'Anyone Can Be an Illegal': Color-Blind Ideology and Maintaining Latino/Citizen Borders

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Abstract

Previous research has shown that nativist ideology racializes nonwhite immigrants, but little research has looked at how color-blind racist discourse shapes how people accomplish this while maintaining a race-neutral identity. This study examines how online discussion forum participants of an anti-immigrant organization in the United States use color-blind racist discourse. The qualitative analysis of 200 threads (2,168 posts) shows that forum participants use the color-blind discursive tactic of diminishing the importance of race through rhetoric of legality, cultural racism, and reverse racism. This rhetoric frees forum participants to conflate illegal, criminal, and Hispanic. This neutralizes contradictions in their claims of a race-neutral stance, which is most evident in their discussions of Puerto Rico whereby participants reinforce a dichotomy between citizen and Latino. While color-blind racism has been used to explain race relations between white and nonwhite citizens, this research shows how the ideology extends to include nonwhite immigrants.

The United States has a long history of creating laws that establish privileges for white citizens. People have been denied entry, the right to vote, and education based on whether or not the law established them to be white (Haney Lopez, 2006). While we live in a post-civil rights era where creating laws and policies that explicitly address a certain racial group is taboo, white continues to represent the ideal citizen whereby nonwhites remain a marginalized other. Scholars who study how immigrants fit into today's racial climate have noted that many of the same nativist ideologies of the past underpin people's interpretations of immigrants today (Feagin, 1997). However, the way in which people talk about immigration also has to fit into today's color-blind environment.

In this paper I examine how members of a nativist extremist organization identified by the Southern Poverty Law Center, Americans for Legal Immigration Political Action Committee

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(ALIPAC), talk about immigration while attempting to avoid sounding racist. Specifically, I analyze the group's main website and a sample of their online discussion forum, which includes discussions that occurred in November and December of 2007. Similar to previous research, I find that participants in the online discussion forum apply stereotypes of nonwhite citizens onto non-white immigrants and in doing so construct a national identity that marginalizes nonwhites (Chavez, 2008; Johnson, 1998; Romero, 2008). I extend this literature by illustrating the importance of color-blind discourse for participants to discuss immigration in a post-civil rights era. I find that forum participants use rhetorical strategies to downplay race as an explanation for their attitudes towards immigration. Specifically, the forum participants use the color-blind tactics of 'anything but race', a reliance on cultural explanations, and reverse racism. However, discussions of Puerto Ricans and the perceived cultural inferiority of immigrants illustrate contradictions within their color-blind discourse.

Construction of a National Identity as White and the Nonwhite Immigrant

The ability to be considered a citizen in the United States, and receive full citizen privileges, has been limited throughout history to characteristics including place of birth, race, gender, and class (Cacho, 2000). As Haney Lopez (2006) shows, the separation of 'white' from 'nonwhite' played an integral role in birthright and naturalization laws. In the 1790s Congress limited naturalization to only 'whites' and subsequent laws continued to use race as a deciding factor in immigration law. In 1882 Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act. This act barred immigration of Chinese laborers, which was later expanded in 1917 to include all persons from Asia. In the 1920s and 1950s we saw the law focus on Mexican immigrants, with mass deportations that included large numbers of US citizens. Further, even birthright citizenship was limited to 'whites' up until the 1940s (Haney Lopez, 2006).

Naturalization cases during this time forced courts to rule on what constituted 'white' and hence who qualified for the privilege of citizenship. The courts used either anthropological classification systems or relied on the 'common knowledge' of race to make decisions on whether or not immigrants qualified as 'white'. For example, in the early 1920s the district court ruled to grant Thind, an immigrant from India, naturalization based on previous court cases that followed the anthropological classification that Indians are Caucasian and therefore 'white'. However, the federal government appealed this decision and the case went before the Supreme Court, which ruled with 'common knowledge' that Indians are not 'white'. This resulted in Thind's naturalization being denied and other immigrants from India having their naturalization stripped (Haney Lopez, 2006).

It wasn't until 1965 that Congress passed the Immigration Act of 1965, which eliminated quota laws that privileged immigrants from Europe. The focus shifted to family reunification, including the spouses, children, and siblings of current immigrants, with only 20 percent of visas set aside for work-related migration (Hing, 2006). However, since previous quotas led to a higher percentage of white immigrants, the 1965 law was intended to attract more relatives of white than nonwhite immigrants and, thus, lead to the same proportion of white and nonwhite migration as had existed under previous law (Reimers, 1985). Instead, Asian and Latino migrants to the US disproportionately took advantage of the family reunification policy, and by the 1990s they became the largest immigrant groups (Hing, 2006). This growth in the nonwhite population became increasingly threatening for those wishing to maintain a white, dominant culture (Chavez, 2008).

Recent changes in immigration policy have become increasingly punitive in nature and continue to be influenced by racial prejudice. The public sentiment largely associates immigrants with

Mexicans (Hing, 2010), and media and political debates are coded with racial messages (Cacho, 2000). In 1994, President Clinton launched the program, 'Operation Gatekeeper', and began construction of a 14-mile wall between California and Mexico intended to curb illegal immigrants crossing the United States border (Walker, 2007). This was shortly followed by the 1996 Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act (AEDPA) and the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) passed by the House. These laws increased deportable offenses and expenditures on border control (Walker, 2007). While these immigration laws were constructed without the stated intention of differentiating between race and ethnic groups, the increasing criminalization and militarization of immigrants calls attention to the southern border, thus constructing Mexico as dangerous.

The policing of these laws criminalizes Mexicans and other Latinos (Haney Lopez, 2006). For instance, Romero's (2011b) case study of an immigration raid conducted by the Chandler, Arizona Police in conjunction with Border Patrol agents in 1997 illustrates clear examples of people being targeted for their appearance as 'Mexican'. People who were doing very legal activities, such as using the pay phone, eating pizza, and driving their cars, were stopped and required to provide proof of legal status (Romero, 2011b).

The construction of Mexico as dangerous, and Mexican immigrants as threatening, was further heightened by the government's response to 9/11 which linked terrorism and immigration. The 'War on Terror' led to the criminalization of being undocumented when Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and the Customs and Border Protection came under the supervision of Homeland Security. This shift led to an increase in deportations, especially for undocumented immigrants with minor infractions (Akers Chacon and Davis, 2006). The policy also increased border patrol and enforcement along the Mexican border, which did not reduce migration, but did lead to huge increases in the number of migrants who died in the desert (Hing, 2006).

