Immigration & the Color Line at the Beginning of the 21st Century

Frank D. Bean, Jennifer Lee & James D. Bachmeier

Abstract: The "color line" has long served as a metaphor for the starkness of black/white relations in the United States. Yet post-1965 increases in U.S. immigration have brought millions whose ethnoracial status seems neither black nor white, boosting ethnoracial diversity and potentially changing the color line. After reviewing past and current conceptualizations of America's racial divide(s), we ask what recent trends in intermarriage and multiracial identification – both indicators of ethnoracial boundary dissolution – reveal about ethnoracial color lines in today's immigrant America. We note that rises in intermarriage and multiracial identification have emerged more strongly among Asians and Latinos than blacks and in more diverse metropolitan areas. Moreover, these tendencies are larger than would be expected based solely on shifts in the relative sizes of ethnoracial groups, suggesting that immigration-generated diversity is associated with cultural change that is dissolving ethnoracial barriers – but more so for immigrant groups than blacks.

FRANK D. BEAN is Chancellor's Professor of Sociology at the University of California, Irvine, where he is also Director of the Center for Research on Immigration, Population, and Public Policy.

JENNIFER LEE is Professor of Sociology at the University of California, Irvine.

JAMES D. BACHMEIER is Assistant Professor of Sociology at Temple University.

(*See endnotes for complete contributor biographies.)

The "color line" has long served as a metaphor for the severe and enduring separation of whites and blacks in the United States. The election of Barack Obama to the U.S. presidency on November 4, 2008, however, broke a barrier many thought would never be breached. Yet while historic, this event's significance for the color line remains unclear. If one recalls W.E.B. Du Bois's famous and pessimistic prophecy from a century ago – that "the problem of the twentieth-century [would be] the problem of the color line"[1] – one might imagine that a single century would span too short a time to eradicate such a deeply entrenched barrier. Racial realists today, perhaps like Du Bois, may well view Obama's election as merely indicating that an exceptionally talented and appealing individual who just happened to be black was fortunate enough to follow one of the most unpopular White House occupants in recent history. Though Obama ran a terrific campaign and became president of the United States, some analysts have thought the election alone

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signifies little about the demise of the black/white color line, arguing instead that claims of a new postracial order in the United States have been premature.[2] Yet even if there are reasons to view Obama's ascendancy as an anomaly, a number of other developments suggest that the color line in fact has begun to shift in recent decades, at least for some groups.

Given the crushing burden that the black/white divide has imposed on African Americans throughout U.S. history, questions about factors leading to possible changes in the old black/white color line are of considerable importance. In particular, a tectonic shift in U.S. immigration over the past forty years has brought millions of newcomers whose ethnoracial status seems neither black nor white.[3] At present (counting both the foreign born and their children), this group comprises more than sixty million persons.[4] The sheer size of this new nonwhite population raises the question of what the color line means in today's America. If such divisions have not been reduced to irrelevance, has the color line nonetheless shifted and become replaced by new, multiple color lines? If convincing reasons exist to think that the old black/white divide has faded, then the question of where the new immigrant groups fall in relation to it are largely moot. Moreover, if this is the case, the same forces driving the color line's dissolution would probably also be working to enhance the sociocultural and economic incorporation of the new immigrant groups, implying that their successful integration represents little in the way of a public policy challenge. On the other hand, if strong remnants of the historic black/white color line persist, then questions about where Latino and Asian immigrants fall in relation to the divide matter a great deal.

As a lens through which to illuminate today's color line, we focus here on alter-native past and current conceptualizations of the color line and on evidence about the nature and extent of intermarriage and multiraciality among both blacks and the major new immigrant groups. If our inquiries lead us to conclude that the new-comers belong on the black side of a persisting and sharp divide, then it is likely that their sizable numbers over the past thirty years, together with their continuing high rates of entry, may be exacerbating long-standing problems in U.S. race relations. But if Asians and Latinos are falling largely on the white side of such a line, then this would imply that the successful integration of the new immigrants is not only possible, but probably also likely. This in turn would raise significant questions about how the nonwhite diversity brought about by immigration is contributing to the weakening of boundaries between the new immigrants and native whites, and whether Latinos and Asians are involved in these processes in similar ways and to the same degree. And even more important, if growing diversity were loosening the ethnoracial boundaries that might constrain the life chances of new immigrants, is this diversity, along with rising familiarity and comfort among native-born Americans with an ever-more diverse nation, beginning also to erode the black/white divide?

