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Contemporary nonwhite immigration from Latin America and Asia, increasing racial/ethnic intermarriage, and the growing number of multiracial individuals has made the black-white color line now seem anachronistic in America, consequently raising the question of whether today's color line is evolving in new directions toward either a white-nonwhite divide, a black-nonblack divide, or a new tri-racial hierarchy. In order to gauge the placement of today's color line, we examine patterns of multiracial identification, using both quantitative data on multiracial reporting in the 2000 U.S. Census and in-depth interview data from multiracial individuals with Asian, Latino or black backgrounds. These bodies of evidence suggest that the multiracial identifications of Asians and Latinos (behaviorally and self-perceptually) show much less social distance from whites than from blacks, signaling the likely emergence of a black-nonblack divide that continues to separate blacks from other groups, including new nonwhite immigrants. However, given that the construction of whiteness as a category has been fluid in the past and appears to be stretching yet again, it is also possible that the color line will change still further to even more fully incorporate Asians and Latinos as white, which would mean that the historical black-white divide could again re-emerge.

In 1903, the prominent African American social theorist W.E.B. Du Bois prophesied that the "problem of the twentieth-century is the problem of the color line," by which he meant the relatively impermeable bi-categorical black-white fault line that had historically divided the country ([1903] 1997:45). Owing to the practice of slavery, the persistence of white prejudice and discrimination resulting from slavery, and the legacy of black social and economic disadvantage, the central organizing principle of race/ethnic relations in the United States has revolved around the axis of the black-white color line (Bobo 1997; Brown et al. 2003; Drake and Cayton [1945] 1993; Myrdal 1944). This delineation consigns blacks and whites to different positions in the social order and attaches a different set of rights and privileges to each group. The unique deprivations imposed on blacks and the tensions spawned by the uneasy history of black-white relations provided stark reminders of the strength of the divide throughout much of the 20th century.

During the latter third of the 20th century, however, the United States moved far beyond black and white, partly as a result of the 1965 Hart-Celler Act – legislation that eliminated national origin quotas and opened the nation's doors to increased flows of nonwhite immigrants. Today, immigrants and their children number almost 66 million, or about 23 percent of the U.S. population (Bean et al. 2004; Lee and Bean 2004; U.S. Bureau of Census 2002). Unlike the immigrants who arrived at the turn of the 20th century, today's newcomers are mainly non-European. The shift in national origins – from Europe to Latin America, Asia and the Caribbean – is the single most distinctive aspect of "new immigration" in the United States (Bean and Bell-Rose 1999; Waldinger and Lee 2001). Today's new arrivals have left an indelible imprint on the nation's racial/ethnic scene, transforming it from a largely black-white society at the end of World War II to one now consisting of multiple racial and new nonwhite ethnic groups (Alba and Nee 2003; Bean and Stevens 2003; Sears et al. 2003). In 1970, Latinos and Asians comprised only 5 and 1 percent of the nation's population respectively, but in 2005, these percentages rose to 13 and 4 percent. Moreover, America's Latino and Asian populations are continuing to expand. According to National Research Council projections, by the year 2050, they are likely to constitute about 25 and 8 percent of the U.S. population respectively (Smith and Edmonston 1997).

While today's immigration dramatizes the analytical inadequacy of the black-white color line, other social trends are also augmenting the racial/ethnic diversity of the United States, most notably the rise in intermarriage and the growth of the multiracial population. Intermarriage soared more than 20-fold over a 40-year period, from 150,000 such marriages in 1960 to 3.1 million in 2000 (Jacoby 2001; Lee and Edmonston 2005). Today,

about 13 percent of American married couples involve someone whose partner is of a different race, a significant increase from earlier lower levels that cannot be attributed to changing racial composition alone (Bean and Stevens 2003). In turn, the upswing in interracial marriage is responsible in large part for a growing multiracial population, which became highly visible when the 2000 U.S. Census allowed Americans to identify themselves as belonging to more than one race. Currently, 1 in 40 Americans identifies himself or herself as multiracial, and by the year 2050, this ratio could soar to one in five (Farley 2001; Smith and Edmonston 1997).

Each of these phenomena – increasing nonwhite racial/ethnic diversity occurring through immigration, rising intermarriage, and the growing multiracial population – suggests that the traditional black-white color line may be losing salience. Given that today's immigrant newcomers from Latin America and Asia may not identify themselves as either black or white, the traditional black-white model of race relations may not adequately depict the character of race/ethnic relations for Asians and Latinos nor accurately portray the structure of today's color line. Consequently, a pressing question in the current sociology of race/ethnic relations is: are the incorporation experiences of America's newest nonwhite immigrant groups tracking those of their European predecessors, or are these groups becoming racialized minorities who see their experiences as more akin to those of African Americans? In other words, do Asians and Latinos more closely resemble whites or blacks in the United States at this point in time? Answers to such questions will help to reveal whether the black-white color line of the past is morphing into a white-nonwhite divide, a black-nonblack divide, or a new tri-racial hierarchy. If the problem of the 20th century was the color line, the question of the 21st century could be one of multiple color *lines*.

We seek to provide a sense of the nature of any new color lines in America by examining both nationally representative census data and in-depth interviews with multiracial Americans, focusing specifically on Asians, Latinos and blacks. Information on the prevalence of and feelings about multiracial identification speaks profoundly to the meaning of race in American society, and to perceptions about the permeability and rigidity of racial/ethnic boundaries. Such data also signal where group boundaries are fading most rapidly and where they continue to endure. More fundamentally, multiracial identification constitutes a significant harbinger of social change because seeing and identifying oneself in multiracial terms (and particularly being able and willing to designate oneself in such terms officially) reflects a jettisoning of the *exclusive* and *absolutist* bases of racial categorization that have long marked racial construction in the United States. As Gans (1999) explains, multiracial identification

reflects the diminishing significance of the current racial scheme, which he predicts will become increasingly less relevant in each generation until it disappears into obscurity. Multiracial identification thus provides an important analytical lens through which to gauge the placement, strength and shifts of America's color line.