Since 9/11 there has also been an increase in nativist groups (Buchanan and Holthouse, 2007), vigilante border groups in particular (Walker, 2007), and nativist websites (Sohoni, 2006). Groups such as the Anti-Defamation League (2007) and the Southern Poverty Law Center (Beirich, 2008) have noted that nativists have increasingly become mainstream with organizations such as the Federation for American Immigration Reform, founded by well-known nativist, John Tanton, building ties with politicians and testifying in Congress. However, the ideology purported by these organizations and adopted in the mass media racializes Latinos (Chavez, 2008; Johnson, 1998; Romero, 2008). For example, Romero (2008) argues, in her study of Mothers Against Illegal Aliens (MAIA) and its leader Michelle Dallacroce, that the symbolism of mothers is used to hide the racist messages of the organization's messages. MAIA and Dallacroce stereotype Latino immigrants as less than human. Specifically, Latino women are portrayed as selfish and criminal breeders, while white mothers are constructed as idealized Madonnas (Romero, 2008). Further, Chavez (2008) finds that racial threat is played out on magazine covers, such as a 1990 *Time* magazine titled 'America's Changing Colors', whereby whites are warned of their imminent descent into minority status.

The racialization of nonwhite noncitizens has important consequences for domestic citizens. As Johnson (1998: 1154) notes, 'The punishment of noncitizens of color suggest just how society might zealously attack domestic minorities of color absent legal protections', and provides the Japanese internment camps for Japanese American citizens during World War II as a clear example. The negative attributes of a nonwhite immigrant other are generalized to the larger nonwhite other, including nonwhite citizens (Johnson, 1998). However, an important aspect of today's immigration debate is that it is occurring post-civil rights. While research clearly shows that racist ideology and racial inequality persist, the way in which they are reproduced is more covert. Below, I turn to the literature on color-blind racism and its importance for discussing immigration.

Color-Blind Racism

While whiteness brings privileges, blatant verbal support of inequality *because of* race is discouraged. Scholars have suggested that the post-civil rights era is marked by color-blind (Bonilla-Silva, 2001; Carr, 1997) or 'Laissez-Faire' (Bobo and Smith, 1998) racism, whereby whites verbally denounce racism and simultaneously deny the existence of continued racial discrimination. Racist ideas are covered and neutralized to appear less malignant (Feagin, 2000). For instance, interview studies with whites find that participants argue that they are opposed to racial inequality, but yet also oppose social policies and programs that would reduce racial inequality (Feagin and O'Brien, 2003; Wellman, 1977). In the new racism, racial disparity is attributed to individual failures and cultural shortcomings, as opposed to problems with the ideology of meritocracy (Bobo and Smith, 1998). Whites diminish the importance of race in explanations for disparities in the distribution of wealth across racial groups and the continued economic marginalization of nonwhites (Bonilla-Silva, 2002).

Color-blind ideology isn't just a way of thinking; it is also a way of speaking (Bonilla-Silva, 2001, 2002; Bonilla-Silva and Forman, 2000; Bonilla-Silva et al., 2004). On one hand people proclaim that they are not racist, while simultaneously freeing themselves to say racist things (Bonilla-Silva, 2001; Bonilla-Silva and Forman, 2000; Bonilla-Silva et al., 2004; Van Dijk, 1992, 1993). Color-blind racist discourse includes phrases such as 'I'm not racist, but' and 'Some of my best friends aren't white' (Bonilla-Silva, 2002; Bonilla-Silva and Forman, 2000). This general climate of color-blind racism is evident in debates regarding immigration.

Chavez (2001: 214) writes that present day discourse on immigration 'cloaks race talk under the guise of acculturation, language acquisition, conquest, and sovereignty and concerns with a non-white majority'. In this sense, rhetoric strategies used to discuss nonwhite citizens are adopted to discuss nonwhite immigrants while attempting to appear race neutral. Feagin (1997: 13) refers to this presentation of nativist ideology as 'old poison in new bottles'. This discourse was evident in the debate surrounding Proposition 187 in California, a 1994 bill passed by voters (but later repealed) that was intended to bar undocumented immigrants from social services and public education. Johnson (1997) suggests that supporters could not rely on expressly racist statements and maintain credibility with the public. Instead, they needed to cover racial sentiment in seemingly color-blind rhetoric.

Mass media is an important site for the reproduction of color-blind ideology (Collins, 2006). Coutin and Chock (1997) illustrate how journalists used racial and ethnic stereotypes to separate illegal immigrants into the undeserving illegal and those deserving amnesty in the media accounts of the US Immigration Reform Control Act of 1986. When journalists gave accounts of immigrants placed into the 'good' category, they stressed their likeness to citizens and diminished the immigrants' racial or ethnic difference. They were constructed in opposition to 'other' criminal and threatening immigrants, thus reinforcing whiteness as normative. Similarly, Ono and Sloop (2002) find that the media makes distinctions between good and bad immigration by relying on the concept of legality. Immigrants of today are juxtaposed with historical waves of legal immigrants. Immigrants now are portrayed as overwhelmingly illegal, and immigrants being referred to as 'good' by the legal distinction are European. Hence a dichotomy between good and bad separates European and white immigrants as 'good' and today's nonwhite immigrants as bad (Ono and Sloop, 2002).

However, the reliance on 'legality' is a color-blind tactic that only appears race neutral. Calavita (1998) argues that 'legality' is itself created by people and, thus, informed by ideology regarding who is and who is not welcome into the nation. Laws can be used to reproduce a racist structure (Feagin, 2000) and, hence, relying on legality does not preclude one from espousing racist ideology.

Further, Akers Chacon and Davis (2006) argue that the term 'illegal' has become a pejorative term associated with Mexicans that reproduces negative stereotypes while appearing non-racist.

In this paper, I analyze the way in which color-blind racist ideology contributes to the construction of the immigrant 'other' on the website and online discussion forum of an anti-immigrant social movement organization. Specifically, I show how color-blind racism informs the way in which forum participants interpret and discuss immigration. While research has examined nativist discourse and imagery in the mass media (Chavez, 2001, 2008; Coutin and Chock, 1997; Ono and Sloop, 2002), little research has examined the internet as a place where nativism is created and dispersed (Ono and Sloop, 2002; Sohoni, 2006). Further, while research has noted the racialization of Latino immigrants (see Chavez, 2008; Johnson, 1997; Romero, 2008), no one has yet analyzed how color-blind racist discourse is important for understanding how people talk about and make sense of immigration in conversations with others. In the online forum, participants pose statements, respond to other statements, and negotiate meaning regarding immigration. I argue that the adoption of color-blind language is critical for the forum members' ability to reconcile contradictions within their nativist discourse and maintain positive non-racist identities as part of an anti-illegal immigrant social movement organization.