When Du Bois predicted the problem of the color line in 1903, the United States was in the midst of its rise to become the world's leading industrial power. His poignant statement foresaw that slavery's contradictions would become more conspicuous and that its legacy – the stain of which was painfully apparent in the form of Jim Crow racial discrimination, as well as continuing rationalizations and stereotypes put forth to justify its inequities – would continue to plague the country.[5] As perceptive as Du Bois's insights were,

they overlooked another (and more often emphasized) defining theme in American history: that of the "American dream," or the opportunity and prosperity promised by immigration and symbolized in the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island in nineteenth-century America.[6] If slavery represented the scar of race on America and the country's failure, immigration exemplified hope and the prospect of success. Such dreams became reality for many of America's nineteenth-century immigrant settlers who fueled the expansion of the westward frontier with the aid of the Land Act of 1820 and the Morrill Act of 1862, which provided land and technical assistance for America's new arrivals.[7]

But as the western frontier began to close at the end of the nineteenth century, and as the United States increasingly became an industrial society in the early twentieth century, the nation found itself in need of additional newcomers, but now for a different reason: to fulfill a demand for workers in the burgeoning factories of America's quickly growing cities.[8] Immigrants once again provided an answer. These new arrivals, as had their predecessors, (re)constructed themselves anew through geographic mobility, eagerly embracing the American tradition of seeking opportunity and identity in "starting over," rather than remaining in Europe where they and their governments faced the challenge of trying to knit together peoples torn apart by internecine conflict.[9]

Nation-building in America, at least outside the South, involved new immigrant settlements and work opportunities, not to mention dreams that encouraged newcomers to recognize that they were part of a "nation of immigrants." By World War I, American immigration had thus served multiple purposes: the early waves provided the country with settlers eager to begin new lives in a land of opportunity; later waves, including those of

Du Bois's era, provided sorely needed additions to the workforce. If American immigration represented the optimistic side of the country's past and future, slavery and its aftermath tainted the fabric of national memory – a blot that many sought to eradicate through denial and romanticization.[10] Indeed, a desire to transcend the lingering contradictions of slavery's legacy even helped focus the myth-making attention on the country's immigrant origins.

Immigration and race thus played strangely symbiotic and compartmentalized roles in shaping the founding mythology of America. But in the early twentieth century, the changing national origins of immigrants began to undermine such convenient compartmentalizations. With the arrival of America's third wave of newcomers from Eastern and Southern Europe, agitated natives started to advocate the "Americanization" of groups they viewed as non-Nordic and thus hopelessly unassimilable.[11] The new arrivals did not resemble the Western and Northern European immigrants of the country's past. Moreover, they were Catholic or Jewish, not Protestant, and they largely settled in industrial cities outside the South.

Thus, the tendency of the period to view foreigners in reductionist terms that conflated national origin and race meant non-Southerners also had to confront and cope with persons of "races" different from their own, a dilemma previously faced in the case of the Irish but one that now could not so easily be dismissed as only a Southern problem.[12] The attendant tensions contributed to the rise of nativism and the passage of restrictive national-origins immigration legislation.[13] But denials both that racism existed and that race relations involving blacks were less than exemplary continued through the Great Depression and World War II. It was not until the 1960s – when the emergence of the geostrategic exigencies of

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the Cold War and the not-easily-denied claims for equal opportunity emanating from post–World War II black veterans dramatized the contradictions of race – that substantial change finally began to occur.[14]

This dramatic shift involved Congress passing two landmark pieces of legislation: the Civil Rights Act in 1964, making discrimination against blacks illegal, and the Hart-Celler Act in 1965, abolishing national-origin quotas as bases for immigrant admissions.[15] Scholars such as Nathan Glazer thought the former would quickly lead to the full incorporation of blacks into American society.[16] Supporters of the latter generally expected it *not* to generate much in the way of new immigration, but rather thought it simply would remove the embarrassment of the country's prior discriminatory admissions policies.[17] The two laws thus shared the prospect of generating improved racial/ethnic relations in the United States.

