SPECIAL FEATURE

RACE AND IMMIGRATION IN THE AMERICAN CITY

New Perspectives on Twenty-First Century Intergroup Relations

Ramón A. Gutiérrez
Guest Editor
Department of History, University of Chicago

Du Bois Review, 9:2 (2012) 313.
 1742-058X/12 $15.00
doi:10.1017/S1742058X12000203

INTRODUCTION

Ramón A. Gutiérrez
Department of History, University of Chicago

This special section of the *Du Bois Review* had its origin in a conference on "Race and Immigration in the American City: New Perspectives on Twenty-First Century Intergroup Relations," which the Center for the Study of Race, Politics, and Culture convened at the University of Chicago on May 27, 2011. The conference explored the nature of intergroup dynamics within multiracial and multiethnic contexts since 1964, when cities across the land were gradually transformed by the arrival of large numbers of new immigrants hailing from Asia and Latin America. Of particular interest were relations between African Americans and Latinos, two highly racialized groups who are often deemed in fierce competition with each other for poorly paid, unskilled jobs. The essays gathered here are the fruits of that conference.

The United States—both at its colonial beginning and in its subsequent development—never had a dense native population able to provide the labor necessary for building the nation's industries and infrastructure. The original thirteen colonies continually imported labor and did so first by relying mainly on debt peons. By 1680, most of these laborers had fulfilled the terms of their contracts and had been set free, many having acquired land along the way. It was then that the importation of African slaves began en masse. By the early nineteenth century, mounting European condemnation of the slave trade gradually led to the abolishment of slavery in the Americas. For slaves in the United States, freedom came on January 1, 1863, in the midst of the Civil War, when President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, liberating some 4 million African Americans mostly residing in the South. Almost simultaneously, the burgeoning republic turned anew to immigrants to provide the basis for capital accumulation and economic growth, welcoming Irish immigrants escaping the Great Hunger caused by the potato famine between 1845 and 1852. German refugees of the 1848 revolutions soon followed. In the subsequent decades, workers from Asia and Latin America, from Eastern and Southern Europe, reached America's shores with the timing, nationality, and emplacement of these population movements largely fueled by this country's industrial needs in the North and Midwest.

As a result of popular fears that the United States was being overrun by racially inferior immigrants from Asia and Southern and Eastern European countries, Congress enacted legislation that increasingly barred workers from these places between 1882 and 1924. American employers accordingly shifted their search for labor to

Du Bois Review, 9:2 (2012) 315–319.

Mexico and the American South. During World War I, approximately 500,000 southern Blacks migrated north. In 1909, only 3% of Chicago's packinghouse workers were Black; by 1918, 20% were. In 1890, only 7% of Black males were employed in industrial occupations; by 1930, 25% were. Fleeing the Mexican Revolution of 1910 and encouraged by the Western hemisphere exceptions to the immigrant quotas established in 1921 and 1924, by this latter date some 500,000 Mexicans had arrived to work on the farms of the West and in the manufacturing plants of the Midwest. In the decades that followed, many more African American migrants moved from the South, the North, and Midwest, with almost an equal number of Mexican immigrants moving into the Southwest and Midwest.

From the early 1900s, African Americans competed with recent immigrants for work at the lowest ends of the occupational structure, constantly breeding tensions and conflict, particularly as labor unions barred Black membership. As the Irish, as the Jews, as the Italians and others experienced social mobility and rising generational success in the twentieth century, becoming "White," as a number of recent studies attest, Blacks in cities suffered the effects of their rising numbers, of their unchanging social location, and of their increasing physical isolation, with many descending into poverty. Was the racism Blacks experienced cause or effect? That has been a burning question social scientists have tried to answer ever since.

In 1964, the Congress of the United States repealed the provisions of the 1924 National Quota Act, quickly shifting the national mix of immigrants admitted into the republic, allowing more persons from Asia and Latin America than ever before, and instantly renewing debates about the impact of immigration on the fate of African Americans. Over and over, since at least World War II, scholars and community leaders have openly wondered why, despite their long residence and citizenship in the United States, African Americans have not experienced the generational upward mobility that has been so common an element of the immigrant experience. The essays gathered here explore dimensions of this question and more.

