example, under the heading of "Asian or Pacific Islander (API)," one of the six racial categories specified in the 1990 federal census,<sup>13</sup> nine ethnic groups had their own check-circles: Chinese, Filipino, Hawaiian, Korean, Vietnamese, Japanese, Asian Indian, Samoan, and Guamanian. In addition to these listed groups, one could have

12 The directions for the 1990 census, as in the past, clearly indicated that only one racial category could be claimed by a person: "Fill ONE circle for the race that the person considers himself/herself to be."

13 The other five racial categories were "White," "Black or Negro," "Indian (Amer.)," "Eskimo," and "Aleut." In addition, there was also an "Other race" category.

checked off the "Other API" circle and written in an unlisted nationality. Among the listed in the instructions as examples of "other Asian or Pacific Islander" groups were Hmong, Fijian, Laotian, Thai, Tongan, Pakistani, and Cambodian (U.S. Census 1990).

Unlike those collectively defined as "Hispanic," who at least share Spanish as a common language and a Spanish colonial legacy, "Asian Pacific American" encompasses ethnic groups with unique languages, cultures, religions, and, in some cases, several centuries of congenial and/or hostile contact with one another. In this section of the paper, we examine the construction of the Asian Pacific American category. As a recently imagined category, our focus then turns to the future stability of this pan-ethnic racial category. And, while we confine our discussion here to Asian Pacific Americans, the reader can readily detect parallels to inter-ethnic divisions within the Latino, Native American, and even African American categories.

Portending the experiences of the Chinese and successive Asian groups in the U.S. for the following hundred years, the official legal status of early Chinese immigrants in California was adjudicated in 1854 by the California Supreme Court in *People v. Hall*. In 1853, a George Hall was convicted of murdering a Chinese based on evidence provided by Chinese witnesses. However, the California Supreme Court overturned the decision, citing a California law disallowing court testimony from Blacks, mulattos, and American Indians. The court 'reasoned' that American Indians had originally migrated from Asia to the Americas via the Bering Straits and were thereby "Asiatics." Hence, like the American Indians, Chinese were ruled to not have the right to testify in courts of law (Chan 1991, p. 48; Almaguer 1994, pp. 162-163). The decision in *People v. Hall* was just the first of many laws and court decisions in California and other mostly western states through which the Chinese, and later the Japanese and others from Asia, were segregated and discriminated against on a racial basis. Among the discriminatory laws were those enacting public school segregation and prohibitions against land purchases and miscegenation.

The national state was similar in its treatment of groups from Asia. If the "power of the national state gave new [European] immigrants both their firmest claims to whiteness and their strongest leverage for enforcing those claims" (Barrett and Roediger 1997, p. 186), the inverse was the

case for Asians in the U.S. prior to the 1950s. In 1790, the U.S. Congress, "in its first words on the subject of citizenship," restricted naturalization to "free white persons," which remained in force until 1952 (Haney López 1996, p. 1).<sup>14</sup> Hence, as the state restricted access to naturalized citizenship to "whites" for three-quarters of its history, one means by which the state demarcated its official, legitimate racial lines was through racial prerequisite court cases. Fifty-two court cases, in which the racial prerequisite to citizenship was challenged, were heard between 1878, when the first case was heard, and 1952, when racial restrictions to naturalized citizenship were finally removed (Haney López 1996, p. 4).

In adjudicating where the racial lines should be drawn, especially between whites and non-whites, the courts were also forced to justify their decisions in these racial prerequisite cases. To do so, the courts drew on the necessarily ambiguous evidence from society -- in the forms of "scientific evidence," the "supposedly objective, technical, and specialized knowledge" of experts, and "common knowledge" definitions of race, as they were being formulated and contested outside the state (Haney López 1996, pp. 5-9). In every racial prerequisite case involving the Chinese, Japanese, Koreans, or Filipinos, the two types of evidence were not in conflict, as both the scientific community and the society at large were judged to be in agreement. The courts without exception ruled that the aforementioned groups were not "white" and hence ineligible for citizenship. Notably, in all cases involving multi-racial persons with ancestry in any of the preceding four groups, the courts again ruled without exception that they were not "white," echoing the hypo-descent rule applied to African Americans (Haney López 1996, pp. 203-208).

Of all the ethnic groups considered as Asian or Pacific Islander today, the "whiteness" of Asian Indians was the only one on which the courts equivocated. In 1910, 1913, 1919, and 1920, the courts adjudged Asian Indians to be "white persons." But, in 1909, 1917, and 1923, the courts decided that they were indeed not "white" (Haney López 1996, p. 67). The definitive word on the matter prior to World War II was handed down by the Supreme Court in 1923 in the case, *United States v. Bhagat Singh*

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14 During the Reconstruction, the Naturalization Act of 1790 was amended in 1870 to include "aliens of African nativity and to persons of African descent."