Neither prediction turned out as anticipated, however. Blacks did not quickly become economically incorporated, and millions of new Asian and Latino immigrants, often seen as nonwhite, unexpectedly began to arrive in the country.[18] Now, nearly a half-century after the passage of those watershed pieces of legislation, we are addressing two broad and interrelated questions: to what extent has the country's contemporary immigration redefined race in America; and in turn, to what extent has the country's prior experience with race influenced its perception of today's nonwhite immigrants?

Certainly, the United States is more racially and ethnically diverse now than at any time since World War II, and overt racial discrimination is now illegal. But to what degree have racial/ethnic relations, especially black/white relations, improved? If race is declining in significance, as many have claimed, is it declining equally for all nonwhite groups? Or is the cancer of racial status, borne of the legacy of slavery, so potent that it has metastasized to include America's nonwhite immigrant newcomers? Where did color lines fall in the past and where are they drawn today? Four major viewpoints have arisen to address these questions.

The *disappearance of color lines altogether* is one common expectation. Perhaps no event in U.S. history has generated so much speculation that the color line might be disappearing than Obama's election as president. During his campaign, Obama presented a vision of a postracial America in which racial status has declined in significance and the country is strengthened by its multiracial and multicultural diversity. Obama's message resonated with many Americans, in part because he himself symbolized change, not only in his progressive political agenda, but also in his multiracial and multicultural heritage. After his election, journalists and pundits proclaimed that the color line had fallen and that America was now a "post-race" society in which anything was possible.[19]

Historian David Hollinger had sketched such a society in his influential book, *Postethnic America*, in which he proposes that color lines might be fading, with the United States moving into a new cosmopolitan or "postethnic" era.[20] In this scenario, racial and ethnic identification adopts a character similar to that of religious affiliation: that is, individuals could not only choose their affiliation, but also preserve the "right to exit" from that group. Critical to the concept of a postethnic society is the element of choice in ethnoracial identification. Hollinger stipulates that postethnic is not anti-ethnic nor is it color-blind; rather, postethnic means individuals can devote as much or as little of their energy as they choose to their community of descent.[21] In short, descent is not destiny.

Hollinger claims that multiracial Americans are performing a historic role by helping move the United States in a postethnic direction since they are able to freely choose "how tightly or loosely they wish to affiliate with one or more communities of descent."[22] In a similar vein, sociologist Herbert Gans views rises in multiracial identification as harbingers of progress because they reflect the diminishing significance of racial rigidity.[23] He further predicts that today's racial categories may become increasingly less relevant in each generation until they fade altogether. In other words, with the increasing hybridization of "American stock," the country may be reconfiguring itself along nonracialist lines.[24] Given recent trends in intermarriage and a small but burgeoning multiracial population, the United States may indeed be moving in a postethnic direction, where group boundaries no longer circumscribe ethnoracial identification and opportunity structures. However, numerous commentators, especially after the onset of the recession in 2008, have noted that the disadvantages of ethnoracial status, especially among blacks and unauthorized nonwhite immigrants, remain too pronounced to conclude that a postethnic society has yet arrived.[25]

Other observers believe that a *white/nonwhite divide is now crystallizing* in the country. Indeed, such a color line has been legally enforced throughout much of the nation's history, with blacks, Asians, and Latinos falling on the nonwhite side of the divide. These groups have faced both severe de jure and de facto discrimination in the past, in the form of enslavement, exclusion, segregation, incarceration, confinement, and deportation. For example, African Americans suffered two-and-a-half centuries of slavery, followed by another century of Jim Crow segregation. The Chinese were barred from immigrating to the United States for ten years beginning in 1882, and Japanese Americans – regardless of nativity and citizenship – were incarcerated en masse during World War II, resulting in more than 110,000 interns between 1941 and 1947.[26] In addition, Mexicans were apprehended and forcibly deported during Operation Wetback in 1954 because of episodic fears of the Mexican immigrant population, often with little regard for legal status. As these examples illustrate, blacks, Asians, and Latinos often appear closer in status to one another than to whites during much of U.S. history.