In this paper, we review results from the 2000 U.S. Census on multiracial reporting. In addition, we examine new data from in-depth interviews with 46 multiracial individuals with Asian, Latino or black backgrounds.[1] Our goal is to elucidate the subjective experience of racial/ethnic identification, including perceptions about the factors and processes that lead to the choice of racial/ethnic and multiracial identities. The in-depth interviews allow us to delve into the meaning that multiracial identification holds for multiracial Americans and the processes that guide (and constrain) identity choices. Two research questions frame our analyses. First, we examine whether multiracial Americans feel free to choose among various racial/ethnic and multiracial identities, or whether they feel they face constraints in the choice of such identities. Second, we inquire about the meaning and content of multiracial identity, probing in order to ascertain whether claiming a multiracial identity is largely a symbolic response to a census questionnaire or one that reflects an identification that is significantly embedded in the everyday lives of multiracial Americans.

Theory and Previous Research

A White-Nonwhite Divide

One possible emergent color line might be a white-nonwhite divide. Such a divide has been legally enforced throughout the history of the United States, well into the 20th century. In 1924, for example, the state of Virginia passed a Racial Integrity Law that created two distinct racial categories: "pure" white and all others. The statue defined a "white" person as one with "no trace whatsoever of blood other than Caucasian," and emerged to legally ban intermarriage between whites and other races. While blacks were clearly nonwhite under the legislation, Asians and Latinos were also consigned to the nonwhite side of the strict binary divide. The statute reflected the Supreme Court rulings of *Takao Ozawa v. United States* (1922) and *United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind* (1923), in which persons of Asian origin were not only classified as nonwhite but also considered ineligible for U.S. citizenship. In the first case, Takao Ozawa (a Japanese citizen of the United States) filed for U.S. citizenship under the Naturalization Act of June 29, 1906, which allowed whites and persons of African descent or African nativity to naturalize. Rather than challenging the constitutionality

of the racial restrictions to U.S. citizenship, Ozawa argued that his skin color made him a "white person" and that Japanese persons should be classified as "white." The Supreme Court ruled that only Caucasians were white, and because the Japanese were not of the Caucasian race, they were not white, but rather, members of an "unassimilable race."

Three months later, in *United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind* (1923), the Supreme Court handed down a similar ruling, denying citizenship to a man of Asian-Indian origin. The court ruled that Bhagat Singh Thind, a native of India, could not be a naturalized citizen despite the fact that anthropologists had defined members of the Indian subcontinent as members of the Caucasian race. In this instance, while the court did not dispute that Thind was a Caucasian, they ruled that not all Caucasians were white. According to the Supreme Court, while Thind may have been Caucasian, he was not a "white person" as "used in common speech, to be interpreted in accordance with the understanding of the common man." While Takao Ozawa was denied citizenship because he was not of the Caucasian race, and therefore not white, Bhagat Singh Thind was denied citizenship because he was not white according to the common understanding of "whiteness," even though the court conceded that he was Caucasian. The rulings reflected the idea that persons of Asian origin were not only a distinct racial and color category from whites, but were also considered "unassimilable."

Solidifying the placement of nonwhites with blacks were administrative policies adopted in the latter half of the 1960s following the Civil Rights movement. Most prominently, Civil Rights administrators extended affirmative action policies to minority groups they perceived as "analogous to blacks" with respect to physical distinctiveness and to having "suffered enough" to be similarly categorized (Skrentny 2002). According to these criteria, Latinos, Native Americans and Asians became eligible for affirmative action programs while disadvantaged white ethnics did not. Perhaps one unintended consequence of such policies was that Latinos and Asians were identified as racialized minorities more akin to blacks than to whites. In essence, these federal policies placed Asians and Latinos on the nonwhite side of the divide, helping to foster a delineation between whites and nonwhites.

Further cementing the divide was the introduction of the label "people of color," which gained momentum and popularity in the late 1980s (Hollinger 2005). This umbrella term combines all nonwhite groups on the basis of their racialized minority status and connotes that they share a similar subordinate status vis-à-vis whites. By homogenizing the experiences of all nonwhite groups, the "people of color" rubric indicates that the boundaries among nonwhite groups are less distinct and salient

than the boundary separating whites and nonwhites. Accordingly, in a white-nonwhite model of racial/ethnic relations, Asians and Latinos would fall closer to blacks than to whites in their experiences in the United States, suggesting that the reporting of and experiences with multiracial identification should be similar for Asians, Latinos and blacks.

A Black/ Non-black Divide

In the 1990s, social scientists began to notice the emergence of a new racial structure that differed from both the black-white and white-nonwhite divides. What appeared to be forming was a new binary color line – a black-nonblack divide – that highlighted the continuing and unique separation of blacks, not only from whites, but also from other nonwhite racial/ethnic groups (Alba 1990; Gitlin 1995; Gans 1999; Sanjek 1994). The concept of a black-nonblack division surfaced in conjunction with a flurry of research documenting the processes by which previously "nonwhite" immigrant ethnic groups, such as the Irish, Italians and Eastern European Jews, became "white." (Alba 1990, 1985; Brodkin 1998; Gerstle 1999; Igantiev 1995; Jacobson 1998; Roediger 1991) For example, Ignatiev (1995) details how Irish immigrants – once referred to as "white Negroes" by the country's Anglo-Saxons – attained "whiteness" by shifting their political alliances, achieving economic mobility and adopting deliberate and extreme measures to distance themselves from African Americans. With upward economic mobility, in particular, came the de-coupling of national origin differences from "racial" differences, further contributing to the development of the idea that for Irish immigrants (and other European immigrants), race was an achieved – rather than an ascribed – status (Alba 1990; Foner 2000; Haney-Lopez 1996; Perlmann and Waldinger 1997; Waters 1990). In other words, as economic and cultural differences diminished and eventually faded between white and nonwhite immigrants groups, the Irish, Italians and Eastern European Jews became racially reconstructed as white.