*Thind*. Thind's position rested on current scientific evidence in which Asian Indians were classified as "Caucasian." And, as the Supreme Court had earlier equated "white" with "Caucasian," Thind proffered that he was white and entitled to the right of naturalization. Faced with conflicting evidence, the Supreme Court decided against scientific evidence and "adopted the 'understanding of the common man' as the exclusive interpretive principle for creating legal taxonomies of race" (Haney López 1996, p. 90). Determining that Asian Indians were treated as non-white by the society, the Supreme Court ruled that they were not eligible for naturalized citizenship. In addition to its particular effect on Asian Indians, the case finally resolved a long point of ambiguity, the intermittent conflict between scientific and social understandings of race.<sup>15</sup> From this case forward, the racial classification understandings of the federal judiciary and of the "common man" in society were theoretically to be one and the same, mutually reinforcing and naturalizing one another.

These decisions at the national level to exclude the aforementioned groups from obtaining citizenship also shaped the language of laws at the state level enacting various discrimination measures against Asians. Among the most important were the alien land laws which prohibited the purchase or lease of land by "aliens ineligible to citizenship." Enacted first in California in 1913, the states of Arizona, Washington, Louisiana, new Mexico, Idaho, Montana, Oregon and Kansas quickly followed suit. Later, during World War II, Utah, Wyoming, and Arkansas -- three of the states with concentration camps for Japanese internment -- passed similar laws as preventive measures (Chan 1991, p. 47).

Affirmatively responding to racist white working class movements on the West Coast, the national state also enacted various anti-Asian immigration laws. In 1882, the Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act, which was renewed decennially thereafter. Because Japan was a growing international power, the U.S. did not take a unilateral approach but 'negotiated' the "Gentlemen's Agreement in 1907," by which the Japanese government stopped issuing passports; the Japanese government in 1905 had already stopped the emigration of Koreans, as it took colonial possession of

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15 Such conflicts between scientific and social understandings also had arisen or would subsequently arise in racial prerequisite cases involving Syrians, Armenians, Afghans, and Arabians.



Korea. The federal courts' equivocation on the racial status of Asian Indians also had its counterpart in the enactment of anti-immigration measures against them. After a period of halting administrative measures to minimize Asian Indian immigration, the Congress finally passed the Immigration Act of 1917 which forbade entry of persons from the "barred zone." The "barred zone" referred to all land east of an imaginary racial and geographical line drawn "from the Red to the Mediterranean, Aegean, and Black seas, through the Caucasus Mountains and the Caspian Sea, along the Ural River, and then through the Ural Mountains" (Chan 1991, p. 55). In 1924, all of the preceding anti-immigration acts were superseded by the Immigration Act of 1924, which barred the entry of "aliens ineligible to citizenship."<sup>16</sup> Because the Philippines was a colony of the U.S., the entry of Filipinos -- who as "nationals" (rather than "aliens") had nonetheless been deemed not "white" and hence ineligible for citizenship -- was still permitted until 1934, when the Tydings-McDuffie Act limited Filipino immigration to 50 persons per year.

Despite the similarity of the experiences shared by the preceding Asian groups as "aliens ineligible to citizenship," they did not forge a pan-Asian identity prior to the 1960s.<sup>17</sup> Because the groups had immigrated in successive waves, the racist exclusion movements and legislations had also come in successive waves, targeting specific ethnic groups each time. Hence, there was widespread ethnic disidentification among Asians in the U.S. For example, as the intense racism directed earlier at the Chinese began to be displaced onto them, the newly arriving Japanese insisted upon their distinctness from their Chinese predecessors in an attempt to stave off exclusionist movements and laws. In addition to practicing ethnic disidentification to minimize their exposure to white racism, the various Asian groups lived in segregated communities, apart not only from the larger white society but from each other, which limited interactions among the groups (Espiritu 1991, pp. 20-24). Furthermore,

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16 By 1924, unlike in 1917, the Supreme Court had definitively decided that Asian Indians were "ineligible to citizenship."

This law also severely restricted the immigration of Southern and Eastern Europeans.

17 Also, although the state bound the various Asian groups together as "aliens ineligible to citizenship," this label did not *yet* mean that the state considered all groups so labeled to be of *one* race. For example, the federal census listed multiple Asian groups as separate races until 1990.

homeland politics kept the groups apart, especially between the Japanese and peoples from regions colonized by Japan and especially during the period leading up to and including World War II.

As sociologist Yen Le Espiritu argues in her ground-breaking book, *Asian American Panethnicity*, Asian American pan-ethnicity took shape among Asian Americans in the decades following World War II. Three structural factors stood out in facilitating its formation. First, the immigrant generation of Asians became outnumbered by second and third generation native-born Americans of Asian descent, among whom past conflicts rooted in homeland politics receded in importance. Second, residential segregation of various Asian ethnic groups decreased in the more racially democratic post-war years, increasing their interactions not only with whites but with other Asian groups. Third, more Asian students were attending colleges, again increasing social contact among the various Asian ethnic groups. These changes led to closer interactions among the Asian ethnic groups and to a growing recognition of commonalities in their past and current experiences in the U.S. And, inspired by the civil rights movement, the Black Power movement, and the anti-colonial struggles in Asia, "Asian American activists built pan-Asian solidarity by pointing out their common fate in American society" (Espiritu 1991, p. 31). They interpreted their "unequal circumstances and histories as being related" (Lowe 1991, p. 30 as cited in Espiritu 1991, p. 31).