Methods

This paper is a qualitative analysis of the website and online discussion forum of the anti-immigrant group, Americans for Legal Immigration Political Action Committee (ALIPAC). With increasing internet usage in the United States, scholars have begun to argue the need to study web-based texts (Adams and Roscigno, 2005; Garcia et al., 2009; Gerstenfeld et al., 2003). In their frame analysis of Klu Klux Klan and white supremacist websites, Adams and Roscigno (2005) argue that websites are an important medium for social movement organizations to disseminate their missions and frames to an audience without being filtered by the media. Gerstenfeld et al. (2003) also argue that hate groups use websites to recruit members without being constrained by geographic boundaries. Since anti-immigrant groups are often charged with being bigots and racists, these organizations need to control their own representations (Sohoni, 2006). Even if the internet forums serve largely as a place for people to engage in symbolic politics (Edelman, 1964), this has consequences. While groups such as ALIPAC may or may not have a direct impact on specific policies, they still reinforce anti-immigrant sentiment and reproduce racist ideology. In their analysis of the websites of white supremacist organizations, Gerstenfeld et al. (2003: 40) argue that online discussion forums bridge geographic boundaries, allowing individuals to interact with people who hold similar beliefs, which 'can convince even the most ardent extremist that he is not alone, that his views are not, in fact, extreme at all'. Thus, the internet is a place where boundaries are interpreted and reproduced.

The Organization

In this study I focus on the website and the online general discussion forum of the group, Americans for Legal Immigration Political Action Committee (ALIPAC). ALIPAC is one of the organizations identified by the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) as 'nativist extremist'. However, the group self-identifies as pro-legal immigration, with a focus on creating social change through legislation. The organizations website lists a four-point platform: '1. Secure our borders 2. Crack down on employers that intentionally hire illegals 3. Remove incentives and rewards to illegals such as licenses, welfare, and other taxpayer benefits 4. Enforce our existing laws and deport illegal aliens

when convicted of crimes or detected during routine law enforcement activities'. The headquarters of ALIPAC are in Raleigh, NC; however, the group considers itself to be a national organization. The organization focuses on having volunteers write letters, email, fax, and call politicians. However, ALIPAC has on rare occasions hosted local events. Between 2006 and 2008, I was aware of two ALIPAC sponsored events, a movie night and a rally in downtown Raleigh, NC, where they brought in speakers such as Chris Simcox, the co-founder of the Minuteman Civil Defense Corps.

As a political action committee, ALIPAC is funded by individual donations. According to the Election Commission, ALIPAC reported $229,721 in donations from 1 January 2007 to 30 December 2008. Donors were from various states, including California, Florida, Maryland, New Jersey, North Carolina, Texas, Virginia, Washington, and more (Federal Election Commission). While it is not a scientific survey, ALIPAC's self-conducted web survey of 2,078 of their 'supporters' shows that 80.27% self-identify their ethnicity as white, 7.03% as Hispanic, 2.69% as Black, 3.61% as Multi-Racial, and 6.4% as other. A similar self-administered survey of 1,517 'supporters' found that 51.94% of supporters self-identified as female and 48.06% identified as male.

The organization was founded in 2004 by its current leader and spokesperson, William Gheen. The Southern Poverty Law Center's 2008 Intelligence Report lists William Gheen as one of 20 most influential Nativists in the United States. Gheen graduated with a BA in Political Science from Eastern Carolina University and went on to become a campaign consultant and served as a legislative assistant in the NC General Assembly. In 2005 he quit his job as a legislative assistant to North Carolina Senator Hugh Webster in order to devote more time to ALIPAC and fight a House Bill that would have made it possible for some non-citizens to attend North Carolina colleges and universities at the price of in-state tuition (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2008).

I chose this organization for several reasons. First, ALIPAC is a large, national organization. William Gheen has appeared as an authority on immigration on major television networks, including CNN, Fox, and CBS. Additionally, I did not want to study organizations that may be viewed as radical, even within the movement, such as border patrol organizations like Jim Gilchrist's Minuteman Project. Since ALIPAC focuses on political lobbying and not border control, my hope is that the voices here are more reflective of average anti-immigrant sentiment as opposed to those who are attracted to more radical organizations. However, it is important to note that people who joined and posted on a nativist chat room are still people who care strongly enough about the issue to do so, and thus, the findings here are not generalizable to a larger population. At the same time, it may also be the case that an online forum may pull more people than face-to-face activism, as it requires less commitment – merely an internet connection and the time to post a response.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data for this article come from the main website for ALIPAC (http://www.alipac.us/) and a sample of threads from the group's online general discussion forum. Threads are online conversations about one topic within a discussion forum that can be traced to an original post. It was necessary to sample threads, because ALIPAC has an active discussion board. For instance, on 1 July 2007, over 500 posts were made. I obtained a sample of 200 threads by sampling every fifth thread. All but three (98.5%) of the threads in the sample were first started in November or December of 2007. The oldest thread began on 14 June 2006. On the website, threads are arranged by most recent post date, not starting date. Hence, the three threads with older start dates were threads that had been started earlier but recently posted to. This time period coincided with the upcoming elections, and politicians running for office were common points of discussion. This was also just prior to the media's coverage of the economic recession. Hence, my sample of frames may disproportionately

represent discussions of politicians and show fewer posts about the economic concerns posed by immigration than if the sample were taken today. While the issue of discussion may have changed across the five years since the data were collected to reflect recent policies or stories in the media, my goal here is less to examine the issues and more to examine *how* people are talking about the issues. While the former may have changed, it is less likely that the latter has. However, even the issues of debate are often recycled. For instance, forum members in my 2007 sample had discussions about the 'Dream Act'. In June 2012, when the Obama administration put forward the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, in many ways a watered-down version of the failed 'Dream Act', this reignited public discussions about the 'Dream Act' and whether or not people who immigrated without documentation as children should be given special consideration when seeking to stay in the country or obtain citizenship status.

My sample of threads includes a total of 2,168 posts, with a median post of six per thread. The length of the threads ranged greatly, from only the one original post to as high as 191 posts per thread. Table 1 provides sample frequencies.

