THE BLACK-LATIN@ COLLECTIVE: IDENTITY NEGOTIATION AMONG BLACK LATIN@S ON FACEBOOK

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this work is to explore the relevance of race as reflected online via the social networking sites (SNS), Facebook. Specifically, a Sociological Discourse Analysis of The Black-Latin@[1] Collective 'group' discussions on Facebook from 2007-2008 was conducted to understand whether Afrolatino/as' dialogues engage constructions of race as evident in U.S. and Latin American discourses. In these discussions, evidence suggests that AfroLatino/as negotiate situational insider-outsider statuses within AfroLatina/o, Latino/a, and African-American spaces based on race, color, and language use. The online group encompassed varying levels of support, and sometimes-conflicting approaches to addressing colorism and racial discrimination among Latino/as. The study's findings also suggest that family, work environments, and media reproduced racial hierarchies and impacted users' perceptions of race and color. Overall, findings illustrate that as U.S. demographics changes, race as it intersects with other identities is continuously relevant in everyday life.

[1] Spanish uses a gendered language component to distinguish between male and female terms or

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INTRODUCTION

AfroLatina/o identity in the Americas has been researched for years. In Wade's (2006) assessment, AfroLatina/o Studies have focused on three main areas: a comparative analysis between Latin America and the United States regarding the gravity of slavery and the impact of the political economy on sexual relationships and 'race' mixing; the effects of systemic racial discrimination on African-descendants in Latin America and the United States; and the relationship between racial classification and culture, more specifically whether having African culture and *being* Black are the same within the context of the Americas. All three areas of research bifurcate where the AfroLatina/o subject is assumed to be, i.e., not on the US mainland. Despite comparisons with the United States within this literature, AfroLatina/os are not directly associated within the discourse of US racial politics, even as it relates to Black immigration (Waters 1994). I argue that studies focused on AfroLatina/os in the US represent a fourth branch of AfroLatina/o Studies. We know little about the role of AfroLatina/os in shaping US racial politics at large, especially as it relates to a rising Latina/o population.

It should be noted that general consensus in the literature describes the population of interest as AfroLatina/o, Black Latina/o, and to a lesser extent, LatiNegra/o. In my work, I combine experiences of AfroLatina/os in the US and position this term as a pan-ethnoracial identity. This means that groups of (Afro)Latin American-descent from any of the twenty-two Latin American countries who now reside in the US are of sociological interest as it relates to their commonalities. Conversely, Spanish-based works that discuss Afro-descendants in Latin America generally refer to this group as *afrodescendiente, negra/o,* or as a Black ethnic group (e.g., *Afro-Antillana/o* or *Costenos* for Black groups born along the coastline as in Panama, Nicaragua, and Honduras). In Portuguese-based scholarship, Afro-descendants are generally

references as *afrodescendente, negra/o,* or *preta/o.* As Bryce-Laporte (1972) explains, AfroLatina/os include a medley of "Spanish-speaking, Portuguese-speaking, and maybe French-speaking blacks of different national combinations and multiple cultural or ethnic permutations" (p. 38). However, for this work, I am not including those from French-speaking nations.

Many US AfroLatina/os are products of the Immigration and Naturalization Act (INA) of 1965 which sought to rectify previous immigration policies that primarily only accomodated white, Western European immigrants. They are both immigrant and native-born. In this work, I discuss the immigrant story as a backdrop to the experiences of those are native-born (at least 2nd generation). AfroLatina/os can varyingly fit into African-American and the broader Latino/a group in the US. With this, they can experience differing levels of in- and outgroup membership (Bryce-Laporte 1972). This membership negotiation is often mediated by levels of consciousness, intra-ethnic group racism, or intra-racial ethnocentricism.

In tandem with the historical reorganizations of the racial order in the United States (Hochschild and Powell 2008), post-1960 racial hierarchies reflect dominant U.S. ideologies that consequently produced a Black-White racial framework. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2000), Latino/as are the largest minority in the nation, accounting for 16% of the U.S. population. With the rising population and political presence of Latino/as in the U.S., the racialization and social mobilization surrounding Latino/a identity has become another central component of the U.S. racialization framework. Consequently, a Black-Latino/a-White framework has begun to emerge in the literature. Still, Latino/as are not a homogenous group and do not all experience racialization equally given that Latino/as can be multiple (Jimenez-Roman and Flores 2010).

This thesis examines the ways AfroLatina/os have negotiated their identities as expressed

through online comments. According to Jimenez-Roman and Flores (2009), the concept of *triple consciousness* involves the AfroLatina/o tradition, transnational and national ethnoscapes, and the relationships between Latina/os and African-Americans (Flores & Jimenez-Roman, 2009). The AfroLatina/o tradition represents the social, psychological, and cultural realities present among those who self-identify or are of visible African ancestry. Latina/os generally identify with national and ethnic origins, but there has been a push in recent years to more fully capture Latina/o experience using a racial lens.

Self-identification and naming practicing of immigrants typically represent ethnic boundary keeping or social distancing. Many scholars have found that Black immigrants and subsequent generations may make corrective attempts to distinguish one's blackness from African Americans to avoid being associated with negative stereotypes popularly propagated as Black behaviors (Waters 2001). Ethnic boundary keeping is often maintained through the establishment of ethnic communities or economies. This boundary maintenance does not necessarily have to overlap with social distancing.

In the case of AfroLatina/os, Rivera (2006) offers another reason for black distinction from 'African Americans':

> Being mistaken for an African American, from my perspective, suggests that my Blackness is not derived from my geographical and historical context, but, rather, it is constructed through the lens of the U.S. mainland's Black-White racial dichotomy (173).

As observed, constructions related to the concept of AfroLatino/a identity interact with U.S. constructs. Still, Black immigrants and subsequent generations are often compared to African Americans due to similar social conditions and racial features. Second and later generations are thought to eventually become African American as they face issues such as downward mobility and begin to blend into the African American community. However difficulties arise in

understanding how Blacks who are non-African American are positioned within the U.S. "pre-existing racial order (Foner and Fredrickson 2004). AfroLatino/as and African Americans share various similarities in the US, but one must caution not to conflate AfroLatino/a and African American identities without risking discursive erasure and group invisibility.