In large part due to the minority activists' success during the 1960s in opening up the state to minority claims, the state took a more interventionist role in redressing past and present racial discrimination. Especially during the Johnson administration, the state responded by giving more attention to social welfare and affirmative action policies. As Espiritu writes, "the social policies of the Johnson years legitimized the claims of the disadvantaged by placing them on the national agenda. Administratively, blacks, Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, Native Americans, and Asian Americans became 'disadvantaged' groups, deserving of assistance to correct past discrimination" (1991, p. 86). To be effective in procuring material gains for their communities, Asian Pacific American social service providers, prompted by and joining the pan-Asian activism, united across ethnic lines "to lobby for Asian American welfare, demanding not only equal access to services but also equal opportunities to administer those services" (Espiritu 1991, p. 87). Pan-ethnicity not only gave Asian Pacific Americans

more political clout, but the state itself preferred to deal with and give funding to pan-Asian organizations "because politically it is the safest decision, freeing [it] from having to choose one Asian ethnic group over another" (Espiritu 1991, p. 93).

On the construction of an Asian Pacific American pan-ethnicity, Espiritu convincingly concludes that "[a]lthough the pan-Asian concept may have originated in the minds of non-Asians, it is today more than a reflection of this misperception. Asian Americans did not just adopt the concept but also transformed it to conform to their ideological and political needs." By "misperception," she means the tendency of non-Asian Americans to "lump all Asian Americans together and treat them as if they were the same" (1991, p. 162).

To Espiritu's conclusion, we would add more emphasis to the state's formative role in having shaped the categorical boundary of "Asian or Pacific Islander." Undoubtedly, the white public's racial lumping of different Asian American groups contributed to the development of a pan-ethnic identity, as Asian American historians have documented (e.g., Chan 1991; Takaki 1989). But, not all the groups falling within the current Asian Pacific American label were racially lumped together by the public prior to the development of a pan-ethnic identity. For example, an Asian Indian would not have been mistaken for a Japanese. Furthermore, most of the groups falling within the Asian Pacific American category now did not have much of a presence in the U.S. prior to the 1960s.

Above all, the "Asian or Pacific Islander" category was initially a *state invention*, which paralleled but was not necessarily the same as the public's racial lumping of Asian Americans. We can see the categorical boundary of Asian Pacific American beginning to take shape with the Immigration Act of 1917, which drew an imaginary racial line on the continent of Asia in the state's attempt to exclude Asian Indians from "whiteness." Although the vast territory between this line and the U.S. did not yet signify *one* race, the state had started on its way, marking the vast area not "white." The *Thind* decision in 1923 solidified the line, denying Asian Indians the right to naturalized citizenship. Through the Immigration Act of 1924, which denied entry to "aliens ineligible to citizenship," the state again implicitly affirmed the expansive racial "barred zone" outlined in the 1917 act. The McCarran-Walter Act of 1952 likewise referred to an "Asian-Pacific Triangle -- that consisted of

countries from India to Japan and all Pacific islands north of Australia and New Zealand" (Hing 1993, p. 38). Then, in the 1970s, the state finally collapsed all Asian groups, marked previously by geographic boundaries and by the term "aliens ineligible to citizenship," into a single racial category. In 1977, the Office of Management and Budget's Directive No. 15, which standardized racial categories for the federal government and is still in effect, explicitly defined "Asian or Pacific Islander" as a "person having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, the Indian subcontinent, or the Pacific Islands." Moreover, as already mentioned, the state increased its attention to social welfare and affirmative action policies at this time and directed resources to Asian Pacific Americans, increasingly using this umbrella "Asian or Pacific Islander" racial category (Espiritu 1991, p. 162).

Three decades into the construction of an "Asian Pacific America," both by the state and by Asian Pacific Americans themselves who transformed the category into a social and political identity, its survival in some form seems assured for the foreseeable future. However, that the current racial line around Asian Pacific Americans will include the same ethnic groups in the future is not as assured. From the category's inception, there have been questions concerning its inter-ethnic stability. First, the Pacific Islander American portion of the Asian Pacific American category has always been marginalized.<sup>18</sup> Certainly, the sense of a shared history held by Chinese and Japanese as well as Filipino and Korean political activists during the 1960s is not as apparent with the Pacific Islander groups. And, due to the Pacific Islanders' ambiguous status within the category, there may be some movement towards re-classification. For example, in the 1990s, there seems to be a movement on the part of some Hawaiians to alter their racial classification to "American Indian" from "Asian or Pacific Islander." Dispossessed of their land and sovereignty by white settlers, they do seem to share similar concerns with Native Americans. And, being re-classified by the state could entitle them to a certain

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18 An indication of the marginalization can be found in Asian American studies, the name of which is in itself non-inclusive in this regard. The two most comprehensive historical surveys of Asian (Pacific) America to date, Sucheng Chan's *Asian Americans* and Ronald Takaki's *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans*, do not much cover Pacific Islander groups. And, noting that "pan-Asian American...ethnicity has taken root primarily among Asian Americans," Espiritu purposely uses "the term Asian American rather than Asian Pacific American" in her book (1991, p. xi).

measure of sovereignty and other rights afforded recognized American Indian tribes (Hodgkinson 1995, p. 174; Goldberg 1997, p. 47).