Perhaps the most interesting region of the United States for the study of race relations today is the American South. Irene Browne and Mary Odem take us to developments there in "'Juan Crow' in the Nuevo South? Racialization of Guatemalan and Dominican Immigrants in the Atlanta Metro Area." They argue that to understand the complexity of racial identities and categories, one must understand the racial formations from which immigrants hail and the ones into which they enter. In the American South the old Black-White binary is still the dominant way race is understood, but the recent arrival of a significant number of Dominican and Guatemalan immigrants has produced two additional dimensions of racial understanding. From the dominant state perspective, immigrants from Latin America are now being lumped together as Latinos and their distinct national identities erased. This racialization is being further compounded through the actions of White state and local legislators in Georgia and Atlanta who in 2006 and 2011 passed a number of laws—SB529 and HB87 most notoriously—prohibiting unauthorized immigrants from having access to health care, education, housing, and transport. Since immigrant status is not something easily physically somatized, police have logically engaged in racial profiling, presuming all Latino immigrants suspect and making legal/illegal immigrant status yet another dimension of racial stratification. In tracing the genealogy of this increasing antipathy toward Guatemalan and Dominican immigrants who were initially warmly welcomed, Browne and Odem point to the terrorist attacks of 9/11, the economic recession since 2008, and the passage in 2010 of Arizona's anti-immigrant law SB1070. Together these local and national debates around jobs and security fueled a popular perception that Latinos were all entering

the country illegally, were unfairly competing with citizens for available work, were increasing the state's tax burden while contributing little, and were engaging in criminal activities. Of course we know these as rather common xenophobic responses to economic downturns, but they were and continue to be extremely painful and disruptive for immigrants. It is interesting to note that Georgia's African American state legislators overwhelmingly voted against SB529 and HB87.

Ruth Gomberg-Muñoz advances a very similar argument in "Inequality in a 'Postracial' Era: Race, Immigration, and Criminalization of Low-Wage Labor," with her focus on the relationship between Latino immigrant workers and African American low-wage employees. She argues that the state and industries highly dependent on unauthorized Mexican workers have intentionally promoted rhetoric about their illegality, heightening public security concerns about their criminality, primarily to facilitate the easy exploitation of these immigrants. Over time the criminalization of unauthorized Mexican immigrants has systematically depressed their wages and created work conditions that have exacerbated their vulnerability. In the past, African American advances in the country's occupational structure had been won primarily by advocating immigration restriction. The situation now is much more complex.

There is no easy causal relationship between the curtailment of immigrant flows and African American economic advances. This is so, Gomberg-Muñoz explains, because starting in 1971 with President Richard Nixon's "War on Drugs," accelerating after September 11, 2001 and the subsequent declaration of a "War on Terror," African American males of prime working age have faced inordinately high levels of incarceration. Industries that exploit unauthorized immigrants have also turned to African American prison labor and to the employment of parolees who by law must work to remain free, regardless of the wage they are offered. Thus, far from competing against each other for work, unauthorized Mexican immigrants and African American men suffer similar forms of criminalization.

In "Something in Common? Elite Messages, Partisanship, and Latino Perceptions of Commonality with African Americans," Kevin Wallsten and Tatishe M. Nteta take stock of the fact that since 2003, Latinos have outnumbered African Americans in the United States and are now the country's largest minority group. Employing elite opinion theory, which holds that ordinary citizens pay little attention to the intricacies of politics and instead rely on their political elites to form their opinions, they seek to postulate about how the partisan political rhetoric of Latino elites will influence future race relations. They hypothesize that Democratic Latino elites who emphasize Latino/African American commonalities to the communities they represent will see these sentiments endorsed. Republican elites who focus on racial difference will not. This hypothesis is tested with empirical evidence from the 2006 Latino National Survey and the 2010 Latino Decisions Survey. They discover that no matter what a Latino's political affiliation is, whether she or he personally feels a commonality with African Americans has a lot to do with whether she or he first feels some affinity with Whites more generally. One's level of linguistic acculturation also matters. Latinos who responded to the above-cited surveys in English were more likely to imagine economic commonalities with African Americans. Wallsten and Nteta conclude that Latino Democrats more often reflect the assessments of their political elites, but that is as far as the analysis can go. To better understand how Latino Republicans and independents respond to messages from their elites, more contextual and group-specific models are needed.