This study examines the extent to which online discussions regarding identity reflect continued relevance and social meanings given to race as understood by members of the Facebook 'group' started by East Coast-based nonprofit organization The Black-Latin@ Collective whose activities predominately exist on a traditional website and offline. This non-profit is part of an emerging trend of organizations creating an online presence via webblogs, social networking sites (SNSs), and traditional websites, for mobilization, information sharing, and awareness raising (Ellison et. Al 2011). As such, web-based sociological inquiry is necessary to understand these processes in the 21st century. The current study posits the following research questions:

(1) What are the themes that emerge surrounding the concept of AfroLatino/a identity in the U.S. within The Black-Latin@ Collective Facebook 'group'?

(2) What existing racial and ethnic frameworks are challenged or supported surrounding the concept of AfroLatino/a identity in The Black-Latin@ Collective Facebook 'group'?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The following section focuses on the theoretical framework to understand the function of racialization through ideologies and frameworks. A growing body of literature on African-descendants in Latin America has emerged during the past few decades (Minority Rights Group 1995), though the experience of descendants in the U.S. has been overlooked in several ways. First, discussions of the "Black experience" have largely been associated and used interchangeably with African Americans. Also, when other Black experiences are discussed, these largely reflect Black West Indian and Caribbean communities with largely Anglophone backgrounds and African immigrant communities (Waters 2001). Current scholarship points to various reasons why Black immigrants may distance themselves from a 'Black' identity in the U.S., as there is a strong push toward dissociation with African-Americans, as well as a desire for their blackness to be understood in specific ethnic contexts. Despite this literature, web-based academic inquiry into understanding the diverse forms of blackness and specifically, "AfroLatino/a" as concept and group has yet to be fully developed or understood.

According to Ignacio national and racial identities are imagined and subsequently legitimated through social structures, institutions, transnational and domestic policies, and financial markets. Because of this, it is important to explore reimagining processes that include the emergent concept of AfroLatino/a identity in the U.S. This discussion of racialization in the US has long been under sociological investigation and has undergone much critique (Gold 2004). As an extension of this critique, groups that exist outside of the traditional U.S. Black-White model need to be understood within contemporary discourses surrounding race and race relations. I propose a qualitative approach in an attempt to understand these processes through

the deconstruction of online discussions as reflecting particular racial ideologies and frameworks.

DESCRIPTION OF 'AFROLATINO/A'

Generally, 'Latino/a' racialization represents the racial ideology of *mestizaje* incepted in Latin America, accounting for racial categories inclusive of Spanish and/or indigenous ancestry, but not African ancestry. The most comprehensive work on AfroLatino/as in the U.S. is 'The Afro-Latin@ Reader,' which provides a series of scholarly articles from multiple disciplines and fields, as well as personal narratives surrounding AfroLatino/as in the U.S. pre-1900 to the present. Content focuses on lived experiences, religions, political contributions, the arts, gender inequality, the workplace, and education (Jimenez-Roman and Flores 2010). The authors have made several contributions about the significance of 'Afrolatino/a':

- Its conceptualization is anchored in transnational ties and global social movements;
- 'AfroLatino/a' has served to identify anti-racist movements recognized by the World Conference on Racism: Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Intolerance in Durban, South Africa in 2001;
- The study of AfroLatino/as has made possible the conceptualization and documentation of a new field of study;
- 'AfroLatino/a' as a term confronts anti-Black racism among Latino/a communities;
- 'AfroLatino/a' emerged in the U.S. to identify racial, cultural, and socioeconomic contradictions within the concept of 'Latino/a'.
- The presence of triple-consciousness among AfroLatino/as in the US as Black, Latin@, and American.

Demographically, there are 180 million African-descendants in Latin America and

nearly 3 million in the US as of 2000 (Jimenez-Roman and Flores 2010). In the U.S. AfroLatino/as comprise 2.5% of the current US Latino/a population and have experienced a 50% population growth since 1980. AfroLatino/as are also more likely to be US born and less likely to speak Spanish in the home compared to other Latino/as (Logan 2003). According Logan (2003), they also experience lower employment rates than African Americans, to whom they are most often compared. Finally, AfroLatino/a children were also more likely to have one AfroLatino/a parent and one non-Hispanic Black parent compared to having two AfroLatino/a parents (Logan 2003).

Along with socio-demographic differences, we find differences in political beliefs. Generally, AfroLatino/as indicate more support of government sponsored healthcare and less support of capital punishment compared to Latino/as who identified as White (Nicholson, Pantoja, and Segura 2005). Differences with issues of mental health have also been explored. Reportedly, Afro-Latina adolescents are more likely to suffer from depressive symptoms than African Americans, white Americans, and other Latino/as (Ramos, Jaccard, and Guilamo-Ramos 2003). Ultimately, AfroLatino/as face a complex position, that of double minority status within US Latino/a and Black communities (Ramos, Jaccard, and Guilamo-Ramos 2003).

RACIAL IDEOLOGY & FRAMEWORKS

Ideologies shape individuals' understandings of social reality. While discussing how racial ideologies impact racialized groups over time, it is important to note that the U.S. Black-White model had undergone its own transformations. Between the 17th and 19th centuries, some states distinguished black and mulatto African-Americans as distinct groups legally and

institutionally (Middleton 2008). In the 20th century, the rule of hypodescent[2] was instated, bringing the groups together under one classification. According to Middleton (2008), although many African-Americans share similar black and white racial lineages as in the Dominican Republic, the U.S. had a distinctly different path for racialization. The varying bifurcations based on geographical, linguistic, historical, and cultural differences is where AfroLatino/as and African-Americans diverge despite similarities due to the TransAtlantic Slave Trade, experiences with discrimination and marginalization. Institutions, laws, and social reification shaped the evolution of Black identity and other racial identities differently.

Bonilla-Silva (2006) compares current U.S. colorblind racism to the treatment of race prevalent in Latin America. Constituted by the Jim Crow era in the U.S. (Bonilla-Silva and Forman 2000), Black-White racial binary did not emerge in Latin America. Instead in the early 20th century, the ideology of *mestizaje* gained much attention and worked to reduce the significance of racial differences. Instead of an emergent Black-White dichotomy, a Black-White continuum emerged with a mosaic of categories based on "hair texture, eye color, culture, education, class" denoted by color (182). Understandings of this process still remain. As such, with Latino/a emigration to the U.S., Latino/as may undergo another racializing categorization process influenced by U.S. understandings of race and race relations (Rivera 2006).