Researchers have also shown that early 20th century European immigrants were not the only ones to have changed their status from nonwhite to white. Asian ethnic immigrant groups such as the Chinese and the Japanese also changed their racial status from almost black to almost white. Loewen (1971), for example, documents how Chinese immigrants in the Mississippi Delta made conscious efforts to change their lowly racial status by achieving economic mobility, emulating the cultural practices and institutions of whites, intentionally distancing themselves from blacks, and rejecting fellow ethnics who married blacks as well as their Chinese-black multiracial children. By adopting the anti-black sentiments held by Mississippi whites and by closely following

the region's moral codes, the Chinese accepted rather than challenged the existing racial hierarchy and essentially crossed over the black-white color line. As a consequence of such deliberate efforts, the racial status of the Chinese in the region changed from almost black to almost white. Spickard (1989) notes a similar process of change among Japanese Americans who, at the beginning of the 20th century, joined blacks at the bottom of the racial hierarchy but whose status rose dramatically just three-quarters of a century later. Today, so extreme is the shift in America's racial hierarchy that Asians, now donning titles of "model minority" and "honorary whites," have become the group against which other nonwhite groups are often judged and compared – a far cry from the derisive designation "yellow horde" that once described Asian immigrants at the turn of the 20th century (Gans 2005; Zhou 2004).

While immigrant groups have changed their status from nonwhite to white or almost white, African Americans have yet to be able to do the same. Gans (2005:19-20) refers to this as the pattern of African American exceptionalism. He elaborates, "The only population whose racial features are not automatically perceived differently with upward mobility are African Americans: Those who are affluent and well educated remain as visibly black to whites as before…" Warren and Twine (1997:208) posit this occurs because blackness has been constructed as the racialized "other" against which whiteness is defined. They explain,

> "[B]ecause Blacks represent the 'other' against which Whiteness is constructed, the backdoor to Whiteness is open to non-Blacks. Slipping through the opening is, then, a tactical matter for non-Blacks of conforming to White standards, of distancing themselves from *Blackness*, and of reproducing anti-Black ideas and sentiments."

Warren, Twine and others (Guinier and Torres 2002), argue that throughout the history of the United States, blacks have served a critical role in the construction and expansion of whiteness by serving as the definition of what white is *not*.

Other scholars further elaborate that whiteness is continuing to expand to incorporate new immigrant groups such as Asians and Latinos (Gallagher 2004; Gerstle 1999; Warren and Twine 1997). As evidence, Warren and Twine (1997) point to the observation made by many Americans that Asians and Latinos appear to "blend" more easily with whites compared to blacks. Furthermore, Gallagher (2004) argues that many whites view Asians and Latinos as more culturally similar to them than to blacks, and posits that the United States is currently undergoing a process of

"racial redistricting," whereby Asians and Latinos (especially multiracials) are able to "glide easily" into the white category. Twine's research on multiracial identification reinforces this point; she finds that the children of black intermarriages are usually perceived by others as black (Twine 1996). By contrast, the children of Asian and Latino intermarriages are not similarly perceived monoracially as Asian or Latino. Studies of Asian-white multiracial youth underscore this point and show that they are equally likely to select white or Asian as the single category that best describes their racial background, pointing to the latitude such adolescents have in designating their own racial/ethnic heritage (Harris and Sim 2002; Saenz et al. 1995; Xie and Goyette 1997). Likewise, multiethnic Mexican Americans exercise a great deal of choice in how they identify (Jiménez 2004). Previous research thus consistently reveals that Asian and Latino multiracial Americans (at least those without African ancestry) exercise more freedom to choose among various racial/ethnic options, including multiracial and white identities.

While the boundaries to inclusion in the white category may have expanded over time and may continue to stretch, blacks are the one group yet to be included. Given the persistence of the rigidity of the boundary surrounding blacks, some social scientists argue that a black-nonblack divide is emerging, in which Asians and Latinos fall on the nonblack side of the divide. If this were the case, we would expect to find lower levels of multiracial reporting and identification among blacks compared to other nonwhite racial/ethnic groups such as Asians and Latinos. We would also expect their experiences with multiraciality to differ from these groups, with Asians and Latinos perceiving greater flexibility and fluidity in their racial/ethnic and multiracial identity options compared to blacks.

A Tri-Racial Divide

While some social scientists propose that America's color line will reflect a binary structure (i.e., white-nonwhite or black-nonblack), others offer an alternative possibility – a tri-racial stratification system similar to that of many Latin American and Caribbean countries. In the United States, this would be viewed as consisting of whites, honorary whites and collective blacks (Bonilla-Silva 2004a, 2004b). Included in the "white" category would be whites, assimilated white Latinos, some multiracials, assimilated Native Americans and a few Asian-origin people. "Honorary whites" would include light-skinned Latinos, Japanese Americans, Korean Americans, Chinese Americans, Asian Indians, Middle Eastern Americans and most multiracials. Finally, the "collective black" category would include blacks, Filipinos, Vietnamese, Hmong, Laotians, dark-skinned Latinos, West Indian and African immigrants, and reservation-bound Native Americans.

Because many of today's new immigrants hail from Latin America and the Caribbean, Bonilla-Silva argues that a more complex tri-racial order may naturally emerge given the "darkening" of the United States. In his view, a tri-racial order would also serve to help maintain "white supremacy" by creating an intermediate racial group to buffer racial conflict (Bonilla-Silva 2004b:5). While a few new immigrants might fall into the honorary white strata and may even eventually become white, the majority would be consigned to the collective black strata, including most Latino immigrants whom he labels as "racial others" or persons whose experiences with race are similar to those of blacks. In this regard, the tri-racial model differs fundamentally from the black-nonblack divide because Bonilla-Silva posits that many Latinos are racialized in a manner similar to African Americans, and therefore fall on the black side of the divide.