A white/nonwhite divide was further evident in the early twentieth century in the state of Virginia, where the Racial Integrity Act was passed in 1924, creating two distinct racial categories: "pure" white and all others. The statute defined a white person as one with "no trace whatsoever of blood other than Caucasian," and it had the goal of legally banning intermarriage between whites and other races. While blacks were clearly nonwhite under the legislation, Asians and Latinos also fell on the nonwhite side of the 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 both of these decisions, persons of Asian origin were not only classified as nonwhite, but also considered unassimilable.

In the case *In Re Ricardo Rodríguez* (1897), Rodríguez, a Mexican-born man who lived in San Antonio for ten years, petitioned for U.S. citizenship in Bexar County, Texas, in order to exercise his right to vote. As in the *Ozawa* and *Thind* decisions, the district court did not rule that Rodríguez was white. What is notable in all three cases is that none of the plaintiffs attempted to classify themselves as "of African descent," even though Chinese, Asian Indians, and Mexicans at that time were often treated more like blacks than whites; to have done so

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would have resulted in a drop in racial status. Moreover, neither did the Court consider classifying the plaintiffs as black, because doing so would have given them a route to citizenship.

During the 1960s, however, in a report to the President's Committee on Civil Rights, Asians and Latinos were officially designated as minority groups alongside blacks based on their color and distinctive cultural characteristics. As groups who had "suffered enough" to be perceived as "analogous to black," civil rights administrators extended affirmative action benefits to Asians and Latinos in employment, including self-employment.[27] Latinos, in particular, have garnered a great deal of recognition as a disadvantaged minority.[28] By grouping Asians and Latinos with African Americans, civil rights administrators presumed that their experiences with discrimination were similar and stemmed from their nonwhite racial status.[29] An unintended consequence of these policies was that Latinos and Asians – who made up, respectively, only 5 percent and 1 percent of the country's population in 1970 – were perceived and labeled as racialized minorities, or "people of color," whose "color and cultural characteristics" would continue to set them apart from whites, thereby making them more akin to blacks.

By placing Latinos and Asians on the nonwhite side of the divide, the country's policy-makers reinforced the perception that these groups may be racially unassimilable, unlike the European immigrants who came before them. In a similar vein, ethnic studies scholars Gary Okihiro and Ronald Takaki contend that today's immigrants from Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean will be unable to escape their racial status and the caste-like treatment that ensues because of their non-European origins.[30] Hence, rather than following in the footsteps of their European predecessors, many of today's nonwhite immi-

grants may follow a path of assimilation into a racialized minority status. In light of these disadvantages, some immigration and race/ethnicity scholars point to the possible emergence of a white/nonwhite divide, in which Asians and Latinos fall on the nonwhite side of the color line, just as they have done throughout much of U.S. history. However, as we note below, sharp differences between blacks and Asian and Latino groups suggest that this perspective is more relevant to historical than contemporary patterns of race relations.

Other social scientists offer a different possibility, a *triracial stratification system* similar to that of many Latin American and Caribbean countries. Sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva proposes that in the United States a triracial divide is emerging, made up of whites, honorary whites, and collective blacks.[31] Included in the "white" category are whites, assimilated white Latinos, some multiracials, assimilated Native Americans, and a few Asian-origin people. "Honorary whites" include light-skinned Latinos, Japanese, Koreans, Chinese, Asian Indians, Middle Eastern Americans, and most multiracial Americans. Finally, the "collective black" category includes 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 triracial order naturally fits the "darkening" of the United States. While a few new immigrants might fall into the honorary white stratum and may even eventually become white, the majority will incorporate into a collective black stratum, including most Latino immigrants, a category Bonilla-Silva labels as "racial others" whose experiences with race are seen as similar to those of blacks.

In this regard, the triracial model is distinctive because Bonilla-Silva posits that most Latinos are racialized in a manner similar to African Americans, and therefore fall on the black side of the divide.