[2] The rule of hypodescent legally ensured that mixed-race African-Americans did not receive societal privileges afforded to Whites. Ultimately, anyone with an 'ascertainable quantum of African blood' was designated as racially Black (as quoted in Middleton 2008).

In the United States, the color continuum and racial binary differ in their evolutions but are similar in their distribution of social privileges associated with racial-color-physical[3] features. According to Cruz-Janzen (2001), in describing color categories for afrolatinas:

> They are the darkest *negras, morenas,* and *prietas*, the brown and golden cholas and *mulatas*, and the wheat colored *triguenas*. They are the light-skinned *jabas* with black features and the *grifas* with white looks but whose hair defiantly announces their ancestry. They are the Spanish-looking *criollas*, and the *pardas* and *zambas* who carry indigenous.

One of the primary similarities between Latino/a and African-American understandings of these racial-color-physical features is that lighter skin is perceived as more attractive, leading to more social privileges within the community. Conversely, association with darker skin is treated as less attractive and garners fewer social privileges (Fraser and Gordon 1998).

As a result of this stance, some scholars have discussed anti-blackness among immigrant and non-immigrant Black (non-African-American) groups. They suggest this anti-blackness has created a division between African-American and other racialized communities, including Latino/as. Some individuals who are perceived to be darker, are associated with 'low-status' culture (Perry 2011), and receive less social privileges may engage in social distancing from these characteristics. Despite instances of social distancing between racial groups, it is imperative to account for the role of ethnicity and ethnic groups. As such, distinctions can be drawn between groups due to the creation and maintenance of ethnic boundaries, which is different than social distancing (Barth 1970).

[3] 'Racial-color-feature' accounts for the separate and overlapping paradigms used for categorizing social groups based on race, skin color, and physical features. The US traditional paradigm more explicitly depends on race. *Mestizaje* depends on variations of skin color and physical features along a color continuum. Among African-Americans, there also exists a color-continuum. At times these paradigms or continuums are independent, overlap, or coexist.

ETHNIC BOUNDARIES AND SELF-VERIFICATION

Ethnic boundaries include self-identification, self-categorization and empirical means to maintain these boundaries. While ethnicity is treated as an intrinsic self-sustaining concept, Barth (1970) draws attention to the deliberate actions groups use for identity maintenance. The deliberate actions used are determined by a particular environment and the opportunities that are available for maintenance within that environment. Hence, ethnic boundaries act as a self-organizing tool for members based on certain qualities such as values, ideas, culture, ethnohistory, etc (Barth 1970). They become increasingly salient as ethnic groups migrate and encounter new groups and possibly new group allegiances, and political circumstances. Despite heavy emphasis on AfroLatino/as as a racialized group, one must contend the agency involved in maintaining group boundaries along racial *and* ethnic lines within domestic and transnational networks. One of the ways AfroLatino/as appear to be maintaining ethnic group boundaries in this way is through self-verification through the use of the Social Networking Site (SNS), Facebook.

Stryker and Burke (2000) define self-verification as " bringing situationally perceived self-relevant meanings into agreement with the identity standard ….[and] … seeking and creating new situations in which perceived self-relevant meanings match those of the identity standard" (p. 288). These practices also rely on communal activities that promote communication and sharing of cultural capital. AfroLatino/as may socially, organizationally, and institutionally fall between the cracks of Latino/as and African-American identities, leaving issues relevant to the group ignored. According to an interview with Ana Seda, a leading member of the Black-Latin@ Collective, when AfroLatino/as seek financial support for projects, Latino/a organizations suggest they consult with an African-American organization and the African-

American organization suggest they seek assistance from Latino/a organizations (Seda 2010). Given the above example, it is clear that while AfroLatino/as are similar to Latino/as and African-Americans in ways, there are still goals unique to this group that may be facilitated through the creation of ethnoracial group boundary creation and maintenance. How might these boundaries look online?

COLLECTIVE IDENTITY AND FACEBOOK

Scholars are increasingly seeing the importance of examining online activity as a contemporary means of understanding social groups (Ignacio 2011). In the exploration of online discourse, one must take into account relationships with power. According to Dijk (2003), the relationship between power and discourse draws on two types of power – access to certain forms of discourse as a resource, and the ability to influence one's outlook, understanding, and knowledge. Dijk (2003) argues that more powerful groups are able to control public discourse. Within the Facebook 'group' under examination, The Black-Latin@ Collective, members are able to set the tone and dictate the type of discourse shared related to blackness and *latinidad*, a characteristic that may be more difficult in everyday life offline.

Oliver and Johnston (2005) explain that social networks are integral places where new ideologies and theories emerge. Although different from traditionally defined 'social networks,' SNSs are also becoming spaces where perspectives on ideology, theory, and social issues are being addressed. Despite originally being a sole offline non-profit organization, The Black-Latin@ Collective has created the possibility with its activity online to facilitate ideological reproduction, knowledge sharing, and self-verification. SNSs do not inherently provide an opportunity to discuss social issues, but particular features on SNSs provide these avenues

(Vitak, Ellison, and Steinfield 2011). Therefore, for this study, the Facebook 'group' feature is being used to better understand the everyday relevance of race in the lives of AfroLatino/as.

FUNCTIONS OF FACEBOOK

The Social Networking Site (SNS), Facebook, was created in 2004 and at that time was only accessible to a select number of Ivy League schools. It has since expanded exponentially to include other universities, and ultimately to the public. Within the site there are a variety of features that allow individuals to create profiles of him/herself, create invitations for particular events, and join 'groups' that focus on particular interests. I focus on the 'group' feature of Facebook only. The Facebook 'group' includes a 'creator' and set of administrators who are able to adjust initial settings, such as whether the group is public, private, invite-only, and whether members can invite their 'friends.' It also allows for the polling of members and the creation and sharing of documents and events offline (Facebook 2011). Scholars have identified the Facebook 'group' feature as a potential means to build social capital through information-seeking behaviors (Ellison et. Al 2010).

While many scholars have examined the relationships between users and 'friends,' this study explores networking based on a dialogue among 'members' of the 'group'. Specifically, this work focuses on AfroLatino/as' use of a 'group' to network online and create discussions surrounding AfroLatino/a identity, race, and related issues. The ultimate goal is to understand how AfroLatino/as discuss the negotiation of identity within a US context. All of the administrators within the Black Latin@ Collective group are AfroLatino/as from various regions in the US.