While some empirical support has emerged for the Latin Americanization thesis, it has not gone without criticism. Murguia and Saenz (2004) argue that a three-tier system pre-dated substantial Latin American migration to the United States. Other social scientists contest the uniform characterization of Latinos as a monolithic group (Forman, Goar and Lewis 2004; Murguia and Saenz 2004). For example, studying Latinos' social attitudes toward other racial/ethnic groups, Forman et al. (2004) find that Latinos fall into different segments of the tri-racial hierarchy depending on national origin. Puerto Ricans differ from Mexicans in their expressed feelings towards blacks, with the former group demonstrating greater variation depending on skin color. Mexicans, however, are much more uniform in their feelings towards blacks and express attitudes closer to those of non-Hispanic whites than to those of non-Hispanic blacks, perhaps as a result of a history of racial mixing in Mexico which involved very few Africans, unlike the history of mixing in Puerto Rico (Forman et al. 2004). In any case, regardless of skin color, Latinos fall closer to non-Hispanic whites in their attitudes toward blacks than to non-Hispanic blacks. Such results suggest considerable variation in the racialization experiences of Latinos in the United States. Contrary to the Latin Americanization thesis, many Latinos, especially Mexicans, may not see themselves or may not be seen as belonging to the collective black category. However, if the Latin Americanization thesis holds and a tri-racial hierarchy is forming, we would expect to find similar patterns of and experiences with multiracial identification among blacks and Latinos because both are "racial others," but differences between these two groups and Asians.

Data and Methods

To assess the placement of the new color line, we examine both 2000 U.S. Census data and 46 in-depth interviews of multiracial adults carried out in southern and northern California. The selection of the in-

Table 1: Respondents by Race/Ethnicity in the Interview Sample

Multiracial Individuals	Total
Asian/White	16
Latino/White	8
Black/White	9
Black/Asian	5
Black/Latino	2
Asian/Latino	6
Total Interviews	**46**

depth interview sample was complex. It is currently impossible to draw nationally representative random samples of multiracial adults because no national (or even local) lists exist. While previous qualitative studies have often recruited respondents from multiracial organizations or by placing advertisements in newspapers or newsletters geared to this population, we purposely decided *not* to recruit respondents using this method because most individuals who belong to such organizations join them because of their strong awareness of and identification with their multiracial backgrounds. Instead, we recruited respondents through ethnic markets, ethnic restaurants and ethnic salons in the southern and northern California areas, near Los Angeles and the San Francisco Bay Area. We contacted the owners of these establishments, and they referred us to some of their regular customers who had mentioned that they had parents of different cultural, racial or ethnic backgrounds.[2] The benefit of drawing an initial selection from these businesses rather than from multiracial organizations is that while the respondents may acknowledge their mixed backgrounds, they may not necessarily identify multiracially. Following the initial interviews, we used snowball sampling to identify multiracial adults who were not customers in these ethnic establishments. By recruiting respondents in these ways, we were able to identify a sample of "potential multiracials" with less bias toward those who clearly identify multiracially (Waters 2000). Table 1 lists our respondents by the racial/ethnic categories of identification.[3]

Lasting up to two hours, the interviews were semi-structured, open-ended and tape-recorded. Respondents were asked questions about their racial/ethnic identities and cultural practices: how and why they choose to identify themselves the way they do; whether these identities had changed over time and/or in different contexts; what their identities meant to them; and their cultural and linguistic practices. The inductive approach in the interviews enabled the uncovering of subjective processes guiding the choice of racial/ethnic identification. We transcribed the interviews verbatim and conducted follow-up interviews when responses were unclear or needed further elaboration.

Results

America's Multiracial Population

For the first time, the 2000 U.S. Census allowed Americans to mark "one or more" races to indicate racial identification. This was a landmark change in the way the census measures race; it acknowledged the reality of racial mixing and no longer required Americans to claim one race exclusive of all others – a momentous shift considering that the United States has been historically hostile to racial mixture as evidenced by the legal invocation of the "one-drop" rule of hypodescent constraining racial identity options for multiracial blacks (Dalmage 2004; Davis 1991; Farley 2002; Haney-Lopez 1996; Hirschman et al. 2000; Hollinger 2003; Nobles 2000; Waters 2000; Williams 2006). As a result of this change, about 6.8 million Americans, or 2.4 percent of the population, identified themselves or members of their households as multiracial. Although this may not appear large, demographers estimate that multiracials could soar to one in five persons by the year 2050. By then, a recent National Academy of Sciences study estimates that the multiracial population could increase to 21 percent when as many as 35 percent of Asians and 45 percent of Hispanics might have multiracial backgrounds (Smith and Edmonston 1997).

America's multiracial population is clustered in the western region of the United States, with nearly two-thirds residing in just 10 states. In California, 1.6 million people identified multiracially, accounting for 4.7 percent of its population, or one in every 21 Californians. To help put this figure into perspective, the number of multiracial births already exceeds the number of black and Asian births in the state (Tafoya et al. 2005). A key sign of a growing multiracial population is its youthfulness. Among Americans who identified multiracially, 42 percent were under the age of 18, compared to 25 percent of other Americans. Moreover, the multiracial population is twice as likely to be under the age of eighteen. In California, 7.3 percent of those under the age of 18 identified multiracially, translating into one in every 14 young Californians. The greater proportion of young multiracials is, in part, a product of the increase in interracial unions, especially among the young, native-born Asians and Latinos.