While there has been some support for the Latin Americanization thesis, it has not gone without criticism. For instance, sociologists Edward Murguia and Rogelio Sáenz argue that a three-tier system predated substantial Latin American immigration to the United States.[32] Moreover, other social scientists contest the uniform characterization of Latinos as a monolithic group.[33] Examining Latinos' social attitudes toward other racial/ethnic groups, sociologist Tyrone Forman and his colleagues find that Latinos fall into different segments of the triracial hierarchy depending on national origin; Puerto Ricans differ from Mexicans in their expressed feelings toward blacks, with the former group demonstrating greater variation depending on skin color.[34] Mexicans, however, are more uniform in their feelings toward blacks and express attitudes closer to those of non-Hispanic whites than those of non-Hispanic blacks, perhaps as a result of the history of racial mixing in Mexico, which involved very few Africans, unlike the history of mixing in Puerto Rico.[35] Regardless of skin color, however, 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. While Bonilla-Silva argues that a triracial hierarchy is forming, it remains to be seen whether most Latinos, and especially Mexicans, will fall into the collective black category as he posits.

In the 1990s, social scientists began to suggest the possible birth of a new racial structure, one that differed from the black/white divide, the white/nonwhite divide, and the triracial hierarchy. This was a new binary color line – *a black/nonblack divide* – highlighting the persistent and uniquely strong separation of blacks, not only from whites but also from other nonwhite ethnoracial groups.[36] The concept of a black/nonblack divide 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."[37] Once considered an inferior "race" by the country's Anglo-Saxons, and regularly characterized in the nineteenth century as "savage," "low-browed," and "bestial," the Irish eventually clawed their way into whiteness.[38]

Researchers have shown that European immigrants are not the only groups to have changed their status from nonwhite to white. Asian ethnic immigrant groups such as the Chinese and Japanese also managed to change their racial status from almost black to almost white. Sociologist James Loewen, for example, documents how Chinese immigrants in the Mississippi Delta made concerted efforts to modify their lowly racial status through economic mobility, the emulation of the cultural practices and institutions of whites, and the intentional distancing of themselves from blacks.[39] Not only did they actively distance themselves both physically and culturally from blacks, but the Mississippi Chinese also rejected their fellow ethnics who married blacks as well as any multiracial children they bore. By adopting the anti-black sentiment embraced 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. Historians have noted a similar process of change

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among Japanese Americans who, at the beginning of the twentieth century, accompanied blacks at the bottom of the racial hierarchy.

Just as the boundaries of whiteness have changed in the past, they may be expanding yet again to incorporate new immigrant groups such as Asians and Latinos, reflecting the inconstant and changing nature of racial categories, for all groups except perhaps blacks.[40] Pointing to patterns of residential segregation, for example, scholars find that blacks are more likely to be segregated than other racial/ethnic groups, regardless of household income.[41] Moreover, research shows that Asians and Latinos are marrying whites at higher rates than are blacks marrying whites, thereby enhancing the possibility that the children of these unions will adopt a nonblack identity.[42] Sociologist France Twine's research on multiracial identification reinforces this point; she finds that the children of black intermarriages are usually perceived by others as black, but by contrast, the children of Asian and Latino intermarriages are not similarly perceived as monoracially Asian or Latino.[43] Twine and fellow sociologist Jonathan Warren posit that this is because Asians and Latinos appear to "blend" more easily with whites compared to blacks, at least from the perspective of many Americans.[44] Based on these trends, some scholars hypothesize that Asians and Latinos are the next in line to become white.[45]

While a number of immigrant ethnic groups have changed their status from nonwhite to white or almost white, black immigrants and African Americans have yet to be able to do the same. West Indian and East African immigrants, for example, distance themselves from black Americans and do what they can to make sure that they are not associated with black Americans.[46] In fact, most West Indian immigrants feel superior to black Americans,

and therefore do not want to be identified as "black American" because this identity connotes downward mobility into a stigmatized status.[47] However, after only one generation, U.S.-born West Indians find it increasingly difficult to distinguish themselves from black Americans; more often than not, they choose to identify as such, both because they feel that their West Indian ethnicity is no longer salient and because others treat and identify them as black American.[48]

The fact that African Americans are not able to change their racial status is evidence of a pattern of African American "exceptionalism," as described by Herbert Gans.[49] Other scholars document patterns of more severe residential segregation and intermarriage, arguing that the apartness of blacks is real, and that the black racial identity and social status is fixed.[50] Given the unique history of African Americans and the rigidity of the boundary surrounding blacks, some social scientists argue that a black/nonblack divide has arisen, in which Asians and Latinos fall on the nonblack side of the divide. Hence, unlike the white/nonwhite divide (which predicts the formation of a "people of color" grouping against whites), a black/nonblack divide suggests that blacks stand apart from other nonwhite groups, pointing to a unique pattern of "black exceptionalism" in race/ethnic relations.