Second, another source of inter-ethnic instability of the Asian Pacific American category has been the post-1965 influx of immigration from Asia. Prompted by, *inter alia*, the civil rights movement, the Congress passed the Immigration Act of 1965, overturning previous restrictions on Asian (and Southern and Eastern European) immigration and permitting the annual entry of 170,000 immigrants from the Eastern Hemisphere. As a large influx of immigrants increased the number of Asian Americans from 1 million in 1965 to 5 million just twenty years later, the ethnic composition of the category also shifted dramatically: "in 1960, 52 percent were Japanese, 27 percent Chinese, 20 percent Filipino, 1 percent Korean, and 1 percent Asian Indian. Twenty-five years later, 21 percent of Asian Americans were Chinese, 21 percent Filipino, 15 percent Japanese, 12 percent Vietnamese, 11 percent Korean, 10 percent Asian Indian, 4 percent Laotian, 3 percent Cambodian, and 3 percent 'other' " (Takaki 1989, p. 420). So, just as the mostly second-generation and third-generation Japanese Americans, Chinese Americans, and Filipino Americans became politically active as "Asian Americans" (and less frequently as "Asian Pacific Americans") and created a pan-ethnic identity, a large wave of new Asian immigrants from Asia has cast an uncertain future for the newly formed identity. In contrast to the Asian Americans of the 1960s, the new immigrants and their children do not have a strong sense of a long history in the U.S. shared with other Asian Americans and, as seen above, are largely of ethnic origins different from the pre-1965 Asian Americans.

A final source of inter-ethnic instability within the Asian Pacific American category we examine deals with the long-standing one between Filipino Americans and other Asian Americans. Comprising the largest post-1965 Asian immigrant group, they are a part of the changing ethnic composition of the Asian Pacific American category discussed in the previous paragraph. But, Filipinos also stand out because they comprised a large segment of the pre-1965 Asian American population and were marginalized even then. Consequently, they have been "the group most outspoken against the pan-Asian framework" (Espiritu 1991, p. 104).

In the late-1960s, as Asian American activists followed the example of their African American counterparts and mobilized around "Yellow Power," Filipino American activists rejected the term, declaring themselves to be brown, not yellow. Ever since, they have been vocal about the dominance of Chinese and Japanese Americans in Asian American studies, social service funding and organizations, and affirmative action programs and have intermittently called for removing Filipino Americans from the Asian Pacific American rubric (Espiritu 1991). In California, Filipino Americans successfully lobbied for the passage of the California Senate Bill 1813 in 1988, requiring "state personnel surveys or statistical tabulations to classify persons of Filipino ancestry as Filipino rather than as Asian or Hispanic" (Espiritu 1991, p. 106).

To explain the "Filipino-Asian split," Espiritu points to two factors: the "cultural distance between Filipinos and other East Asian groups" and, perhaps more importantly, the "class cleavages" between the better off Asian Americans and Filipino Americans who do not fare as well in the labor market (1991, pp. 107-109). We basically agree with Espiritu's assessment but would point to a third possible factor: the impact of U.S. colonization of the Philippines. A proponent of establishing Filipino "autonomy from the sweeping rubric of 'Asian American'," cultural theorist E. San Juan, Jr. has repeatedly emphasized the "reality of U.S. colonial subjugation and its profoundly enduring effects...[which] distinguish Filipinos from the Chinese, Japanese, Koreans, and others from the Asian continent" (1994, p. 206). Although there is not much of a sociological or historical literature on the "enduring effects" of U.S. colonization on Filipino Americans, San Juan's comments seem to warrant investigation. How else do we explain Filipino Americans' faring worse than other Asian Americans, controlling for education and other relevant factors? We should be open to the possibility that Filipino Americans have faced and do face a qualitatively different racism than other Asian Americans. For example, in pre-statehood Hawai'i, Filipinos, as colonial subjects of the U.S., faced a racism different in character than the one faced by the Japanese, which placed and kept the former at the bottom of the racial order (Jung, forthcoming).

At least in the short term, Espiritu is probably correct in her prediction that Filipino Americans are likely to remain within the Asian Pacific American category. First, even though their

numbers have dramatically increased to become the second largest ethnic group within the category by 1990, they would still be too small by themselves to be an effective political voice. Second, although joining a Latino coalition is a possibility, given their shared history and culture of Spanish colonialism, there are many obstacles. The biggest obstacle may be the state, which "continue[s] to treat Filipino Americans as Asian Americans." Third, given the first two reasons, those Filipino Americans wishing to abandon the Asian Pacific American framework are still in the minority (Espiritu 1991, p. 108, 172). But, if their numbers keep increasing at a rapid pace and they continue to feel marginalized within the "Asian Pacific American" racial category, whether Filipino Americans stay within the Asian Pacific American racial boundary in the long-term is an open question.