METHODOLOGY

This work is a qualitative attempt to understand how AfroLatinos/as (re)imagine and (re)negotiate their racial identities between racial paradigms and ideologies. Data analysis relies on a set of codes iteratively developed based on Sociological Discourse Analysis. The purpose of Sociological Discourse Analysis is to "provide an explanation of social action based on [the] subjective viewpoint" (Ruiz-Ruiz 2009). Its role is to use social inter-subjectivity among persons to inform knowledge about "social order." Sociologically, discourse analysis demands three levels of analysis: textual, contextual, and interpretive. According to Ruiz-Ruiz (2009), textual analysis involves inductive coding and categorizing data into units, positioning discourse as an object. Contextual analysis places discourse as an object and contextualizes it. Finally, interpretive analysis considers implications as a step toward developing theory.

Table 1. illustrates these levels and the corresponding questions used to assess these levels of analysis. The first question attempts to gauge shared issues that demarcate group membership, or community. The second question addresses the importance of the group's ethnoracial background and how that shaped dialogue within the Facebook 'group.' Location of the online conversation is important for several reasons. According to the Pew Research Center's "first national survey of how the use of social networking sites (SNSs) by adults is related to people's overall social network" (42), Facebook users get more social support and are more trusting than users of any other major SNS[4]. In addition, they are the second most politically gauged SNS users after the professional site, LinkedIn (Hampton et. al 2011). As such, those participating in the Black-Latin@ Collective during the years under examination may have found

[4] These major SNSs include Myspace, LinkedIn, Twitter, and a collective Other.

this to be a trusting and supportive group to discuss identities. The final question attempts to gauge how ethnic and racial identity negotiation is shaped or verified among 'members.'

Table 1. Methodological process to examine electronic discourse within the Black-Latin@ Collective Discussion Forum on Facebook

STEPS OF SOCIOLOGICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS	QUESTIONS
Textual Analysis – Keyword Search of 'Group' Forum	Q. 1 - Are commenters discussing issues of common concern to the community?
Contextual Analysis – Local meaning of discourse	Q. 2 - Who participated in the discussion? Where did the discussion take place?
Interpretive Analysis	Q. 3 - What racial ideologies and frameworks are negotiated within the 'group', how and what are the implications?

Although Ruiz-Ruiz (2009) uses Sociological Discourse Analysis (SDA) to examine text produced offline[5], examining electronic discourse is becoming increasingly relevant as we become more connected through the internet. As such, SDA has been adapted to electronic discourse within this work. According to Ruiz-Ruiz (2009), discourse as an outcome of communication reflects knowledge of one's social reality. Therefore electronic discourse in an online discussion forum is viewed as an appropriate research site. In addition, Ruiz-Ruiz (2009) asserts that sociologists tend to focus on content created through verbal discourse, which is viewed as "information, ideology, and social product" (Ruiz-Ruiz 2009). Verbal discourse has the ability to transfer meaning representative of the social world and is therefore the most popular form of discourse examined within sociology (Ruiz-Ruiz 2009). Especially relevant to

[5] When individuals are using the internet, the term 'online' is used to encapsulate this activity. Conversely, 'offline' is a term used when individuals are engaged in activities not occurring while 'online.'

the current work's focus on discourse and SNSs, Ruiz-Ruiz (2009) explains that meanings attached to actions or events in one's everyday life can lead to social action. Capturing the subjective experiences communicated within these spaces provides a discourse that can inform objective knowledge produced in social sciences (Ruiz-Ruiz 2009). As such, discussion forums can be viewed as sites of actions that aid in the legitimization of a social group.

This study examined 'group' comments posted in The Black-Latin@ Collective Facebook 'group' for the years 2007-2008. Approved by IRB in July 2011, data was collected between August 2011 and October 2011. The purpose of the group is to build relationships with AfroLatino/as and other communities. One can argue that participants of The Black-Latin@ Collective 'group' may falsely present themselves as Facebook users because of the ability to socially construct their identity online (Gosling, Gaddis, and Vazire 2007). Furthermore, it is widely understood that individuals are known to present themselves in a positive light to others in everyday situations (Goffman 1959).

Given the widely-held notion that everyone puts their best face forward in electronic forums, it is relevant to dispel concern regarding discussion participants' proclivity to falsely represent themselves regarding their own negotiations and understandings of race. Specifically for Facebook, Back et. al (2010) found that users mostly represent their actual personalities, not self-idealized versions of themselves. As such, this work assumes that discussion participants are presenting issues online that they value offline.

DEMOGRAPHICS

The Black-Latin@ Collective Facebook 'group' is open to individuals of all backgrounds. However, it is likely that AfroLatino/as are most likely to be the majority within

the group as the Facebook group belongs to The Black-Latin@ Collective that is originally an offline nonprofit organization. It is difficult to estimate how many 'members' were a part of the 'group' during 2007-2008, the years that the online discussions under examination occurred. It can be stated that at the beginning of this research in August 2011, there were nearly 260 'group' members. In October 2011 'group' membership increased to 390 and increased again to 423 'group' members by January 2012. At the very least, this illustrates increasing interest in AfroLatino/a identity. Among the 26 'group' commenters, there were 102 final comments felt to be pertinent to my research concerns. Commenters were not anonymous and used actual Facebook usernames, which were replaced with pseudonyms below. There were 11 males, 14 females, and one unknown. Ten commenters self-disclosed their ethnoracial identities: 9 being AfroLatino/a[6] and 1 being African American.

PRIVACY

Privacy matters were a concern for this study. According to Facebook policy, 'administrators' of a group control the group's privacy settings. There are three types of groups on Facebook: Open, Closed, and Secret. The Black-Latin@ Collective is considered *closed*. This means that information provided within the group can only be viewable to members of that group. I began data collection by contacting the group's administrators. I requested to be a part of the group and upon joining comments were then made available to me and any other member of the group. Groups function differently from personal profiles and have respective privacy controls. At no time were personal profiles visited in the study. Only comments that users provided within the group were examined.

[6] Two of these commenters expressed being Black but national identity was more accurate for them as a label. Hence, rejecting US constructions "Afro-" and/or "Latino."