Even though scholars and other observers may differ over where they think today's color lines are drawn, and may disagree about how strong these might be, there is little question that as a result of immigration, the United States has rapidly become a more ethnoracially diverse society.[51] More immigrants come to the United States than to any other country in the world.[52] According to the American Community Survey, by the year 2010, the foreign-born population in the United States

(including both whites and nonwhites) numbered almost forty million persons, and their native-born children were nearly as numerous, accounting for about another thirty-five million.[53]

Unlike the waves of immigrants who arrived in the early twentieth century, today's immigrants are mainly non-European. In 2010, only about 12 percent of legal immigrants originated in Europe or Canada, whereas about 80 percent came from Latin America, Asia, Africa, or the Caribbean.[54] These new arrivals contribute substantially to the size of the country's overall Latino minority (over 16 percent of the national population in 2010, up from less than 5 percent in 1970) and the country's Asian population (about 5 percent, up from less than 1 percent).[55] And these trends are likely to continue. According to conservative projections from the National Research Council, by the year 2050 America's Latino and Asian populations will make up, respectively, at least 24 percent and 8 percent of the U.S. population.[56] Unquestionably, contemporary immigration has altered the racial and ethnic terrain of the United States.

Is this rising diversity helping dissolve the old black/white color line? Several reasons suggest that this might be the case, and that growing ethnoracial diversity is indeed helping increase tolerance among whites of both new immigrant groups and African Americans. One reason is simply that as minority immigrant groups grow relatively larger, the probabilities of contact between the members of such groups and majority natives increase, thus promoting familiarity, respect, and greater liking across the groups. These are the processes that psychologist Gordon Allport noted in his long-standing *contact hypothesis,* which predicts that greater interaction between the members of different groups fosters familiarity and increases affect and liking, especially under certain conditions.[57]

Second, the presence of a larger number of different groups may tend to diminish the significance of any single group, if for no other reason than that multiple minority groups may diffuse the intensity of negative affect and stigmatization.[58] A third reason is that greater diversity may yield other positive psychological and social dividends, such as increased creativity, problem-solving capacities, social resiliencies, and interpersonal skills that result from learning to cope with the differences, challenges, and opportunities presented by diversity. Such factors have been argued to strengthen workplace and societal communication, cohesion, and effectiveness, especially in technology- and knowledge-based economies.[59] They have also been observed to impart adaptive advantages to second-generation persons growing up in such environments.[60]

Such ideas are also similar to the notion of heterogeneity as often more broadly invoked in sociology.[61] Increased diversity (or heterogeneity, more generally) promotes greater tolerance.[62] Diversity thus may contribute to increases in the likelihood of exogamy and multiraciality to the extent that diversity fosters the loosening of ethnoracial boundaries and promotes more flexibility in marriage and identity options for the members of ethnoracial minorities and their offspring.

On the other hand, larger nonwhite minority groups may also give rise to perceptions that these groups constitute a threat to majority whites. But whites may perceive some ethnoracial groups as more threatening than others. In particular, research evidence suggests that blacks are seen more negatively than Asians or Latinos. Whites in the United States have often seen blacks as threatening, in part because of worries about economic competition and in part because the harsh discriminatory tactics employed against blacks for decades after slavery engen-

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dered white fears of reprisal.[63] But because the new largely nonwhite immigrant groups have not experienced similarly crushing discrimination on such a widespread scale for such a long period of time, whites are not likely to perceive the new immigrant groups in the same way as they do blacks.[64]

Whites also view African Americans as a less preferred source of unskilled labor than immigrants.[65] Asian immigrants, by contrast, are not as numerous as blacks or Latinos and are much more highly selected for higher levels of education than most Latino immigrants. Thus they may be viewed more favorably and be more likely to occupy higher positions in the American stratification system than Latinos and blacks, and thus are unlikely to generate negative group-threat effects. Such a hierarchy of group-threat differences accords with the tenets of queuing theory and group position theory, both of which imply that an ordering among groups characterizes the extent to which they face discrimination in the labor market and other contexts in the United States.[66]