### Clashing Cultures of Race and Latinos

Sociologists Michael Omi and Howard Winant, in their well-deservedly influential *Racial Formation in the United States*, define racialization as "the extension of racial meaning to a previously racially unclassified relationship or group" (1986, p. 64). In other words, racialization refers to the process of some non- or pre-racial relationship or group becoming racial. And, reviewing U.S. history through this conceptual lens, one can chart the process of racialization continually unfolding as American Indians, Africans, and later Mexicans, Chinese, Japanese, etc. have successively come into prolonged contact with whites and have consequently been racially classified and subjugated by them.<sup>19</sup>

In this section of the paper, we would like to modify this conceptualization, *insofar as* "the extension of racial meaning" is meant as a unilateral imposition of racial categories and meanings onto pre-racial peoples. With the exceptions of the earliest encounters between Europeans and Indians and between Europeans and Africans, there have not been many, if any, encounters between the dominant "white" group and subsequent ethnic groups in the U.S. which can be characterized in such unilateral

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<sup>19</sup> Of course, "white" itself is not a natural racial identity. In anglophone North America, the English and other Europeans initially imagined this new identity into being in the late 17th century, in the course of their interactions with Africans and American Indians (Jordan 1968).

terms. The early Mexicans, Chinese, Japanese, Koreans, Asian Indians, Filipinos, and others of the 19th and early 20th centuries were not pre-racial peoples without their own preformed racial worldviews. And, the large influx of immigrants since 1965 from Latin America and Asia certainly have not been of pre-racial peoples. Rather, they bring to the U.S. a set of racial schemas, a culture of race, *different* than the dominant one operant in the U.S. What then transpires is an encounter of the two cultures of race, from which a new synthesis may emerge. To be sure, the encounter is not between two peoples who have equal powers to enact their different racial schemas, but that the dominant culture should prevail absolutely also does not follow. As Nader Sohrabi writes about the clash of two cultures of the state in Iran at the turn of 20th century, the "new emergent culture" of race is not the "the result of a linear, one-way diffusion" of the dominant culture "but a synthesis that emerge[s] out of the clash of two cultures of" race (Sohrabi, forthcoming).<sup>20</sup> We illustrate this idea with the example of racial classification and Latinos in the U.S.

Unlike the other pan-ethnic groups, the pan-ethnic Latino population is internally divided along multiple racial lines. "Asian Pacific Islanders," for example, may be ethnically Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Indian, Filipino, Guamanian, or Vietnamese, but they are all designated as belonging to one race according to the state. Similarly, Blacks may be descended from the original African slave population or, as is increasingly the case, immigrants from Africa or the Caribbean. Despite profound inter-ethnic differences, however, the state nonetheless aggregates them into one race (e.g., OMB 1977).

The category "Hispanics" likewise captures a multi-ethnic category. However, the state does not designate this category as a "race" but refracts it along those categories the state officially recognizes as "races": white, Black, and, to a lesser extent, Native American and Asian. Faced with this state classification scheme, significant percentages of the Latino populations currently opt out of it on the census and list their racial status as "Other" (Toro 1998). The uniquely multi-racial nature of the Latino population is principally due to the clash of cultures of race which draw racial lines differently. As the aforementioned large-scale opting out signals, the clash has yet to result in a

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20 See also Sahlins (1981, 1985), the theoretical inspiration of Sohrabi's analysis.



coherent synthesis, but as discussed below, the state's dominant racial classification scheme has not been and is not likely to operate unchallenged or unchanged.

The varied ways Latinos make sense of the state's racial categories is strikingly apparent to us in our current academic workplace. At the time of this writing, the sociology department has three Latino faculty members: a Cuban American, a Puerto Rican, and a Chicano (the first author of this paper). Despite the common "ethnic" identification -- as Latinos by the three faculty members or as "Hispanic/Spanish origin" by the state -- the three faculty members probably placed themselves in three different racial categories on the last federal census in 1990: the Puerto Rican as "Black," the Cuban American as "white," and Chicano as "Other -- Mexican American." The same holds true for the pan-ethnic Latino faculty currently affiliated with the Latino Studies Program across campus, which includes individuals who are ethnically Cuban, Dominican, Mexican, Puerto Rican, and South American. Although they are all consciously Latino, they too probably checked off different racial categories on the last federal census. A majority probably identified themselves as "white." At least one (a Dominican) probably identified herself as "Black," and none probably identified themselves as Native American or Asian. And, more than a few probably opted out for the "Other" racial category.

The unique features of the U.S. Latino population's multi-racial composition has its roots in Spanish colonialism, during which the colonial states imposed racial hierarchies which were more gradational and fluid in nature than their northern counterparts. More so than in the English colonies, Spanish colonization in Cuba, Mexico, Puerto Rico, and elsewhere in Latin America entailed widespread miscegenation among the Spanish, Indian and African populations. The racial order in Mexico -- where the colonized Indians comprised the most subordinate racial group and principal labor force -- organized around Spanish/Indian miscegenation, while the racial order in the Caribbean -- where African slaves assumed the most subordinate position -- organized in Spanish/African terms. These patterns, in addition to the differences in the timing of the subsequent colonization by the U.S. in the mid- and late-nineteenth century, factored centrally in the complex re-racialization of the Latino population in this country.