Wide variations in rates of multiracial reporting also occur across groups. As shown in Table 2, 12 percent of Asians and 16 percent of "Other" Americans (i.e., Latinos) identified multiracially, yet only 4 percent of the black population did.[4] The black rate of multiracial reporting is much lower compared to other groups, even after controlling for differences in age, education, nativity, gender and region of the United States (Tafoya et al. 2005). Moreover, while the Census Bureau estimates that at least three-quarters of blacks in the United States are ancestrally multiracial, just over

Table 2: Multiracial Identification by Census Racial Categories

	Racial Identification[a]	Multiracial Identification[b]	% Multiracial
White	216.5	5.1	2.3
Black	36.2	1.5	4.2
Asian	11.7	1.4	12.4
Other	18.4	3.0	16.4
American Indian and Alaska Native	3.9	1.4	36.4
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	.7	.3	44.8

Note: All racial and multiracial identification figures in millions.
[a]Racial/Ethnic group totals do not sum to the total U.S. population because multiracial persons are counted here in more than one group.
[b]Multiracial persons are counted for each race category mentioned.
Source: U.S. Census 2000

4 percent choose to identify as such, indicating that most black Americans do not depend strictly on their genealogy to identify themselves, but instead, rely on the social construction of racial boundaries. That the rate of multiracial reporting is three to four times higher among Asians and Latinos than among blacks suggests that the historical absence of the constraining "one-drop" rule for these groups may provide more leeway in exercising discretion in the selection of racial/ethnic identities (Harris and Sim 2002; Xie and Goyette 1997).

When we examine patterns of multiracial reporting among couples with children under the age of 18, we find that 40 percent of children living with couples of different races are identified multiracially. For example, 49 percent of black-white couples, 52 percent of Asian-white couples, and 25 percent of Latino-white couples identified their children as multiracial. Yet stark differences emerge when these couples chose a single race to identify their children. Most black-white couples who reported a single race for their children chose black, while most Asian-white and Latino-white couples who chose a single race for their children chose white rather than Asian or Latino (Tafoya et al. 2005).

Furthermore, the rate of multiracial reporting declined with children's age. A full 55 percent of 1-year-old children born of black-white unions were identified as multiracial, compared to 35 percent of 17-year-old children. In other words, as black-white children grow older, they are less likely to be identified as multiracial, and more likely to be identified as black. Among 1-year-old children of Asian-white unions, 57 percent were identified as multiracial, compared to 45 percent of 17 year olds. As Asian-white children grow older, they, too, are less likely to be identified as multiracial, but more likely to be identified as white rather than Asian.

A similar pattern emerged among Latino-white children. Hence, while all multiracial children are less likely to be reported as multiracial as they grow older, black-white children are more likely to be reported as black whereas Asian-white and Latino-white children are more likely to be reported as white (Tafoya et al. 2005).

The data from the in-depth interviews of the multiracial adults help to elucidate the patterns that emerge from the U.S. Census. Two main research questions guide the analyses. First, do multiracial Americans feel free to choose among various racial/ethnic and multiracial options? Second, what meaning does multiraciality hold for these respondents? Is multiracial identification instrumental or symbolic in their everyday lives?

Outsiders' Ascription and the Inclusivity/Exclusivity of Racial Categorization

Based on the interviews, we find that multiracial blacks are less likely to identify multiracially compared to their Asian and Latino counterparts, in large part, because of outsiders' ascription, which powerfully influences one's choice of identities. Sociologists have noted that racial/ethnic identity is a dialectical process – one that involves both internal and external opinions and processes (Nagel 1994; Rodríguez and Cordero-Guzman 1992; Waters 1990, 1999). Researchers have also shown that outsiders' ascription most powerfully constrains the racial/ethnic options for blacks. While blacks in the United States make distinctions based on ethnicity, class, nativity and skin tone, the power of race – and blackness in particular – often overrides these internal differences (Kasinitz 1992; Waters 1999).

Multiracial blacks are less likely to identify as such, in part, because others identify them as black. For example, when we asked a 33-year-old woman born to a white mother and black father why she chose to identify as black on the census form, she explained,

> "I feel if somebody is going to look at me, they're not going to think I'm white so I put black… I don't think I'd identify as white very often, but I guess if it's very specific then I'm going to indicate that I'm both black and white. I mean, I know that I'm mixed, but if it were to come up, and it were to be a choice, one or the other, I would say I'm black."

Other multiracial adults with one black and one white parent echoed similar sentiments. While they recognize the racial mixture in their backgrounds, they choose to identify as black because, as a 26-year-old male notes, "I think the main reason I identify as black is if someone looks at me, I don't

really necessarily look white." Here, he maintains that if one looks black, one cannot be white. So powerful is the force of outsiders' ascription that he chooses to identify his son, whom he conceived with a white woman, as black rather than as multiracial or white. Another multiracial black male whose mother is white and father is black identifies as "black American – home grown, 100 percent." He married a white woman and has two sons from the marriage, and when asked how he chooses to identify them, he responded, "I would say that they are half and half on the purest level, but still, for some reason, I just look at them as black." Both of these black-white multiracial men underscore that not only do they identify as black, but they also identify their children as black, even though they could claim a multiracial identification for themselves as well as their children. Other black multiracials (e.g., black-Asian and black-Latino multiracials) similarly feel that people often see and identify them as black and fail to acknowledge their Asian or Latino ancestries.

By comparison, multiracial Asian-whites and Latino-whites feel that they have much more leeway to choose among different racial options, including multiracial and white identities. Some choose to identify as half-Asian or half-Latino and half-white, and more importantly, others do not challenge these identities, nor do they automatically ascribe a monoracial Asian or Latino identity to them. Instead, their multiracial identities are more readily accepted than the multiracial identities for blacks. Moreover, unlike black-white multiracials, Latino-white and Asian-white multiracials are often identified as white, which in turn, affects the way they see themselves. For example, many of the multiracial Latino-whites feel that they look "white" without a hint of Latino ethnicity. Their perception that they look white is reinforced by others who are shocked to learn they have a Latino parent, as a 23-year-old Mexican-white multiracial woman explains,

> "I feel like I'm white with a hint of Mexican. That's not usually what I identify with, and that's not how people identify me either. I feel mostly Caucasian, but I do have a Mexican background and family and heritage, but I identify with being white more just because that's the way I look. I mean, people are always surprised to find that my Mom is Mexican. They say, 'Oh my god, I never would have known. You look like a total white girl!'"