One way to gauge the consequences of the country's new ethnoracial diversity, including its implications for color lines, is to examine changes in those factors that are especially good indicators of the dissolution of ethnoracial boundaries. Two of the most important of these are ethnoracial intermarriage and multiracial identification. High and growing levels of these suggest the possibility of boundary dissolution. For example, living among a large coethnic community or residing in a PUMA (Public Use Microdata Area) that is greater than 20 percent Asian positively affects the degree to which interracially married Asians and whites identify their multiracial children as Asian.[67] Furthermore, comparing patterns of multiracial identification in Hawaii and New Mexico, social psychologists Cookie Stephan and

Walter Stephan find that the higher rate of multiracial reporting in Hawaii reflects its greater multicultural environment; while 73 percent of the Japanese in Hawaii identify multiracially, only 44 percent of Hispanics in New Mexico choose to do so.[68] Demographer Karl Eschbach, too, discovers regional differences in the choice of an American Indian identity for American Indian/white multiracials, ranging from 33 to 73 percent across the country.[69] The results of all these studies support the hypothesis that ethnoracial diversity will be positively related to exogamy and multiracial identification.

That intermarriage and multiraciality have been growing is also strongly evident in recent data. By 2010, 11.8 percent of marriages among young Americans (ages 20 to 34) were ethnoracially mixed, almost one in every eight unions.[70] Moreover, this figure was up from about one in eleven in 2000, a rise of almost a third in just a single decade. This change is all the more notable because it moves in the opposite direction from what one would expect based merely on increases in the number of Latino and Asian immigrants. Such increases have boosted the sizes of minority groups, thus providing *more*, not fewer, potential coethnic spouses.

Higher levels of intermarriage have also occurred in tandem with a growing multiracial population. For instance, 5.3 percent of all children (ages 0 to 17) were identified as multiracial in 2010 (compared to only 1.1 percent of persons age 55 or older). For whites, this figure was 6.4 percent, and among blacks and Asians it was 14.6 percent and 27.9 percent, respectively. (Comparable figures for Latinos are hard to derive because Latinos report various racial origins.)[71] Recent research also shows intermarriage and multiraciality are highest in those parts of the country that are the most diverse; this results in part from more diversity per se, not just

from larger minority populations.[72] The findings of in-depth qualitative interviews also reveal that respondents see nonblack exogamy and multiraciality in much more favorable terms, and even refer to it as a "nonissue," than they do black intermarriage.[73]

America continues to confront the long-standing challenge of reconciling the myths of race and immigration. When Congress passed the Hart-Celler Act in 1965, opening America's doors to new waves of non-European immigrants, newcomers from Latin America, Asia, and the Caribbean began to change the face of the nation. Neither exactly black nor white, Latino and Asian immigrants have ushered in a new era of diversity, shifting the country from a largely black/white society to one consisting of multiple nonwhite ethnoracial groups. These changes – legal eradication of discrimination, new immigration from Latin America and Asia, new ways of measuring "race" in the U.S. Census, increasing ethnoracial diversity, rising rates of intermarriage, and a growing multiracial population – seem to suggest optimistic conclusions about the breakdown of America's traditional black/white color line.

The indicators appear to signal that the boundaries between all ethnoracial groups are loosening, thereby paving the way for a new era of cosmopolitan diversity in the twenty-first century. Racial status seems to be declining in significance and loosening its hold as an organizing principle of opportunity in the United States, and the tenacious black/white color line that has long gripped the country appears to be fading. Moreover, the country's new diversity appears to be contributing to the breakdown of the color line for all groups.

However, when we examine differences in patterns of intermarriage and multiraciality, as revealed both in large national data sets and in-depth interviews, we arrive at less sanguine conclusions about the declining significance of race for blacks. Not only are rates of intermarriage with whites much lower for blacks than for Asians and Latinos, but blacks are far less likely to identify multiracially compared to Asians and Latinos. Such findings provide evidence that legal and structural changes alone – while of considerable importance – are insufficient to explain notable differences in rates of intermarriage and multiracial identification when we compare blacks to other nonwhite groups. It seems that residues of the cultural and behavioral frameworks that have sustained the black/white divide for centuries continue to linger.