At the point of their respective colonization by the U.S., Mexican, Puerto Rican, and Cuban (and Filipino) populations had undergone centuries of Spanish colonial rule. There had emerged in these earlier colonial contexts a hierarchical racial order that was more fluid than the U.S. white/Black distinction based on hypo-descent. In Mexico, it is estimated that *mestizos* -- individuals of Spanish/Indian ancestry -- comprised 85-90 percent of the population by 1900; Indians comprised 8-10 percent, and Europeans, mainly Spanish, made up the remainder (Morner 1967). In the Spanish Caribbean during the 18th century, the Spanish and Black slave populations were fairly evenly split in number (Williams 1970, p. 109). By 1898, when Puerto Rico and Cuba passed into U.S. hands via the Spanish-American War, the largest racial category in the islands was *blanco* (white); an intermediate stratum -- variously defined as *mulatto* or *trigueno* -- was the next largest, and the smallest, but discernible, category was *negro* (Black). In 1910, for example, 65.5 percent of Puerto Ricans were identified by the Puerto Rican census as *blanco* (as opposed to *mulatto* or *negro*), a figure which continued to rise throughout the century. Indicating that the *blanco* category was not intended to be "unmixed," as the white category was in the U.S., Virginia Dominguez explains that "when given the choice to identify themselves as either white or black, most Spanish-speaking people from the Caribbean identify themselves as white...." (1989, p. 273).

The different ways that the racial lines were drawn during the Spanish colonial period, and then later re-mapped under U.S. rule, is central to the racial dilemmas Latinos confront to the present day. In the American Southwest, prior to its annexation by the U.S. at the conclusion of the Mexico-U.S. War of 1846-48, there existed a racial order that was similar to those established elsewhere in the Spanish colonial world. Ramon Gutiérrez's highly acclaimed *When Jesus Came, the Corn Mothers Went Away* insightfully explores its initial construction and transformation in colonial New Mexico from the sixteenth to the mid-nineteenth century. According to Gutiérrez:

Throughout colonial Spanish America, race functioned as a metalanguage: with few exceptions, a person's occupation and status was often quickly deduced by simple appearance. From such visual evaluations of race to be correct, a close correlation had to exist between all constituting elements of racial definition: legal color, actual physical color, and phenotype. When such a

correspondence existed, it meant that in the daily life of face-to-face community, race was a visual metonymic sign of a person's position in the social division of labor, symbolic of a propinquity to the infidel, or in the case of slaves, dishonor and social death (1992, pp. 202-203).

Racial and religious lines in New Mexico revolved along a relational axis that privileged the conquering Spaniards (who were Christian, "civilized," and White) at one end and the vanquished Amerindians (who were deemed heathen, "uncivilized," and dark) at the other.

The above racial order in what is now the American Southwest had important consequences for the way that the Mexican population was re-racialized under U.S. colonial rule in the mid-nineteenth century. Those living in the territory ceded by Mexico, for example, were initially defined as honorary "whites" through the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo which officially ended the Mexico-U.S. War. The treaty formally extended to them access to U.S. citizenship, a privileged status that was reserved only for "free white persons" at the time (Almaguer 1994; Martinez 1998). While the mixed Spanish/Indian background of most Mexicans was the basis of derision, antipathy, and ambiguity, the fact that they were not of African ancestry factored centrally in their attaining an "honorary" white status at this time; as discussed above, the late antebellum period was a time of drawing a stark distinction between white and Black through the ever stricter enforcement of the hypo-descent rule. Hence, we can see that even at this initial point, the U.S. state was trying to symbolically capture Mexicans with its classification system centered on whites and Blacks.

At the same time, the newly conquered Mexicans -- especially the elites -- were attempting to assert their own culture of race. For example, in making the case that Mexicans were white during the California State Constitutional Convention in 1849, a prominent Mexican *ranchero* from Santa Barbara impassionately argued that the term was a reference to European ancestry and social standing -- as it was understood under Spanish and Mexican rule -- not merely to skin color. Don Pablo de la Guerra, a delegate to the convention, maintained that "it should be perfectly understood in the first place, what is the true significance of the word 'white.' Many citizens of California have received by nature a very dark skin; nevertheless, there are among them men who have heretofore been allowed to vote, and not

only that, but to fill the highest public offices. It would be very unjust to deprive them of the privileges of citizenship merely because nature had not made them white." In drawing attention to the Californio elite's European ancestry, de la Guerra strategically downplayed the predominantly mestizo backgrounds of most Mexican Californians, closing his eyes to the Indian and perhaps African blood flowing in their veins. Moreover, he apparently allayed Anglo concerns over Mexicans attaining an "honorary" white status by reassuring them that if they used the word white as a term intended to "exclude the African race" from the franchise, de la Guerra was in full agreement with this usage (Almaguer 1994, pp. 55-56).

The synthesis resulting from the clash of the two cultures of race was a racial order which recognized the "whiteness" and hence citizenship rights of some Mexicans but denied them of others. The latter was particularly true in the case of working-class and/or darker Mexicans who were often denied their legal rights by being categorized summarily as Indians (as the Chinese were at one point), despite the Mexicans' own racial antipathy towards Indians. A notable example involved Manuel Dominguez, a dark-skinned mestizo, who served as an elected delegate to the California State Constitutional Convention of 1849 and as a member of the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors. In 1857, he traveled to northern California to enter testimony in a San Francisco courtroom. Before Dominguez could testify, however, the Anglo lawyer for the plaintiff objected to his taking the witness stand. The lawyer argued that Dominguez was an Indian and, therefore, ineligible to enter testimony in the state. Despite Dominguez's high social standing among Mexican Californians, the judge upheld the objection, and Dominguez was dismissed (Almaguer 1994, p. 57).