Of the 274 unique aliases, 150 (55%) of the sample listed their 'location' in their user information. The remaining 45% of the posters left this information blank, and thus, there is no way to know if the people who did not list their location were clustered in different locations. Among those who did provide this information, 32 different states plus 'Mexifornia' (N=4) were listed. The states with the highest frequencies were California (N=34), Texas (N=19), and North Carolina (N=14). These states are not surprising, since California and Texas are border states with a history of migration and nativist organizing. North Carolina recently experienced an influx of Latino immigrants and is the home headquarters for ALIPAC. However, Maryland (N=2), New Jersey (N=4), New Hampshire (N=1), Ohio (N=4), and other states that have not experienced high rates of immigration or anti-immigrant group mobilization were also listed. Additionally, states where one might have expected greater activity had relatively low amounts of people identifying as their location, such as Arizona (N=4), Nevada (N=3), and New Mexico (N=2).

The main website for ALIPAC and the sample of forum threads were copied into Word documents on 15 and 16 December 2007. Next, I uploaded the files into the ATLAS.ti qualitative software for analysis. I approached the data inductively, without a set coding schema. I began with open coding, where I assigned a code to each line of data (Charmaz, 2006; Lofland and Lofland, 1995). After 30 threads, I began to develop a more focused coding schema based on themes that

Table 1. Descriptive Frequencies for the Online Forums.

	ALIPAC
Total threads analyzed	200
Total posts analyzed	2168
Average posts per thread	10.8
Median posts per thread	6
Minimum posts per thread	1
Maximum posts per thread	191
Number of unique aliases	274
Average posts per user	7.9
Median posts per user	3
Most posts by one user	187
Fewest posts by one user	1

emerged from the open coding (Charmaz, 2006). As I coded the data, I began writing analytic memos exploring the underlying meanings and processes inherent within the data (Charmaz, 2006). These memos often prompted me to return to the data and modify my coding strategy. In this sense, my coding process was more iterative than sequential.

I find that forum participants use color-blind discursive techniques identified by Bonilla-Silva (2006). Similar to the comments made by students in Bonilla-Silva's (2006) study, the forum participants use color-blind ideology to make sense of the social world and do not experience different components of the color-blind frame as separate. Thus, some statements include multiple frames simultaneously. I will show that the participants draw from the frames of the minimization of racism and reverse racism while arguing that they rely on legality and not race. The forum members also frame immigration using cultural racism. In these cases, the forum participants focus on perceived negative traits of a monolithic 'Latino' culture or an inferior 'Mexican' culture. The use of the words 'Mexicans', 'Latinos', and 'Hispanics' are often used interchangeably or in conjunction with one another. For example, Casper324 wrote, 'Thanks in part to the Mexican/Hispanic invasion we have cock fighting, dog fighting, and now horse tripping!' Similarly, Reciprocity wrote about 'reverse assimilation and the Latinization of America or Amexica eventually'. There were no clear differences regarding when participants used which words.

In the next section, I first turn to how forum members claim to be race neutral while calling attention to a socially constructed border. In order to maintain the voices of the forum members, I include quotes directly as they were posted in the online forum. Spelling, grammar errors, use of capital letters, bolded words, and internet shorthand are those of the original authors.

Language of Legality as a Race Diminutive

Consistent with the dominant color-blind ideology, being racist threatens the legitimacy of both the group and individuals. This is a problematic identity dilemma since group members reinforce racist ideology, some more explicitly than others. For example, in one instance, a forum participant posted discussions from a perceived pro-immigrant organization. The members referred to this as a Chicano forum. This post prompted an example of a more explicitly racist statement. EX_OC writes, 'They resort to that because (a) their level of sanity is limited and (b) the macho rapist/tough guy image makes up for their pigmy stature and mental midget failure of Mexico to achieve what America has.' In this statement, EX_OC is connecting the physical makeup of Chicanos (pigmy stature) with mental abilities, 'mental midget failure'. In response, No2illegals posts, 'Wow… I couldn't have said it any better…. Awesome!' and wilro writes, 'It's amazing how childish the chicken forum – ooops, I mean chicano forum is. Only small minds like theirs can produce something so moronic.' The quotes above attach negative attributes with genetic characteristics and liken Mexicans to animals. However, comments that are so blatantly racist, referring to physical features, are rare. They are also inconsistent with today's color-blind ideology. Less explicit statements that reinforce racist ideology are much more common.

Consistent with today's color-blind ideology, group members maintain that they are not racially motivated. There were 67 posts across 25 threads where forum participants explicitly state that they, or nativists in general, are not racist. Diminishing the importance of race as an explanation for inequality is one form of color-blind racist discourse (Bonilla-Silva, 2002). Bonilla-Silva (2002: 62) notes that white students interject 'anything but race' phrases into their stories to stress that their color-blind story is truly devoid of racial explanations. This is a central tactic used by the ALIPAC forum members to attempt to neutralize any part of their explanations regarding immigration that have racial messages in them. For members of ALIPAC the specific 'anything but race'

strategy is to rely on rhetoric of legality. When nativists rely on 'the law' as the moral measuring stick, the discourse suggests some level of rational decision making because it relies on seemingly immutable laws. This is despite the fact that laws themselves are socially constructed, and in such a way that has historically excluded nonwhites from full citizenship (Calavita, 1998) and reinforced white as the conceptualization of a 'national' community (Collins, 2006). While racial groups are socially constructed (Omi and Winant, 1987), people are classified into racial groups based on physical features present at birth and outside the control of the individual. However, legal citizenship status is seen as an achieved status, an identity that someone can acquire through social action. In this sense, if the law is unquestionably rational and rule breakers are morally inferior, illegal immigrants can be deemed morally inferior others who should be blocked from crossing 'the border'.

Both the main website and the forum members make claims that they are not racists because they welcome *legal* immigrants and people of all races and ethnicities. For example, the platform provided on the main website of ALIPAC illustrates the emphasis placed on legal status. It states, 'ALIPAC supports those that legally immigrate, but we DO NOT support any amnesty, visa expansion, or "Guest Worker" program designed to reward illegal aliens or legalize their presence in the US.' The platform stresses that legal immigrants are welcome, but that the organization opposes intervention by the government in an already existing process that would change the law in such a way that would make some current illegal immigrants legal. These changes to the law are perceived as rewarding those who break the law. While the statement on one hand recognizes the mutable nature of law, the forum participants treat the legal status of immigrants as fixed.