Similarly, another young female, born to a white father and Mexican mother explains that others (including other Mexicans) often assume that she is non-Mexican because of her white phenotype, as she relays,

> "I don't look Mexican, but I feel it within me. I cook Mexican food, and I listen to my Spanish stations. But a lot people identify me as white because my appearance. I always shock them when I say, 'Oh yeah, I'm Mexican.' I go to a restaurant or food place that's Mexican and always order in Spanish and they go, 'Oh, habla Espanol?', and I go, 'Si!' and then we start speaking."

This type of response was typical of many of the Latino-white multiracials who we interviewed.[5] The surprised reaction that Latino multiracials receive stems, in part, from the fact that many non-Latinos have a very narrow vision of what a Latino *should* look like. While non-Latinos may believe that there is a stereotypical Latino or Mexican look, Latinos recognize that many do not fit this stereotypical image, as a multiracial Mexican-white woman elaborates,

> "In Mexico, there's no one look. It's not all dark skin or dark eyes or looking Indian. One of my sisters has green eyes, and my other sisters have fair skin. I think that here, people think all Mexicans have dark skin and brown eyes. In Mexico you see a lot of kids that look like Anthony [her son] or are lighter. There's this concept – stereotype – that you look Mexican."

While Latinos recognize that Latinos as a group span the color and feature spectrum – with many having fair skin, blonde hair, and light eyes – non-Latinos often have a very specific vision of what a Latino should look like (Jiménez 2004). Non-Latinos are often surprised to meet Latinos and Latino multiracials who do not have dark skin or dark features, and similarly, non-Asians are surprised to meet multiracial Asians who do not have black hair, an olive skin tone, and dark eyes. For example, a man born to a Japanese father and white mother explained that because he has blonde hair and blue eyes, people assume that he is white and treat him accordingly,

> "Most of the time people assume that I'm white. I mean, it's just the fact that I look white. People just think or they have a stereotype of somebody that's white, so they will kind of treat me the same way."

These multiracials fall out of the purview of what most Americans believe Latinos and Asians are supposed to look like. By contrast, while most

Americans have a very narrow and specific vision of what Latinos and Asians should look like, they may have a much broader vision of what blacks look like, often recognizing any semblance of black skin color and features on sight.

The differences in racial identification and ascription point to the *"inclusivity and exclusivity of racial categorization."* While outsiders' ascription of black identity is broad and all-encompassing, outsiders' ascription of Latino and Asian identity is more narrow and specific. Thus, mixed-race African Americans have not been able to claim that they are one-eighth African American without giving up the other seven-eighths part of their ancestry (Hollinger 2003). By contrast, mixed white Americans can claim to be one-eighth, one-quarter, or one-half Asian or Latino and seven-eighths, three-quarters or one-half white (as many of our respondents did), and more importantly, can have those identities accepted by others. In part, the difference stems from the relative newness of the Asian and Latino multiracial populations, combined with the lack of historical rules governing their choice of identities. Such conditions provide multiracial Asians and Latinos more freedom to choose among various racial and ethnic options, including white identities (Xie and Goyette 1997). However, the difference also stems from the stigma associated with blackness (Loury 2004) and the invidiousness of the "one-drop" rule, which has resulted in the treatment of blackness as an all-encompassing, monolithic category.

Symbolic Identities

We also asked the multiracial respondents how they feel about their backgrounds, focusing specifically on the meaning and content that multiracial identification holds for them. We wondered whether marking more than one race was simply an answer to a census questionnaire or whether multiracial identity was instrumental in their everyday lives. Based on the interviews, we found that for most of the Asian-white and Latino-white multiracials, their ethnic identities are more symbolic than instrumental. While none deny the racial/ethnic mixture of their backgrounds, most feel that race holds little consequence in their daily lives.

For example, when we interviewed an Asian-white multiracial man, he expressed the view that he does not believe that race will affect his life chances, nor does he believe that race matters much for anyone who is "really good" at what they do, as he says,

> "I don't think race matters that much. I don't think your race matters that much if you are really good at what you do. Well, at least in the U.S. you can be very successful, so I don't think how I look on the outside

affects it. It should depend more on the things that I'm
able to do. I don't really feel it's going to affect me. I
don't see limits."

While many of the multiracial respondents do not believe that race affects
their life chances, they readily acknowledge and are proud of their mixed
ethnic backgrounds when asked how they self-identify.

Moreover, while their Asian or Latino identities may not be a salient
feature in their everyday lives, they deliberately choose to mark these
identities on official forms. When we spoke to a man born to a white
mother and Asian Indian father, he explained that while he identifies as
white in his everyday life, he always marks both "Asian Indian" and "white"
on the census and other official forms,

> "I always felt like a regular kid, other than being
> just tanner than other people. But other than that I
> identified with being 100 percent white. I don't identify
> that strongly with being Indian, but every time I put
> anything down on the census or anything, I'm Indian
> and white."

Most notable about his response is that while he admits to having always
identified as "100 percent white" throughout his life, he chooses to mark
his Indian ethnicity on the census form and on other official documents,
indicating that marking himself as Indian is an option that he consciously
chooses, even though he may not identify as such in his everyday life. For
this multiracial man, his Asian Indian ethnicity is optional, situational and
voluntary, as ethnicity is for white Americans of European ancestry (Gans
1979; Waters 1990).

During the interview, we also asked how he plans to identify his unborn
son. His wife (who is white and was eight months pregnant at the time)
responded, "Personally I would still consider our child Indian, even though
the Indian side is watered down considerably. I don't want to ignore that.
I think it's still important." The husband then added, "I mean I wish I had
a stronger identification with being Indian. I really like learning about it,
and I wish I knew more. For me it's important, and I really need to know
about it, so I think it's important for our child to have that same thing."
This couple treats Asian Indian identity as a foreign culture than can be
learned and acquired rather than an ascribed ethnicity that is lived and
experienced in everyday life.