But, the above synthesis was not permanent, most notably as large numbers of Mexicans of working class origins began to immigrate to the Southwest. With continual immigration from Mexico, and the heated politics around it, a new synthesis has yet to fully emerge. Examining the census categories applied to people of Mexican origin throughout the 20th century reveals the state's ambivalence toward the racial status of Mexicans. After classifying Mexicans as "white," at least in theory, for a lengthy period of time, the 1930 federal census listed "Mexican" as a racial category for the first time. Then, the category was absent once again just 10 years later. In 1950 and 1960, Latinos

appeared as an "ethnic" category with the designation, "Persons of Spanish Mother Tongue." In 1970, the appellation for the category changed to "Persons of Both Spanish Surname and Spanish Mother Tongue." And, in 1980 and 1990, the "Hispanic" category emerged (Omi and Winant 1994, p. 82). But, from 1950 to the present day, the Latino category was to be marked in conjunction with one of the state's recognized racial categories. As the state imposed these changes in racial/ethnic categorization vis-à-vis Mexicans (and other Latinos), people of Mexican origin tried to make sense of the changes in their own cultural terms, by either declaring themselves to be white (whereas neither the state nor the society may share this view) or opting out of the categories altogether. For example, more than 40% of people of Mexican origin in 1980 and nearly 50% in 1990 opted out of the state's predetermined racial categories (see Tables 1 and 2).<sup>21</sup>

The situation reflects a clash between two cultures of race, as a Latino population -- racialized according to one racial logic -- is re-racialized in the U.S. according to a different racial logic. Similar ambiguities of race within the Latino population are also vividly captured in the way that these lines are configured among Puerto Rican migrants in the U.S. According to sociologist Clara Rodriguez, Puerto Ricans bring with them a more complex understanding of racial categories than the state categories of the U.S. Her review of the scholarly literature on this issue suggests that there exists among Puerto Ricans a variegated continuum of racial types. These include individuals who are defined "as *blanco* (white), *indio* (dark skinned and straight haired), *moreno* (dark skinned but with a variety of Negroid or Caucasian features and hair forms), *negro* (black or African-American in appearance), and *trigueno* (brown or wheat-colored), a term that can be applied broadly to each of the foregoing types except for the very blond *blancos*" (Rodriguez 1996, p. 133; see also Rodriguez-Morazzani 1996). Eduardo Bonilla-Silva suggests a less differentiated racial classification scheme among Puerto Ricans, one that contains

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21 We want to gratefully acknowledge the valuable research assistance of Sylvia Orduno of the Department of Sociology at the University of Michigan in compiling the census data used in this chapter. The data are drawn from the 1980 and 1990 U.S. Census Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS), a 5 percent weighed sample. Reynolds Farley also provided invaluable advice and guidance in answering various questions we had about the data set.

three principal categories -- white, *trigueno*, and Black -- with the first two being the major categories and the latter a smaller, subordinate one (personal communication 1998).

Either way, Rodriguez and Bonilla-Silva agree that, as in the rest of Latin America, one can be racially re-classified through class mobility and other mitigating factors, and that persons within the same family may identify and be identified as belonging to different races based on somatic features, color, hair texture, etc. Unlike racial classification in the U.S. which depends, above all, on descent and hence is perceived as immutable, racial classification in Latin America is more fluid. Hence, Rodriguez concludes about Puerto Ricans' racial practices, "[M]embers of the same kin groups can be identified with varying racial terms, and an individual might change racial status with changes in class or education" (1996, p. 134).

One plausible reading of the U.S. census vis-à-vis Puerto Ricans is that while the state recognizes their distinctness or "Latineness" with the "Hispanic" category, it nonetheless attempts to impose a choice between the Black and white racial categories, which have their roots in the historical enforcement of the hypo-descent rule. But, like their Mexican counterparts, Puerto Ricans in the U.S. assert their own understandings of race, their culture of race, within the strictures of the state-sanctioned categories. Hence, we see that although a large majority of Puerto Ricans may be perceived by the state and the society at large as "Black," only 3.5% of Puerto Ricans identified as being "Black" in the 1980 federal census, whereas 48.3% and 47.5% identified as being "White" and "Other," respectively. Similarly, ten years later, 45.8%, 5.9%, and 47.2% of Puerto Ricans identified as being "White," "Black," and "Other," respectively (see Tables 1 and 2).