In the forum, stressing legality becomes immediately linked with accounts that neutralize racist labels. For example, in a thread titled 'Is Illegal Immigration about Racism', Joazinha writes, 'Jim Gilchrist, founder of the Minutemen Project, told me that illegal immigration is a LEGAL, NOT a RACIAL/ETHNIC issue because ANYONE can be an illegal!' This statement is exemplary of how forum members use legal status as a measure of morality, while denying that certain racial or ethnic groups could be disproportionately affected by the law. It portrays illegal immigrants as choosing to break the law, while ignoring the structural constraints that limit what choices different types of people have. The stress placed on 'legal' immigrants is a deliberate move by ALIPAC to racial rearticulation whereby they draw from ideas in the broader culture to apply and construct racial meanings (Omi and Winant, 1987). Here, the ALIPAC forum members draw from a color-blind frame of 'anything but race' to ensure that the word 'legal' cannot be deemed openly racially motivated, despite the fact that the converse 'illegal' becomes associated with 'criminal' and 'Latino' (Johnson, 1998), consequentially racializing all Latinos.

While the focus on border protection provides legitimation for a conceptualization of illegal (De Genova, 2002), it becomes an even more powerful discursive tool of boundary maintenance when criminality is stressed. The connotation and meaning behind 'illegal' is very different from 'undocumented'. 'Illegal' stresses criminality, while 'undocumented' suggests lack of paperwork. The term 'illegal' is used expressly for the imagery that it evokes. The ALIPAC members are cognizant of this. For instance, one forum participant posted, 'Calling an illegal alien an undocumented worker is like calling a robber an unwanted houseguest.' The poster stresses the belief that immigrants who are in the country illegally are not just breaking the law, but they are causing harm to citizens. This statement associates immigration with people who violate homes and steal from the owners.

Seventy-three of the 200 threads contained references to immigrants engaging in criminal activity beyond documentation status, including murder, rape, and drunk-driving. The overall consequence of the ideology is the construction of a dangerous and criminal immigrant 'other'. Since

9/11 and the association of immigration with terrorism, national discourse and more punitive laws have set a framework for interpreting undocumented workers as criminal and threatening just by their presence. Further, instead of the focus being on an action, this new framework suggests that the very identity of the person is criminal (Akers Chacon and Davis, 2006). Drawing on criminality is coded with both class and racial messages. Crime is associated in the United States with poor Black men, and policies and policing have focused on the crimes of the poor as opposed to white collar crimes committed by the upper class (Cacho, 2000). Cacho (2000) further argues that claims of immigrant criminality attempt to reverse the historical relationship where whites have hoarded resources and persecuted nonwhites. Here, forum participants are constructing a threatening non-white perpetrator in relationship to a white citizen victim.

Welcoming Legal Immigrants

Another way that the color-blind rhetorical strategy of legality manifests in conversations is through stressing that legal immigrants are not just welcome, but supported by other members. Similar to the findings of Coutin and Chock (1997) that the media separates good and bad immigrants, the construction of good and bad immigrant categories is also played out in the conversations on the ALIPAC forum. However, when ALIPAC forum participants accept immigrants in the forum, their difference from 'other' immigrants is stressed. There were two individuals who started conversations in the forum by announcing their status as legal immigrants. Below is an exchange between forum participants on the ALIPAC website and one of the two posters.

> **sbi** – Do I have a place here? Been here **legally** for over 11 years, started green card process 6 years ago, **never** overstayed my visa. My name check (part of the green card process) is pending with the FBI for 5 - yes, five - years. I wish Washington (AKA McCain and Kennedy) would devote time to deal with this nonsense as much as they do to help those crimeallians.

> **PinestrawGuys** – You most certainly DO, sbi, and WELCOME TO ALIPAC!!!! Jump right in and give 'em hell, you're the kind of immigrant we're fighting for.

> **Cliffdid** – Welcome sbi. People like you are one of the reasons I become so infuriated with people who break our laws and sneak in. I commend you for doing things the legal way. For any trolls reading this who have cut in line … I hope your ashamed of yourselves!

There are several important components to this exchange. On the surface, by welcoming a legal immigrant, the forum members reinforce the message from the title of their organization Americans for *Legal* Immigration. Welcoming legal immigrants underscores ALIPAC's claim that they oppose only illegal immigrants.

In the quote, sbi notes the long hard process of getting legal status. He or she states a six-year visa process and five-year waiting period for the government to verify his or her name. Further, sbi uses the language of ALIPAC when labeling undocumented immigrants, calling them crimeallians. PinestrawGuys responds that sbi is 'the kind of immigrant that we're fighting for.' This reinforces the difference between immigrants who go through legal channels and those who do not, and it reinforces the connection between undocumented immigrants and criminality. It also describes ALIPAC members as moral champions of legal immigrants. In addition, Cliffdid suggests that illegal immigrants have 'cut in line' and are not only illegal but contributing to a much harder and longer process for immigrants who attempt to gain citizenship status through acceptable legal channels. Illegal immigrants are portrayed as rule-breakers who are merely unwilling to seek citizenship

through legal channels, which downplays the different levels of hardship and opportunity that individual undocumented immigrants face. It simplifies 'good' and 'bad' in order to easily place people into simplified categories and ignore complex questions regarding the creation and enactment of the law itself (Coutin and Chock, 1997). As Johnson (2009) argues, current immigration law currently disadvantages poor, and thus nonwhite, immigrants by requiring potential immigrants to prove that they have the education and employment to ensure that they will never need public assistance. Employers who sponsor immigrants must likewise agree to pay for the public assistance should the immigrant need it. This blocks immigrants who lack education and the opportunity to get a well-paying job; these are more likely to be from poorer countries such as Mexico. Meanwhile, immigrants who are more likely to meet these requirements are more likely to come from wealthier, predominantly white countries such as Great Britain. Further, current yearly caps on the number of immigrants who can come from one country lead to long lines that can last 20 years from countries with high demand, while there are short or no waits for immigrants coming from wealthy countries that do not have high levels of out-migration (Johnson, 2009).

The exchange between the participants above also illustrates claims of likeness and group membership. For instance, Cliffdid refers to 'our laws' which suggests a group membership and conversely a group boundary. It constructs the in-group as law abiding citizens, while referring to those who 'sneak in' calls attention to a border. With the advent of Homeland Security and the connection between immigration and terrorism, this draws attention to the Mexican/United States border. Further, as noted previously, the reference to crime 'crimealliens' by sbi draws on culturally coded images of poor people of color. Since United States laws promote white privilege and reinforce a white national identity, this highlights a white normative in-group in relation to immigrant others regardless of the actual race of sbi (Collins, 2006).