The sentiment is echoed by a Japanese-white woman who says that
while her ethnic background is not very important in her everyday life,
she would like to "have more culture," and is now more interested in

learning about her Japanese ancestry. She explains, "I don't carry a lot of the culture with me. I don't really think that my ethnic background is of any importance to who I am or what I do. But I am finding more desire to have more culture." These Asian-white multiracials treat their Asian ethnicities as cultures to be acquired that will make their lives more interesting. They also underscore the critical point that one can be Asian Indian or Japanese without having to give up being white, just as one can be Irish or Italian and white. And just as importantly, these multiracial identities are accepted by others, signaling the voluntary and optional nature of Asian ethnicity for the multiracial respondents.

The experiences of the Latino-white multiracial respondents mirrored those of the Asian-white respondents. Some even used the term "whitewashed" to describe their faint attachment to their Latino ethnicities. For example, this Mexican-white male describes himself this way:

> "I think I'm more of like a crossover type Hispanic. I don't speak Spanish, you know, a little bit, but I'm not fluent. So I've become more, you know, whitewashed, but I still try to stay true to my upbringing and Hispanic background."

In essence, he feels that a "crossover type Hispanic" is one who speaks little or no Spanish, identifies as white (as he does), and has essentially incorporated into the white, middle-class American culture without having given up one's Hispanic culture or ancestry. Furthermore, what this multiracial man conveys is that one can claim a Hispanic or Mexican ethnicity and also claim a white racial identity, signaling that he regards Hispanic identity as cultural and symbolic rather than racialized.

For the Asian-white and Latino-white multiracial respondents, claiming a white racial identity does not preclude them from also claiming an Asian or Latino ethnicity; they can be white, yet also be Asian Indian, Japanese, Hispanic or Mexican, signifying that Asian and Latino ethnicities are adopting the symbolic character of European ethnicity for white Americans. By contrast, the black multiracials we interviewed have not been able to do the same; they have not been able to claim a white or nonblack racial identity and have those identities accepted by others, signaling that black remains a relatively fixed racialized category. The experiences of Asian-white and Latino-white multiracials thus differ starkly from those of black multiracials. Not only are Latinos and Asians more likely to report multiracial identifications, but these multiracials are more likely to describe their Asian and Latino identities as being voluntary and optional rather than ascribed and instrumental, suggesting

that the Asian and Latino identities are adopting the symbolic character of white ethnicity.

Conclusions and Discussion

What do the patterns of multiracial identification suggest about the future of America's color line? The findings indicate that group boundaries appear to be fading more rapidly for Latinos and Asians than for blacks, signaling that today's new nonwhites are *not* strongly assimilating as racialized minorities who see their experiences with race as akin to those of blacks, as would be predicted by the white-nonwhite divide model. Moreover, a tri-racial hierarchy model that would place Latinos and most new immigrants into the "collective black" category and label them as "racial others" does not seem to accurately characterize the racialization process of America's nonwhite newcomers. Instead, experiences with multiraciality among Latinos and Asians are closer to those of whites than to blacks. Furthermore, that racial and ethnic affiliations and identities are much less matters of choice for multiracial blacks indicates that black remains a significant racial category. The lower rate of black multiracial reporting and the racial constraints that many multiracial blacks experience suggest that blackness continues to constitute a fundamental racial construction in American society. Hence, it is not simply that race matters, but more specifically, that *black* race matters, consistent with the African American exceptionalism thesis.

The findings thus suggest that a black-nonblack divide is taking shape, in which Asians and Latinos are not only closer to whites than blacks are to whites, but also closer to whites than to blacks at this point in time (Gans 1999, 2005; Glazer 1997; Lee and Bean 2007; Quillian and Campbell 2003; Sears 2003; Sears et al. 2003; Waters 1999; Yancey 2003). Hence, America's color line may have moved toward a new demarcation that places many blacks in a position of disadvantage similar to that resulting from the traditional black-white divide. In essence, rather than erasing racial boundaries, the country may simply be reinventing a color line that continues to separate blacks from other racial/ethnic groups.

While a black-nonblack divide may depict the color line at the moment, it is also possible that a black-white divide might re-emerge. Whiteness as a category has expanded over time to incorporate new immigrant groups in the past, and it appears to be stretching yet again (Gallagher 2004; Gerstle 1997; Warren and Twine 1997). Based on patterns of multiracial identification, Asians and Latinos may be the next in line to be white, with multiracial Asian-whites and Latino-whites at the head of the queue. If this is the case, a black-white line may re-emerge, and Du Bois' century-

old forecast may become relevant once again. However, regardless of whether the divide falls along black-nonblack or black-white lines, the position of blacks remains the same.

This is ominous because a color line that more strongly separates whites from blacks than one that divides whites from other groups invites misinterpretation about progress of black-white relations in the United States. Because boundaries are loosening for *some* nonwhite groups, this could lead to the erroneous conclusion that race is declining in significance for *all* groups or that relations are improving at the same pace for *all* racial/ethnic minorities. However, the results of the present research suggest that the social construction of race is more rigid for blacks than for Asians and Latinos. Not accounting for this difference could easily lead to the endorsement of the flawed logic that if race does not significantly impede the process of incorporation for Asians and Latinos, then it must not matter much for blacks either. Not only is this line of reasoning incorrect, it also risks creating specious support for so-called "color-blind" policies that fail to recognize that race and the color line have different consequences for different minority groups (Bobo 1997; Brown et al. 2003; Guinier and Torres 2002; Loury 2002).