The racial classification scheme in Cuba is similar to that of Puerto Rico, as it recognizes three racial categories -- Black, white and mulatto (or *trigueno* in Puerto Rico) -- and also takes phenotype and social class into consideration (Pedraza 1996, p. 274). The similarity between the two, however, is not replicated among the Cuban and Puerto Rican populations in the U.S. The intervening variables are the open borders between the U.S. and Puerto Rico, a U.S. commonwealth, and the relatively closed borders between the U.S. and Cuba, a U.S. political foe. Hence, immigration from Cuba has been in distinct waves and have been less racially (and politically) reflective of Cuba than the migration from

Puerto Rico. Hence, the relatively recent arrival of the Marielitos in the 1980s was the first major wave of Cuban immigrants with a sizable number of Blacks. According to sociologist Silvia Pedraza, "Over 91 percent of the refugees who came over in the first wave, Cuba's elite, were white. But the proportion of whites declined quite markedly during the second wave. From 14 to 19 percent of those who immigrated from 1965 to 1979 considered themselves as 'other.' The Marielitos had the lowest proportion white of any wave -- 77 percent -- while 16 percent considered themselves 'other' and 6 percent considered themselves Black" (1996, pp. 274-275). As with the Puerto Ricans' usage of the census categories, the numbers of "Whites," "Blacks," and "Others" are probably reflective of the Cubans' understandings of these racial categories, not the state's.<sup>22</sup>

### Conclusion

In this paper, we suggested that the state is a major producer and reproducer of racial categories, continually alchemizing the seemingly arbitrary into the seemingly natural, the biologically unreal into the socially real. By looking to the ambiguities of the distant past and the present, we demonstrated that even the most rigid "color line" between whites and Blacks, long governed via the unforgiving one-drop rule with the backing of the state, is not immutable. By examining the inter-ethnic instabilities within the contemporary racial category "Asian or Pacific Islander," the boundary of which was largely a state invention, we saw the outlines of possible reconfigurations of the category. By re-thinking the concept of racialization -- not (only) as a unilateral imposition of racial categories onto pre-racial peoples but as a synthesis of differing cultures of race -- we demonstrated the still ongoing process of synthesis of the state's attempts to capture Latinos with its official racial/ethnic categories and the Latino populations' divergent understanding of race. And, although we paired each of the three themes with a particular group for analytical

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22 The distorting impact of the Cubans' more selective immigration to the U.S. is reflected in the federal census, as Cuban Americans are by far much more likely than Puerto Ricans (or Mexican Americans) to identify themselves as white. For example, according to the 1980 and 1990 censuses, 83.8% and 83.6% of Cuban Americans identified themselves as "White," respectively. The comparable figures for Puerto Ricans were 48.3% and 45.8% (see Tables 1 and 2).

purposes, there were obvious overlaps, to which we intermittently referred. The classificatory implications of intermarriages and multi-racial identities, the inter-ethnic instabilities within pan-ethnic categories, and the re-conceptualization of racialization as the clash of differing cultures of race are, in varying degrees and varied ways, relevant to the study of all three groups discussed in this paper as well as the ones we did not.

For almost the entirety of U.S. history, the (re)production of racial categories, in general, and the state's formative role in it, in particular, have been inextricably tied to the structuring of racial domination. However, in the past several decades, the preceding statement has become somewhat ambiguous. The racial social movements of the 1960s and 1970s transformed the non-white racial categories into meaningful political identities, and the state responded, in part, by instituting race-conscious programs to redress past and present discrimination. As a result, the racial distinctions which were used to subjugate are now partially the tools with which to resist subjugation: evil has become necessary evil. So, what are the implications of this paradoxical shift for social scientific research?

Paralleling anti-racist politics of race, the social scientific study of race cannot simply abandon "race" on the grounds that it is biologically groundless or 'merely' an ideology. Both in politics and scholarship, "color blindness" does not present us with a compelling choice, which would only leave us blind to the vast racial inequalities that remain with us. On the other hand, social scientists also cannot merely ratify and reify the state's official racial categories and become complicit in their naturalization. This analytic route only leads us back to treating race *as if* it were biologically tenable. Because "one of the major powers of the state is to produce and impose...categories of thought that we spontaneously apply to all things of the social world," Pierre Bourdieu writes, "when it comes to the state, one never doubts enough" (1994, p. 1). As social scientists, we should vigilantly doubt the racial categories we employ in our scholarly research. Historical analyses must always be mindful of the historical specificity and mutability of the boundaries and meanings of racial categories. Likewise, contemporary analyses must contextualize race and theoretically justify the racial categories they use. In the process, the important project of studying the powerful effects of the "color line" can and must be closely tied to the study of the construction of the "color line" itself.



Table 1. Percentage of Latinos by Ethnicity and Race in the 1980 Federal Census.

	Mexican	Puerto Rican	Cuban	Other "Hispanic"	Total
White	55.4	48.3	83.8	63.4	57.7
Black	1.9	3.5	2.9	4.5	2.7
American Indian	0.7	0.2	0.1	1.1	0.7
Asian/Pacific Islander	0.3	0.6	0.2	4.7	1.2
Other	41.7	47.5	13.1	26.4	37.7

Source: U.S. Census Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS), 1980.

Table 2. Percentage of Latinos by Ethnicity and Race in the 1990 Federal Census.

	Mexican	Puerto Rican	Cuban	Other "Hispanic"	Total
White	50.4	45.8	83.6	50.9	51.6
Black	0.9	5.9	3.8	7.3	2.9
American Indian	0.8	0.2	0.1	0.7	0.7
Asian/Pacific Islander	0.5	1.0	0.3	2.5	1.0
Other	47.4	47.2	12.2	38.5	43.9

Source: U.S. Census Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS), 1990.

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