Additionally, welcoming legal immigrants also does not mean that they are given full inclusion into the nation. Collins (2006) argues that whites tolerate historically oppressed racial/ethnic groups as long as they do not challenge white privilege. Similar to the media analyses of Chavez (2008) and Ono and Sloop (2002), the reliance on legality reinforces the creation of a racialized immigrant other, because ALIPAC forum members conflate illegal immigrant and Hispanic. This becomes even more evident when the cultural threat of immigrants is linked with illegality.

Culture and the Case of Puerto Rico

Another color-blind racist frame is to rely on cultural explanations for differences between racial and ethnic groups (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). In this frame, people identify perceived negative traits of racial and ethnic minorities. This tactic was also used by members of the online forum. In particular, the forum members do focus on the cultural inferiority, especially perceptions of an immoral Hispanic or Latin o/a and, in some instances, 'Mexican' specifically. For example, one ALIPAC forum participant posted a message arguing that Mexicans are cruel towards horses. In response to the posting, members discussed the overall moral shortcomings of Mexicans and/or 'Hispanics'. Specifically, one forum member wrote:

> Culture or not, its against the law, since it is cruelity to animals. That they believe it is ok because of their culture, doesn't speak well for their culture. Culture is also used as the high number of hispanics that drink while driving, or drink underage. Neither of those are made 'ok' just by some idea of culture either.

In the above statement, the conceptualization of illegal and criminality is not completely ignored. However, the 'legal' status of the individual as an immigrant is no longer the underlying

premise. This argument is no longer necessary, because the link between illegal immigrant and Mexican is strong enough to free individuals to merely associate Mexican with criminal. The expectation that immigrants should assimilate and fear that new waves of immigrants are incapable of assimilating is historically a core component of nationalism in the United States (Feagin, 1997). Chavez (2008) argues that the cultural stigmatization of Latinos is one component of the racialization of Latino in nativist discourse. Latinos or Hispanics are seen as naturally different by virtue of 'their culture', incapable of assimilating, and thus threatening to and incompatible with the white in-group. This is consistent with Bonilla-Silva's (2006) finding that cultural racism is a central tenant of today's color-blind ideology. While explanations for racial inequality diminish the importance of discrimination, people instead focus on perceived flaws in the culture of racial and ethnic minorities. These perceived cultural flaws explain their marginalized status and places blame on racial minorities, thereby relieving whites of responsibility.

Another example of the cultural racism theme is illustrated in a thread where members discuss Puerto Rico. The forum members seldom talk about Puerto Rico. Puerto Rico is part of the United States, and Puerto Ricans are US citizens. The following thread in the ALIPAC forum was one of two threads with disagreement expressed between members of the forum. It was longer than the ten-post average for this forum, with 19 posts by 13 members. It started with one forum member, AmericanPatriot23, asking 'Why Cant English Be Made The "Official Language" of the USA? I hear one of the obstacles is Puerto Rico since their "main" language is Spanish, rather than English. What do you guys think?' To this question, Jimpasz responds,

> Puerto Rico teaches English in all public schools and has done so for 40+ years. Puerto Ricans are U.S. Citizens if they choose to speak Spanish that is their right. Puerto Ricans are not immigrants or illegal immigrants, no visa or passport is needed for U.S. Citizens (including Puerto Rican born) folks who travel between the mainland U.S. and the U.S. possession of P.R. The U.S. Military is proud to have thousands of men and women from the enchanted Isle.

In this quote, we see Jimpasz relying on the definition of legal vs. illegal immigration as the standard for who to include as a citizen and who not to include. This fits with the arguments forum members and websites give supporting their claims to being race/ethnicity neutral. However, all but one of the other forum members in this thread argues that Puerto Ricans are different from other citizens. AmericanPatriot23 responded, rebutting Jimpasz's argument with the following:

> … but recently Puerto Rican organizations have protested against making English our official language. If you do some search you will see that has been one of the obstacles. Also, les not forget that some Puerto Rican organizations are 'branches' with the racist 'National Council of La Raza'. I don't know if you know this but in the town of Hazletown Pennsylvania the 2 main organizations suing not to crack down on illegal immigration and to not make English the official language of Hazletown were the ACLU and a Puerto Rican organization since the small Puerto Rican population said it would make them feel uncomfortable having English as the official language of Hazletown.

AmericanPatriot23 ignores Jimpasz's argument that Puerto Ricans can speak Spanish if they desire, because they are citizens. He criticizes Puerto Ricans for opposing English as the official language of the United States. Santa Ana's (2002: 235) analysis of immigration metaphors in mainstream media shows that people perceive the English language to be 'an emblem of being "truly American"' and that speaking any other language is 'unpatriotic and un-American'. In this sense, adopting the English language is perceived as key to full assimilation into the culture of the United States. Thus, it is not surprising that language was one of the cultural aspects that

ALIPAC forum members focused on when drawing from the cultural inferiority color-blind racist frame.

The cultural racism theme is perhaps exemplified by statements that create an explicit boundary between Latino and US citizens. For instance, Joanzina replied to the thread regarding Puerto Ricans and English-only policies with the following statement: 'I believe we should just DITCH Puerto Rico! Then on their own, they can be Latino ALL they WANT to!' Similarly, in a different thread, Rockfish writes about an Illinois politician who was born on the mainland, but has Puerto Rican heritage. Rockfish posts, 'He is latin before he is American.' In both Joanzina's and Rockfish's comments, Latino and 'American' appear incompatible. Further, we see ethnicity, 'Latino', being used as a proxy for nationality and 'American' is the proxy for white.