ANALYTICAL PROCEDURES

Discussion comments and asynchronous sub-comments (N=102) from 2007 and 2008 were extracted from The Black-Latin@ Collective's Facebook 'group' (Davis and Brewer 1997). Sub-comments are simply responses to initial comments or posts. Explicit and implicit ideologies of commenters were examined through the deconstruction of meaning systems produced in the group through frames, personal stories, and topics addressed. Comments were broken down into cases, which represent initial posts with a thread of sub-comments. The goal of analyzing case comments was to understand how commenters understood and negotiated racial ideologies in their lives.

A digitally recorded, 110 minute, telephone interview was conducted with a leading member of The Black-Latin@ Collective for a firsthand account regarding why The Black-Latin@ Collective was created, its goal, and the ethno-racial and class background of the creator, along with the role these identities played into the creation of the non-profit organization. The semi-structured interview questionnaire included the following sections: (1) Personal Experiences with Afro-Latina Identity, (2) Black-Latino/a Collective Website, (3) AfroLatino/as in National Discussion, and (4) Black-Latino/a Collective Facebook Group.

FINDINGS

Based on these findings, AfroLatino/as are connecting with one another to question racialization practices in the U.S., negotiate membership and identity within Latino/a and African-American communities, and discuss the appropriateness of 'AfroLatino/a' as an adequate group identifier. As shown in Figure 1, the Black-Latino/a-White trichotomy is treated as mutually exclusive categories. However, U.S. racial ideologies typically ignore the racialization framework relevant to Latin American countries, and therefore the racial ideologies that may be salient for Latino/as.

In the group, commenters engaged in a range of self-disclosure strategies surrounding the posting and "evaluation of articles, autobiographical narratives, statements of personal feelings" (Davis and Brewer 1997). Although we know that there are individuals who can be considered AfroLatino/as (Jimenez-Roman and Flores 2010), dark-skinned Latino/as (Bonilla-Silva 2006), Black Hispanics (Denton and Massey 1989) or Black Latino/as (Darity Jr., et. al 2002) in the group, the group is not exclusive, leaving the option for members of other racialized communities to join. It is clear that by joining the 'group,' all members had some level of interest into issues surrounding the concept and the group that can be understood as 'AfroLatino/a.' Commenters had varying experiences and views on topics presented. Emergent Topics are listed in Table 2 below.

TABLE 2. CASES, COMMENT, AND COMMENTER COUNT

ANALYTICAL DATA

CASE	CASE TOPICS	COMMENTS #	COMMENTERS Per/ Thread
1	Views on 'AfroLatino/a' as appropriate nomenclature	17	10

Table 2 (cont'd)

2	Media representation; 'Latino/a & Black passes'; Family	20	8
3	Natural Disaster in Peru; Family messages	2	2
4	African diaspora populations, Family messages, Views on 'AfroLatino/a' as appropriate nomenclature, One Drop Rule	49	11
5	Blacks in Mexico	7	3
6	Senator Barack Obama's views on AfroLatino/a	3	2
7	El Cristo Negro de Portobello (Spanish)	3	2

AFROLATINO/A LABEL: WHAT'S IN A NAME?

This section will describe the ways in which AfroLatino/a commenters challenge the Black-Latino/a-White model while still placing the label 'AfroLatino/a' as contested terrain. First, commenters do not collectively agree on the terms 'AfroLatino/a' or even 'Latino/a' as being an appropriate term for those from or with roots to Latin America and the Caribbean, though 'Latino/a' is used in scholarship and everyday situations to describe individuals with Latin American origins. Discussion emerged that 'Latino/a' is inherently a European reference to the exclusion of African heritage. Commenters 'debate surrounding 'Latino/a' as appropriate also exists in the literature (Wallerstein 2005). As such, commenters addressed whether adding the prefix 'Afro' to indicate blackness was therefore suitable.

In case 1, the initial post asked whether fellow group members liked or disliked the label 'AfroLatino/a.' Of the 10 commenters in this case, half expressed liking the term as it captured both Latino/a and African roots.

AfroLatino/a identity is not universally defined or employed among participants in The Black-

Latin@ Collective Facebook group. Still, it should not be assumed that because individuals debated the appropriateness of 'AfroLatino/a' as a group identifier that members expressed Black denial. Ten of the 26 participants self-disclosed dual Black and Latin American identities but not all adopted the emerging label, two of the ten identified as AfroLatino/a, one preferred to be identified as 'Latino.' Table 3 indicates a snapshot of the diverse responses in Case 1 among group members:

TABLE 3: CASE 1 - 'AFROLATINO/A': WHAT'S IN A NAME?
1. AFRO-latino/a, afro-LATINO/A. What's in a name? Okay, group members. Here are some questions for you. What does that name mean for/to you? Do you like it? Dislike it? Afro? Latino/a? Is there another way to get the message across? All thoughts are great thoughts... *Lorenzo Sullivan (Male, Self-Identified as Dominican/Puerto Rican)*
2. I just consider myself Latino. I am aware of and embrace my African culture entirely, however I do not identify with mainstream American black culture as I was not raised in it. When people ask what I am, depending on their level of education I either explain in detail or give them a short answer, 'Blaxican', which is our slang for black Mexican. - *Lonnie Garcia (Male, Self-Identified as Black Mexican)*
3. I don't like the term Latino and [would] rather culturally define myself to [others] as AfroDominican / Cocolo. Afro: African mindset, perspective, and critical thinking. Dominican: born , referring to customs language etc ... Cocolo: Family lineage. *Aset Atreu - (Male, Self-Identified as Black and Dominican)*
4. . . . in my honest opinion, regardless of whether the person is half African American half Latino, like my daughter, or Dominican, like me, the experiences of black Latino/as are impacted by the nexus of black phenotype and Latin American culture, which more often than not, are evident either through names, accents, or other cultural cues. . . *(Yahira Cedeno, Female, Self-Identified as Black and Dominican)*
5. i self identify as black latina. because, having been born and raised in Panama, i share the latino and afro cultures. and because i also have English west indian heritage, i go further in saying that I am a Afro Latina with West Indian heritage. I LOVE IT!!! I love who i am and I enjoy being able to merge in and out of various cultures like a chameleon. *Enid Robinson (Female, Self-Identified as AfroLatina, Panamanian)*

In subcomment 2, Lorenzo expressed his preference for identifying as primarily Latino. It is evident that this commenter associates what is widely known as American Black culture as

being African American culture, which he explains he is not a part of. His distinction between Black American and African-American is apparent when 'mainstream' is used as a qualifier for African-American. From this standpoint, one can be considered a non-mainstream Black American or a mainstream Black American. In this case, non-mainstream Black American refers to his identity as a 'black Mexican,' or Mexican of African descent in the US.