Moreover, a logic of presumed "color blindness" also risks overlooking the fact that boundary maintenance and change are two-sided processes that involve both choice, and perhaps more importantly, constraint (Alba 1999; Bobo 1997; Lamont 2000). This means that not only must members of racial/ethnic minority groups pursue entry and incorporation into social contexts occupied by the majority group, but also that members of the majority group must be willing to accept their admission. Based on patterns of multiracial reporting, it appears that Asians and Latinos are more actively pursuing entry into the majority group, and that whites are more willing to accept their entry compared to blacks. At this time, the boundaries for Asians and Latinos appear more elastic than they seem for blacks, consequently reinforcing the racial stigma attached to blackness (Loury 2002). The fact that boundary dissolution is neither uniform nor unconditional indicates that we cannot be complacent about the degree to which opportunities are improving for all racial/ethnic groups in the United States, particularly when a deep and persistent divide continues to separate blacks from all other groups.

Notes

1. For purposes of discussion and analysis, we employ the often used terms Asian, Latino and black even though we recognize that these categories are socially constructed and a great deal of ethnic heterogeneity exists within them.

2. We recognize that recruiting respondents through ethnic establishments may bias our sample by excluding those who culturally identify as white.

3. Our initial goal was to interview an equal number of respondents in each subgroup, but we found that task difficult for several reasons, especially in the case of black multiracials. At first glance, this may appear to constitute a weakness in the research, but at another level it is a strength because the likelihood of locating and recruiting various kinds of multiracial individuals itself turns out to yield significant information relevant to the research purposes at hand. This was evident in three ways. First, ethnic establishment owners referred more Asian and Latino multiracial individuals to us. Second, these respondents, in turn, referred more of their co-ethnic friends who agreed to participate in the study. Third, when we identified multiracial black adults, they were more likely to decline our requests for interviews. Some could not understand why we were interested in studying them and were suspicious of our intentions, even after we reiterated that the study was comparative and did not focus specifically on black multiracial adults. Others admitted that issues of racial identification had caused a great deal of turmoil in their lives, and they were unwilling to speak about these issues publicly, even when we assured complete confidentiality and anonymity. Still others simply did not return our calls, even after repeated attempts to contact them, making it clear that they were not interested in participating. In the end, more than half of the black multiracial adults who were referred to us declined our request for an interview.

   By contrast, none of the Asian and Latino multiracial adults refused our request for an interview. In fact, most were enthusiastic and eager to talk at length about issues of racial/ethnic identification. Thus, the different levels of willingness to participate in the study itself constitute evidence about multiraciality in America, reflecting different histories and experiences with multiracial identification. That Asian and Latino multiracial adults are more willing to discuss issues of racial/ethnic identity indicates that these groups probably experience less social stigma than black multiracial adults.

   We chose to interview respondents in California because the rate of racially-mixed marriages in the state is twice the national average. The higher rate of intermarriage stems, to some extent, from the fact that California had overturned its anti-miscegenation laws in 1948 – nearly two decades before the Supreme Court ruling of *Loving v. Virginia* in 1967. California also leads the country with the highest number of multiracial individuals, and is the only state with a multiracial population that exceeds 1 million. Hence, by interviewing respondents in California, we get a preview of where the color line is changing most rapidly in the United States.

   An additional methodological concern observers might raise is that the interviews are conducted only with Californians and, within this group, only with pre-identified individuals with multiracial backgrounds who are willing to talk with us. Perhaps these kinds of selectivities yield a distorted view of the basis and nature of multiraciality in America. There is undoubtedly truth to this. California is a state that has long been more tolerant of racial/ethnic minorities than other states, especially when it comes to intermarriage in particular and marriage and family behavior in general. Multiracial individuals willing to talk with us probably hold more benign views of multiraciality than those unwilling to talk with us. However, our main interest lies in

assessing whether the experiences of Asian, Latino and black multiracials seem to place such persons closer to whites or to blacks, so that we may gauge where America's color line is changing most rapidly. Selection bias of this kind would seem likely to distort things in the same direction for all multiracial groups. The fact that we observed major differences between Asian and Latino multiracials as compared to black multiracials, therefore, would not appear to result from any such biases. Hence, we would expect to find similar results elsewhere in the country, although places less tolerant of nonwhites than California might yield diminished differences between the Asian and Latino multiracials and the black multiracials. However, the national level census data on intermarriage and multiracial reporting suggest this is not the case.

4. We should note that "Latino" or "Hispanic" was not considered a racial category in the 2000 Census. The census form mandated two distinct questions regarding a person's racial/ethnic background: one about race and a second about whether a person was "Spanish/Hispanic/Latino." Someone who self-designated as "Spanish/Hispanic/Latino" could thus report any race. In the 2000 U.S. Census, 42 percent of Latinos chose "Other" as their racial category, and in both the 1990 and 2000 censuses, 97 percent of those who marked "Other" as their race were Latinos (Anderson and Fienberg 1999; Grieco and Cassidy 2001; Rodríguez and Cordero-Guzman 1992; U.S. Bureau of the Census 2001). While the Census does not treat those of "Spanish/Hispanic/Latino" as a distinct racial category, we treat them as such here for two reasons. First, many Latinos see themselves as belonging in a separate category, as indicated by the fact that so many identify as "Other" race in the census. That is, they feel that the racial categories presented do not fit them well (Rodríguez 2000). Second, Latinos have been legally treated as a separate group, and often as a racial minority group that qualifies for and benefits from federal programs designed to assist disadvantaged minorities, such as affirmative action programs. Latinos have also been protected by Civil Rights legislation and the Voting Rights Act, both of which are aimed to help racial minorities (Glazer 1997; Skrentny 2004). Hence, not only do Latinos see themselves as belonging to a separate category, they are also often treated if they were a distinct racial category by the U.S. government.

5. Because we conducted the interviews in California, the Latino multiracials in the sample are of Mexican origin, which may explain, in part, why others identify them as white. The history of racial mixing in Mexico involves mostly Indians, Spaniards, and whites, resulting in its national ideology as a mestizo country, with the racial continuum ranging from white to Indian. However, other Latino multiracials of different national origins may experience a different type of outsider ascription, especially if the racial mixing includes black African ancestry in their countries of origin. In other words, Latino multiracials whose racial mixtures include black ancestry may have a different multiracial experience than Mexican-white multiracials.

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