The reliance on ethnicity is also evident in a poster who challenges AmericanPatriot13's claims that Puerto Ricans do not share White Anglo culture. Just as journalists in the media separated immigrants into 'good' or 'bad' by either stressing assimilation or difference from White Anglo culture (Coutin and Chock, 1997), the following post illustrates how this is played out in the online discussions. The poster begins by reinforcing the importance of language as a central component of being 'American', but suggests that Puerto Ricans do speak English and can thus be largely placed in the 'good' category. The forum participant then makes reference to Elvira Arellano, a Mexican citizen, who had given birth to a son in 1999 in Oregon and is thus a US citizen. She was a major figure in the immigrant movement, because she fought for the right for herself and other mothers of US citizens to be able to remain in the United States. She lost the fight in 2007 when she was arrested and deported. The reference below by the ALIPAC forum member to Elvira in relation to a Puerto Rican woman who opposed her illustrates how forum members separate 'good' and 'bad' Latinos based on those who challenge White Anglo culture and those who are seen as non-threatening. Bren4834 writes,

> I worked in the finance department for an online college in Florida a few years back. I had numerous students from Puerto Rico------they ALL spoke English just as well as you and I. I also believe that Puerto Rico stresses English through their schools… I would be curious to know how many people belong to the Puerto Rican organizations----do they really have large numbers?? I remember reading an article about Elvira. It was when they were having the Puerto Rican day parade in Chicago. The article (from the very open borders paper) said that Elvira was watching the parade from the church. It said that during the parade, a Puerto Rican woman stopped in front of the church and yelled to her 'Go home'!!

Bren 4834's quote gives the example of a Puerto Rican woman who yelled at Elvira to 'Go home'. The woman in the parade was clearly celebrating an ethnic heritage and pride in being Puerto Rican, which other members constructed as being incompatible with 'American'. However, this woman was constructed in a positive light in relation to Elvira. There are several possible explanations. First, it is consistent with the members' claims that they rely on legal status. In this instance, the Puerto Rican woman is legal while Elvira was an undocumented immigrant. Secondly, Elvira was famous for seeking sanctuary in churches in Chicago to avoid court dates and deportation. This is also consistent with the criminalization of immigrants, especially Mexican immigrants, as willing to break the law. Additionally, while Elvira's status as a mother may have garnered sympathy from religious institutions and the media, current nativist groups stigmatize undocumented mothers as unfit and criminal mothers. For example, the nativist environmentalist movement gives danger messages regarding the fertility rates of immigrant women (Bhatia, 2004; Sohoni, 2006). Similarly, Romero's (2008, 2011a) research on the nativist group Mothers Against Illegal Aliens (MAIA) found that the stigmatization of immigrant mothers as animalistic and selfish was at the center of the group's mission. Similarly to MAIA, ALIPAC forum members perceive Mexican women to have

children in the United States for the sole purpose of gaining the right to stay in the country and perceive that this will make them eligible for welfare and cash assistance. This belief in immigrant mothers using their children for personal gain draws from the raced and classed stereotype of the 'welfare queen', which stereotypes Black women as having children merely to gain additional government assistance (Collins, 2006). Here, the woman from the Puerto Rican day parade is granted a precarious honorary status in relation to a more threatening Mexican mother.

Reverse Racism

The final color-blind racist rhetorical strategy that emerged from the data was making claims of reverse racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). This tactic neutralizes claims that whites are racist by projecting the claim of racism to nonwhites. We saw this tactic above in conjunction with the color-blind tactic of focusing on culture. Recall AmericanPatriot23's statement that Puerto Ricans align themselves with organizations that are portrayed as racist towards whites. In this instance, the National Council of La Raza (NCLR), a civil rights organization for Latinos in the United States, and the ACLU are implicated as racist. In addition, the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF) and the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) are also charged by forum members with being racist. For example, Jamesw62 responds to comments made by Janet Murgula, President and CEO of NCLR.

> **Jamesw62** – here is my post on the commentary by the LaRaza hate bating racist woman a Raza meaning 'the race' or 'the people' along with LULAC and MALDEF think that anyone who wants the borders secured is racist.. I did not know that being illegal means your a race of people. Especially when one considers the Border Patrol report that came out a few months ago where they reported that citizens of 140 different countries were arrested crossing illegally into the US from Mexico. So the Minuteman Civil Defense Corps is a vigilante group? i find this to be the best joke I have heard today. Does Ms. Murguia know that the true racist and vigilante group is hers?

In this example of reverse racism, Jamesw62 denies accusations that immigrant restrictionists are racist and then returns the racist label to La Raza. In addition, Jamesw62 cites the English translation of La Raza, the race, as evidence that the group is racist.

   While forum participants use this color-blind racist tactic to justify opposing immigration, it is part of a larger frame for interpreting race relations in the United States. Similar to the criminalization frame, reverse racism similarly inverts what Cacho (2000) describes as the perpetrator/victim binary. Despite evidence that immigration policing targets and harasses people who 'look' Mexican, regardless of citizens status (Hing, 2006; Romero, 2011b), these statements not only deny white racism, but reverse the relationship so that whites are victims. Through what Bonilla-Silva refers to as abstract liberalism, white people use rhetoric of equality to suggest that any laws or policies meant to reduce racial inequality are not color-blind and therefore racist. For example, 1_paint writes, 'Members of white racist groups are prosecuted and removed from positions of power in both the political and private sector. Why are the "brown" racists groups treated any differently.' Similarly, in response to a story about a boy who called a classmate 'brown' being suspended from school for a 'hate crime', NOamNasty writes, 'Ths bill was to protect the real haters. Haters of good morals and values. We already have hate crimes aaginst racist,bigots,it's called civil law !' In these statements, the belief that nonwhites in the United States are given special treatment, while whites are disadvantaged, is extended to include all 'brown' people. In this sense, we see again the abandonment of rhetoric on legality and citizenship status, and see that white becomes an

in-group symbolizing the right to privileges such as jobs and political power through a perceived superiority in morals in comparison to nonwhites, the general out-group.

Discussion

Previous research has examined nativist discourse and imagery in the mass media (Chavez, 2001, 2008; Coutin and Chock, 1997; Ono and Sloop, 2002; Santa Ana, 2002). Scholars who examine nativism and anti-immigrant groups argue that Latino immigrants are being racialized in the United States (Chavez, 2008; Johnson, 1998; Romero, 2008). I extend this research in two ways. First, I show how color-blind racist frames traditionally used by whites to discuss nonwhite citizens are adopted when discussing nonwhite immigrants. Secondly, I show how this color-blind racist ideology is used in conversations between individuals in an online discussion forum. The online forum is an important place where individuals can reinforce color-blind ideology through using color-blind terms in interactions and finding others who confirm those beliefs. The main color-blind frames used by the forum members were: diminishing the importance of race through rhetoric of legality, cultural racism through the stigmatization of Latino, abstract liberalism, and the use of reverse racism. Throughout these frames, the forum members drew from coded messages that reference racial stereotypes such as criminality and the 'welfare queen'.