In subcomment 3, Aset expressed dislike of the word as U.S.-constructed term 'Latino' erases his cultural ties to the Dominican Republic. He rejects the term 'Latino' while still connecting to his national identity. At the same time, he accepts the U.S. constructed prefix, 'Afro-' to signify African ideological significance. Although he does not mention physiological characteristics that denote blackness, given the Dominican Republic's large African descendant populations it can be assumed that this commenter is what Bonilla-Silva (2006) calls a dark-skinned Latino. Also in support of his Black identity, he refers to *Cocolo*, a term of African origin that at times can even be used within racial discriminatory contexts to mean "black, poor, and unrefined" such as in Puerto Rico (Bonilla-Silva 2010; Jimenez-Roman and Flores 2010).

Yahira and Enid in subcomments 4 and 5, respectively, draw attention to the diversity within AfroLatino/as. Here, Jahira references her daughter as AfroLatina, who is both African American and Latina. Jahira describes herself as AfroLatina vis-à-vis her connection with the Dominican Republic. Enid's identity as an AfroLatina is filtered through her hybrid Panamanian identity. Panamanians are known to have black West Indian ancestry because of West Indian migration patterns at the turn of the 20th century for the construction of the Panama Canal. She brings attention to this and her Latino/a cultural components having been born and raised there. She is also one of the unique

commenters in that her situational negotiation of identity was celebrated while others expressed more social difficulty occupying multiple identities.

Adoption of the label 'AfroLatino/a' signified a number of combinations for this group surrounding African associated components (e.g., culture, roots, history, hair texture, and/or phenotype) and Latin America association by way of connections to personal or familial countries of origin. While agency is important in self-identification, external factors such as agents of socialization also contribute to identification and racialization.

AGENTS OF SOCIALIZATION: PEER GROUPS, MEDIA, AND FAMILY

While skin color based categories for Latino/as are qualitatively different in the U.S. than in many parts of Latin America, still darker Latino/as are likely to experience prejudice based on racial markers such as phenotype and hair texture *in addition* to other prejudices targeted at the Latino/a community. Bonilla-Silva (2010) cautions Latino/as of African descent that they will likely be viewed as African Americans, not Latino/as, and will be treated accordingly, emphasizing that those with 'accents' are susceptible to receive racial *and* ethnic discrimination. Conversely, lighter or whiter Latino/as experience prejudice based on ethnicity and other markers while experiencing privileges based on lighter skin color and/or other physical features deemed desirable among Latino/as and society. Media and family aid understanding of these differences and privileges, and reproduce ideologies adhered to in everyday life for example, in messages received about suitable individuals to date. Commenters addressed Latino/a celebrities who are acknowledged in the US and those in case 2 see skin color as being relevant to their media coverage.

Consistent with Golash-Boza's work (2006), commenters challenged the somatic image for Latino/as as being collectively mestizo/a, a result of the racialization of Latino/as in the U.S. Golash-Boza explains that discrimination plays a role in how Latino/a groups will identify in the U.S. In Case 2 shown in Table 4, commenters expressed frustration with associations of blackness with particular groups and identity negotiation between Latino/a and African-American peers.

TABLE 4: CASE 2 - CHALLENGES TO THE UNDERSTANDING OF 'LATINO/A' AND 'BLACK'
1. My friends, (regardless of race) they start to treat me with more respect once they discover my Latino root. I always got the feeling that since I'm not African-American (they don't seem to understand the concept of Afro-Latino), they thought that made me, more acceptable. My African-American friends distance themselves from me. They'll make comments like, "you don't understand, you're not really black," or the one I hate the most, "it's a black thing" ... I don't understand why SOME of our American brothers and sisters can't see that we've had it just as bad and continue to do so because of all of the anti-immigration hype thats going on… *Jomari Cuevas (Case 2, Female, Afro-Latina, Puerto Rican, Dominican)*
2. I work at a youth organization who serves predominantly Black and Latino youth. I get the constant shock when I speak Spanish, a sudden gained affection and charm from Latino members which makes sense if they feel they now have something in common with me but what's sad is the sudden treatment I get from our African American members... now "suddenly" I don't understand their plight, suddenly my hair is different and my complexion has changed. I'm like NO I am the same person I racial[ly] and physically resemble you, only difference is in our language and cultural upbringing but I share the same discrimination even from my own. It's hard to get that concept across. But I can't blame them when many are confronted with Latino/as who deny any connection with Africa even if its painted on their face and carried in their tradition - *Tiffany Reyes (Case 2, Female, Self-identified Black Latina, Dominican)*
3. I have found myself disgusted at comments made about Blacks in my presence by Latino/as. When I protest or tell them that that shit was uncalled for they get mad, . . . As a kid I remember being like ok Black=African American and thats not me, not my culture, so they not referring to me but when comments like ese pelo malo, or tan prieto/a that has shit to do with culture thats race and when I look in the mirror its me they talking bout. Because physically I am Black . . . Luckily we're having this discussion and slowly Afro-Latino stories are being told. It is def up to us to represent and make ourselves heard and educate not only our peers but the future of 2moro... – *Tiffany Reyes*

Table 4 (cont'd)

4. People like Tego [Calderon], Don Omar, Celia Cruz and Jonny Ventura are beautiful examples of AfroLatino/as but they are only a token few. We as Latino/as are constantly bombarded by images of beauty and Latinidad that never represent those mentioned above. Just look at the cover of any months issue of Latina or People en Español or tune into channel 41 or 47. In general Caribeños are rarely represented and when we are its a focus on the J-Lo's and Rosalyn or Ms. Universe or the Daddy Yankees. Its like come on no wonder people who know nothing about us and use media as their sole source have no idea that Latino/as come in Black. - *Tiffany Reyes (Case 2, Female, Self-identified Black Latina, Dominican)*
5. Strengthen your academic and economic situations and then there will be no race that will be able to put us down. Ensure you succeed 8 times better than those who despise you and then see how they will shut up and learn to respect you. Finally be proud, stand tall declare that you will not be intimidated by small minded racists,the world has over 6 billion people and African/black population is likely to be over 3 billion in the next 50 years so they will have to get used to that. Maintain competitive birth rate to be the majority population. You can do it. – *Henry Blake (Case 2, Male, Self-Identified Race Undisclosed)*
6. Henry, THINK! Do the Whites have to be "better educated" or have a high economic standing to be respected? – Kenneth Gibson *(Case 2, Male, Self-Identified Race Undisclosed)*

Commenters negotiated situational insider-outsider group status and media based representations based on one's skin color, ethnic assertion, language use, and social cue. Jomari explains that once her Latino/a peers realized she was also Latina, they no longer found race to be salient to her identity. First, under the guise of *mestizaje* which is an ideology present in many Latin American countries that reduces the significance of race in the name of national unity (Bonilla-Silva 2006), she was viewed as more acceptable to Latino/a peers. Upon being recognized as an insider, it was confirmed that trust could be extended (Jimenez-Roman and Flores 2010; Mann-Hamilton 2010).