Thus, while the social distance between blacks and other groups may be declining, it is not diminishing at the same pace as it is for Asians and Latinos. Also, the distance among nonblack groups is far smaller than that separating these groups from blacks. Continued immigration from Latin America and Asia serves as a reminder that Asians and Latinos are immigrant groups, and most blacks are not. Because boundaries seem to be loosening for nonwhite immigrant groups, it is tempting to conclude that "race" is declining in significance for blacks as well. But the bulk of recent evidence runs counter to this notion, thus contradicting the conclusion that because ethnoracial status seems not much to impede processes of incorporation for Asians and Latinos, then it must not matter much for blacks either. But it is also false to conclude that because incorporation is so difficult in the case of blacks, it must be equally hard for Asians and Latinos.

It is fallacious to think that "race" is declining in significance for everyone in the United States. It would also be incorrect for policy-makers and the American public in general to favor and endorse "color-blind" policies that fail to consider

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that ethnoracial status still constrains opportunity, most especially for blacks. Recent research on intermarriage and multiracial identification points to a persistent pattern of "black exceptionalism," one that also emerges in studies of residential segregation, educational attainment, racial attitudes, and friendship networks. And while some blacks are closing the gaps on some of these fronts, this body of research forebodes the continued existence of barriers to full and complete incorporation of many blacks in the United States.

In short, while the disadvantage that Asians and Latinos experience stems more from their immigrant backgrounds than ethnoracial ascriptions per se, the disadvantages that blacks experience stem from the enduring stigma attached to the historical significance of blackness. Although the United States is more ethnoracially diverse than ever before, a consistent tendency toward black exceptionalism is nonetheless implied by the workings of the marriage market and by patterns of multiracial identification, both of which reveal a "diversity paradox" in America. Even while the country exhibits a new diversity, and although intermarriage and multiraciality are projected to increase in the foreseeable future, rates of intermarriage and multiracial reporting are occurring at an uneven pace. Boundaries are dissolving more rapidly for new immigrant groups such as Asians and Latinos than they are for blacks, for whom these boundaries remain very real.

There is another dimension to the diversity paradox. Diversity in itself appears to independently foster the dissolution of boundaries, but this effect is differentially offset by the degree to which Asians, Latinos, and blacks appear to be perceived as threatening. For example, the positive effect of diversity for blacks is trumped by a negative group-threat effect.

For Asians, however, no negative group-threat effect emerges. While diversity also has a positive effect on boundary-weakening for Asians (as it does for blacks), the places where Asians show larger group sizes also have higher rates of multiracial identification. Latinos fall in between blacks and Asians. While diversity has a positive, independent effect for Latinos, their increases in group size, while negative, are not large enough to offset the positive effects of diversity. In sum, while diversity is beneficial, its significance for blacks, Asians, and Latinos is unequal. Although paradoxical, it is critical to keep in mind that even among blacks, the relationship between diversity and multiracial reporting is a positive one, revealing that rising diversity alone is helping break down racial barriers to some extent, even in the case of blacks.

* Contributor Biographies: FRANK D. BEAN is Chancellor's Professor of Sociology at the University of California, Irvine, where he is also Director of the Center for Research on Immigration, Population, and Public Policy. His publications include *The Diversity Paradox: Immigration and the Color Line in Twenty-First Century America* (with Jennifer Lee, 2010), *America's Newcomers and the Dynamics of Diversity* (with Gillian Stevens, 2003), and *Immigration and Opportunity: Race, Ethnicity, and Employment in the United States* (edited with Stephanie Bell-Rose, 1999).

JENNIFER LEE is Professor of Sociology at the University of California, Irvine. Her publications include *The Diversity Paradox: Immigration and the Color Line in Twenty-First Century America* (with Frank D. Bean, 2010), *Asian American Youth: Culture, Identity, and Ethnicity* (edited with Min Zhou, 2004), and *Civility in the City: Blacks, Jews, and Koreans in Urban America* (2002).

JAMES D. BACHMEIER is Assistant Professor of Sociology at Temple University. His research focuses on Mexican migration to and within the United States, as well as the incorporation of second- and later-generation Mexican immigrants, especially in the areas of education, the labor market, and health. He has published articles in several journals, including *Social Forces*, *Social Science Research*, and *International Migration Review*.

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