In a post-civil rights era, a color-blind ideology frames white people's interpretations and understandings of race. While white people denounce racism as morally wrong, they simultaneously do not support policies that would reduce racial inequality. Additionally, while they use discursive tactics to stress how race is not part of their reasoning for opinions, they then go on to say very racist things (Bonilla-Silva, 2001, 2006; Bonilla-Silva and Forman, 2000; Bonilla-Silva et al., 2004; Van Dijk, 1992, 1993). Bonilla Silva (2006) cleverly refers to this as 'racism without racists'. While color-blind racism has been shown to legitimate continued racial inequality amongst citizens by race, it is also clear that color-blind ideology also shapes how people view immigrants, especially nonwhite immigrants.

These rhetorical devices are particularly important, because there are clear contradictions within and across the frames. For instance, one of the major color-blind frames argues that forum participants distinguish between citizens and immigrants solely on the basis of legality. This frame ignores the social construction of the law itself and how immigrants have become increasingly criminalized under the law. There are also contradictions between this frame and the second frame where forum members draw from cultural racism. While forum participants may argue in one thread that 'anyone can be illegal', forum participants in other threads suggest that one cannot be Latino and 'American' at the same time. This is especially highlighted by some forum members who argue that Puerto Ricans should not be citizens, because they are Latino. Here, Latino trumps legality as the marker of who can be American. However, it appears that the other color-blind tactics free these members to also make distinctions based on ethnicity without threatening their identity as non-racist.

Whites have traditionally used cultural racism as a way to explain why Blacks have not succeeded and justify opposition to programs that would reduce and eliminate racial inequality. Whites have argued that racial disparities in economic outcomes are the results of Blacks' poor family values, failure to stress education, laziness, and a culture of poverty instead of a racist social structure (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). For the forum members, the perceived negative cultural traits of Latinos are used to justify laws that disadvantage Latino immigrants and keep them from gaining citizenship. However, this also operates to stigmatize all Latinos regardless of citizen status, illustrating that while some Latinos may be able to reach honorary white status, they are not granted full citizen

status. Further, racialized Latinos face racial profiling and discrimination in their daily lives (Romero, 2011b). Similar to Coutin and Chock's (1997) findings that journalists use assimilation to separate 'good' and 'bad' immigrants, some forum participants stress the assimilation of legal immigrants and Puerto Ricans to argue their inclusion. However, honorary status can be revoked and the national ideal citizen remains white Anglo (Collins, 2006).

Another way that whites have used color-blind racism to explain racial disparities, especially in the criminal justice system in the United States, is to stereotype Blacks as dangerous and criminal (Anderson,1990). The rhetoric of legality allows forum participants to extend this stereotype to Latino immigrants as well. Not only do ALIPAC forum participants stress that being undocumented makes an immigrant's main identity an 'illegal', this illegality is associated with a host of other crimes ranging from drunk driving to murder and rape. This association of immigrants with crime is made despite the fact that research finds no association between immigrant population and crime rates (Reid et al., 2005) and in some instances, even an inverse relationship (Graif and Sampson, 2009). It neatly categorizes immigrants into a stereotypical bad other and undermines efforts of immigrant rights groups who attempt to gain resources and improve their treatment (Honig, 2001).

The final frame of reverse racism neutralizes nonwhite immigrants' and citizen's claims of discrimination by painting whites as the true victims. However, this reversal of the victim/perpetrator relationship (Cacho, 2000) ignores how previous immigration law specifically excluded 'nonwhites' from the ability to become naturalized citizens (Haney Lopez, 2006) and current trade agreements that draw resources from Mexico to the United States. Specifically, as Hing (2010) argues, while the policies of the Mexican government have certainly had a role in the poverty faced by Mexican workers, the NAFTA trade agreement led to major job losses as Mexican farmers could not compete with the price of government-subsidized corn from the United States.

My research finds the same nativist tactics as found by Feagin (1997), whereby forum members stress racial and ethnic inferiority and present immigrants as non-assimilative. These nativist tactics are also used by the mainstream media towards 'other' immigrants and create a boundary between citizen and Latino (Chavez, 2001, 2008; Ono and Sloop, 2002). However, the nature of my data – discussion posts – illustrates the importance of the color-blind rhetoric. While one might expect that group members would not feel it necessary to give disclaimers that they are not racist, this is not the case. Even in discussions with other forum participants, posters specifically state that they, the group, and nativists in general are not racist. ALIPAC forum participants develop a discourse that focuses on legal status to bolster their claims that they are not racist. In their online discussions, they argue that they avoid being racist by relying on legal status instead of race or ethnicity. However, they simultaneously engage in 'othering' that arguably is not so color-blind. This suggests that the color-blind discourse of legality even neutralizes rhetoric that is inconsistent with diminishing the importance of race. The forum participants draw a clear distinction between Latino and citizen, relying on culture as the boundary justification.

Conclusion

The Southern Poverty Law Center labels ALIPAC as a 'nativist extremist' organization, arguing that the organization targets immigrants instead of focusing on law. The group's spokesman and forum members, however, argue that they are pro-legal immigrant, are not racist, and focus on policy. I have argued that color-blind racism allows them to adopt extreme attitudes towards immigrants and Latinos without changing their own self-perceptions. Similar to scholars of other right wing groups, such as the KKK and white supremacists (Berbrier, 1999; Ferber, 1998), ALIPAC

forum participants draw from messages available from the larger culture and punitive ideology towards undocumented immigrants in the United States. For example, the labeling of Latinos as criminal, non-assimilative, and having inferior cultures are messages that are widely available in mainstream media (Chavez, 2008; Santa Ana, 2002). The ALIPAC forum participants interpret immigration through today's color-blind frames which shape what they view as important and what aspects are sidelined or rendered invisible. The language and rhetorical techniques they use are likewise a result of growing up in a culture marked by structural racism and a discourse that denies it (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). In turn, their use of these techniques further normalizes and helps to disseminate stereotypes that racialize Latinos making them cultural outsiders and reinforcing whites as cultural insiders.

While research has shown the importance of color-blind racism for understanding race relations in the United States, my analysis shows how frames regarding nonwhite citizens are being applied to immigrants. Forum participants argue that immigration is not about race or racism. To bolster this claim they rely on color-blind tactics that include rhetoric of legality, cultural explanations, and reverse racism. These tactics free individuals to engage in the racialization of Latinos while simultaneously maintaining race neutrality. Thus, color-blind racism becomes an important component of understanding today's debates surrounding immigration and decisions regarding policies that affect immigrants and their families. It is important that we understand how this shapes people's understanding of what it means to be a citizen in the United States and the consequences for the marginalization of nonwhites.

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