For Jomari, 'African American' simultaneously operates as American, a nationality instead of a race. While this might be thought to be a distancing mechanism, the group is subsequently referred to as 'brothers' and 'sisters,' terms of affection used within the African diaspora and denoting unity. Third, Jomari articulates herself and other AfroLatino/as as

experiencing struggles surrounding race *and* immigration, supporting her view that AfroLatino/as qualify as a racialized other navigating multiple systemic forms of oppression.

In subcomment 2, Tiffany has had similar experiences as Jomari and engages in a dialogue with her on these issues and therefore affirming Jomari's comments. Tiffany was empathetic to African Americans' experiences with discrimination by other Latino/as. However, once Tiffany asserts her identity as Latina, she says that some of her African American peers dissociate her from blackness and therefore from the struggle of blackness. This situationally positions her as a part of an in-group/out-group struggle despite similar racialized experiences.

Tiffany also references in subcomment 2 that she receives a 'Latina pass' once Latino/a peers know realize that she is a Spanish-speaker. While 'Latino/a passes' are socially given to those who fit the stereotypically mestizo/a mold, Tiffany as a Black Latina was not legitimated as a Latina by her peers until she spoke Spanish, distinguishing her from African Americans. Her legitimacy was illustrated through what she described as "sudden gained affection." Conversely, her sudden lost of affection from African Americans was noted once she asserted ethnic components to her identity. She interprets this as African Americans being unaware of slavery's legacy in Latin American and the Caribbean. She was now seen as an outsider to the struggle that often unites African Americans even though AfroLatino/a and African American histories are related from her point of view. Among Latino/as, she was not ideologically understood as Latina, though speaking Spanish did provide a common cultural tie. She attributes the ideological shortfall as symptomatic of Latino/as' denial of any African contributions to Latin America.

Tiffany continues her discussion of the peer group role in subcomment 3. She carried very strong feelings about the discussion of blackness within her family, as well as

among her peers, which is evident in this comment. Peers are also pivotal in understanding notions of race. The messages Tiffany received about characteristics denoting blackness such as bad hair (*pelo malo*) or being too dark (*tan prieto/a*) coincide with media portrayals of mestizo/as or lighter skinned Latino/as who are associated with standards of beauty. Bad hair typically refers to hair that is not 'straight' and has a much finer, white European, hair texture.

While social privileges are awarded to lighter Latino/as, they are not as available for darker Latino/as who may be identified as unattractive. For the commenter, because Black was seen as African American within her family, an attempt was made to create social distance between comments made about African Americans, but eventually she came to terms that these same race-based insults could be applied to her because of shared physical similarities. Tiffany's example provides a detailed illustration of how the concepts of race and racialization are relevant within the Latino/a community through interpretations of beauty and acceptable dating preferences. Moreover, these interpretations shape individual understanding of oneself and others.

At the end of this comment thread represented by subcomment 5, one individual offered advice regarding how AfroLatino/as could overcome discrimination and gain respect through traditional messages such as hard work and academic success, as well as having a competitive birth rate. Just one group member contested this, subcomment 6, by arguing that having to ensure individual or collective out-performance of the majority will not structurally change their conditions or combat inequality given that, in his interpretation, Whites do not have to earn respect in this way.

While some may assume that AfroLatino/as either *become* African American or that they completely reject association with a Black identity whether vis-à-vis African Americans or not, members within the Black Latin@ Collective group did not express these sentiments. Instead, members expressed a diverse set of experiences related to blackness, *latinidad,* and *afrolatinidad.*

UNDERSTANDINGS OF RACE AND RACIAL CLASSIFICATIONS

In the group's understanding of race and racial classifications, commenters contested the former 'one drop rule' of hypodescent that aided the legal and social construction of race in the U.S., presented in Case 4. Case 4 inhabited the largest number of comments (49) and commenters (11). The initial post that shaped Case 4 listed 150 million[7] African descendants by country per population in Latin America and the Spanish Caribbean. The following commenters debated the accuracy in measuring blackness and differing racial constructions within countries as indicated by a selected portion of the comment thread in Case 4, Table 5:

[7] According to Jimenez-Roman and Flores (2011), the population has increased to 180 million.

TABLE 5: CASE 4 - AFRICAN-DESCENDENT POPULATIONS, ENUMERATION, AND RACIALIZATION

1. I … think the numbers for Puerto Rico are down played. A lot of people in PR (or in the states for that matter) claim everything other than Afro Rican.

-Monica Johnson (Female, Self-Identity Race Undisclosed)

2. True! Those numbers are downplayed and out dated...lol! In PR 84% of the population is listed as white. The only reason why ppl put down white or anything other than black is because it is "good" or "better" for the soul/mind and for social standing and for money. If you are listed as black the tougher life will be.[8] - *Jacob Micheaux (Male, Self-Identity Race Undisclosed)*

3. Interesting. Martinique, Guadeloupe, and French Guiana were left out. They are French speaking as well hence LATIN. Latin American is a term coined by the French ppl … - *Jacob Micheaux*

4. Well without an arbitrary One Drop Rule, it is a difficult thing to measure. Especially given the blanqueamiento in all its forms across the region. It's worth noting that Mexico doesn't even count Blacks in their census. – *Adrian Patilla (Male, Self-Identity Race Undisclosed)*

5. The one drop rule was OUTLAWED in 1967. Therefore it has NO legal precedent or legal adhesion anymore. I am not saying that the mentality of it still has an effect in terms of how people think in terms of race and classification but either way in the USA it is a matter of if you are white or not white. – *Jacob Michaeux*

6. Panama latest census was a joke. Afro latinos were not counted because "race" and "blackness" are still tabous [SIC] there. It is amazing how a country with soo much Afro influence in every aspect, has a hard time with defining itself as having Afro heritage. – *Enid Robinson (Female, Self-Identified AfroLatina, Panamanian)*

7. So there were no race questions at all, or did they just exclude Negro as an option? – *Adrian Patilla*

8. Ok, here is a summary of how the census is conducted. The questionnaire had the following questions: "Does anyone in this home consider him/herself black or of African descent? Yes, No

If you said yes, then answer the following: Do you consider yourself: Colonial black, Antillean (West Indian) Black, Black- other , none[9] - *Enid Robinson*

Within this conversation, there are several things occurring. The group is debating

[8] In this comment, 'lol' is an electronic discourse acronym for 'laugh out loud,' indicating humor. Likewise, 'ppl' is an abbreviation for people.

[9] Enid addresses the different Black groups that exist in Panama. Colonial Blacks are those that have been in Panama since independence from Spain and Colombia. Antillean/West Indian Blacks are those that migrated for mostly labor purposes in the late 19th century and early 20th century.

how Blacks are conceptualized and enumerated domestically and in particularly countries. Additionally, commenters affirm and contest each others' positions, while integrating concepts that construct race. Here, there is a critical discussion of identity that references institutional (e.g., the Census) and historical means of racialization.

In subcomment 1, Monica expresses that the African-descendant population is vastly undercounted in Puerto Rico and in subcomment 2 Jacob affirms this sentiment. Mutual doubt of the Black population count is indicative these group members perceive African-descendants in Latin America to be inadequately represented. Subsequently in subcomments 4 and 5, Jacob and Adrian debate the contemporary applicability of the one drop rule (Middleton 2008) and the role it has in racialization among AfroLatino/as. Jacob does not appear to agree that the one drop rule determines blackness butAdrian does. While, both agree that blackness in relevant in the discussion of AfroLatino/as, they differ on *how* they perceive blackness to be constructed. In subcomments 6 though 8, Enid engaged in one instance of information sharing within the comment thread. She explained her country of origin, Panama, accounted for Black identity for the first time in its 2010 census. Here is an example regarding knowledge of racialization from the U.S. and abroad that inform opinions on Blackness within a transnational framework.

Overall, these findings suggest that race is increasingly relevant as it intersections with other identities despite dominant discourse of a postracial U.S. society. First, AfroLatino/as used dominant ideological understandings to negotiate racialization vis-à-vis Latino/as and African-Americans. The evidence also suggested that agents of socialization reproduced dominant ideologies at macro and micro levels. Consistent with the work included in *The AfroLatino/a Reader* (Jimenez-Roman and Flores 2010), commenters challenged the Black-White dichotomy

and racialization of U.S. Latino/as as one homogenous group. Finally, commenters discussed the (in)appropriateness of adopting the label 'AfroLatino/a.'

CONCLUSION

While Latino/as are likely to view themselves in terms of national identity, the otherness created as a consequence of racial ideologies and frameworks are salient markers that may influence Latino/as of African-descent to also identify as Black in addition to Latino/a (Denton and Massey 1989). Likewise, living within the U.S. paradigm of racialization, Latino/as may also find solidarity with groups to which they are racially similar. In addition, racist encounters may influence Latino/as of African-descent to connect with a racial identity, as well. Therefore, it could be argued that as darker, African descendant Latino/as experience otherness among the general Latino/a group, the concept of AfroLatino/a may become adopted more broadly.

Adopting a social black identity does not necessarily erase ethnic components. AfroLatino/as may experience black rejection or reduction by African-Americans who are often deemed 'authentically' Black, or the identity standard for who constitutes 'Black' in the U.S. Negotiation of ethnic and racial identities is not a linear process. While not all Latino/as of African-descent identify as 'AfroLatino/a,' this research reveals there is a growing number that do.

Innovative forms of analysis and theoretical concepts can help better understand how racial ideologies and frameworks are changing and being understood within contemporary immigration processes and among People of Color trying to fit into the traditional US Black-White dichotomy. As this study is exploratory, findings are not yet generalizeable. However, examining online discussions can serve as a barometer for the social issues and ideologies gestating in society that may otherwise only be visible locally and offline. Engagement in social networking sites has the ability to reveal much about identity, ideology, and experiences related

to diasporic communities. An online group such as The Black-Latin@ Collective may also be a safe space for African-descendant Latino/as to explore identification within ideas of blackness in the U.S., something that may be considered taboo among family and peers offline. Further, it allows an unobtrusive research method for understanding how identities are established in the 21st century.

Future research on AfroLatino/as needs to take into account gender differences between men and women among other social categories. Building on the work of Cruz-Janzen (2001), AfroLatinas, especially those women with darker skin and "apparent negroid features," are often seen as sexual partners but not as women worthy to be wives by partners or society (179). AfroLatinas such as *mulatas*[10] may be viewed as less socially acceptable for marriage but are ranked higher socially than black AfroLatinas. Again, this speaks to the *de facto* system of colorism within racialized communities. It would also be useful to examine codeswitching between Spanish, Standard American English, and African American Vernacular English (AAVE) among AfroLatino/as to understand how this impacts the perception of AfroLatino/as.

Among AfroLatino/as, there is diversity to consider such as different sets of socialization and lived experiences across space, language use, proximity to other communities, nationality, and accent. Increasingly, academia and different forms of media are capturing these varied experiences. For example, The CNN web site points to a growing concern with AfroLatino/a identity, something that other individuals and groups are also developing (Diaz 2012; Morales 2011; Ocana 2012).

[10] Women who are mixed with African (Black) and Spaniard (White) ancestry.

In general, the diversity among U.S. Latino/as and Black communities lends itself to examining how AfroLatino/as contribute to the discussion of race in the US. Disregarding the social and structural significance of race silences much needed discussion on how racialization is changing in the US. Moreover, disregarding the sociological implications of race silences the communities most affected by racism and colorism. The discussion of race is not only relevant for sociological inquiry, but to understand how and to whom resources and social privileges are distributed and flow within networks. In efforts to contest current postracialism discourse, it is important to emphasize that it is not that race is becoming unimportant. As the U.S. experiences demographics shifts and new technological tools assist in raising visibility for social groups, scholars must not dismiss the significance of race. Instead, they must embrace it and understand how it is being (re)interpreted and (re)produced.

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