In "Unsettling the Geography of Oakland's War on Poverty: Mexican American Political Organizations and the Decoupling of Poverty and Blackness," Juan Herrera traces the formation of the Mexican American community in Oakland, adding empir-

ical evidence to Wallsten and Nteta's argument about how political elites influence whether members of their ethnic group imagine their economic and political interests as converging or diverging from those of African Americans. Herrera's essay is interesting not only for the organizational history he unearths but also for two additional reasons. First, he points out how flexible and rapidly changing ethnic and racial identities can be by showing how ethnic Mexicans residing in Oakland, California, had been classified by the state by their language—as Spanish-speakers or simply as Whites with Spanish surnames—to avoid classifying them as members of a distinct race. But by the mid-1960s, as massive government funds flowed into Oakland as part of President Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty, ethnic Mexican leaders learned enormously by watching the civil rights activism of their African American neighbors, organizing their communities to vote and to demand job training and education. Now calling themselves Mexican Americans, they argued that their racialization was similar yet distinct from that of African Americans. While African American disadvantage was visually marked by color, Mexican American racialization was based on immigrant status and the lack of English-language mastery. Accordingly, Mexican Americans too deserved federal poverty funds to empower themselves. The stakes were enormous. By 1967, the federal government was spending $100 million a year in Oakland, an amount that vastly surpassed the city's own total budget. The argument prevailed.

Herrera secondly notes that to establish their claims to partake of the distribution of poverty funds, ethnic Mexican leaders emphasized their similarities with the African American majority in Oakland, invoking a long history of political alliances with them through the Democratic Party establishment, choosing conjunctional activists, men who had loyalties to both communities, as their allies. They relied on the boxer Jimmy Delgadillo and Evelio Grillo, both were Afro-Cubans connected to the city's African American elites.

Coalitions between African Americans and Latino immigrants seem to be most successful when their leaders forge bonds of cooperation and emphasize the similarities in their experiences. This is the point Virginia Parks and Dorian T. Warren make in "Contesting the Racial Division of Labor From Below: Representation and Union Organizing Among African American and Immigrant Workers." Studying unionized hotel workers in Chicago's UNITE HERE Local 1, Parks and Warren focus on the organizational resources unions provide their members to mediate their racial and ethnic competition with the aim of creating a unitary front to obtain those demands they seek of management. Rather than allowing to go unchallenged the dominant African American perception that immigrants reduce African American job opportunities, the union chose to embrace African American employment needs and immigration reform simultaneously under the banner of diversity. Concretely, UNITE HERE Local 1 did this by drawing comparisons between the migration histories of African American and immigrant workers and by emphasizing that all workers in their union would be protected if the needs of their most vulnerable members were first addressed.

Finally, in Jennifer Lee's essay, "A Postracial Society or a Diversity Paradox? Race, Immigration, and Multiraciality in the Twenty-First Century," we turn to the politics of intimacy, to the ways in which racialized bodies are eroticized, mate and reproduce. Studying the levels of intermarriage, and the parental and filial identities of mixed race persons, Lee ponders the persistence of the "one-drop" rule of hypodescent that historically has led to the classification of many mixed-race persons as simply Black. As Lee explains, since 1960, due largely to immigration, the level of intermarriage among Asians, Latinos, and Blacks has dramatically increased. In

1960, only 1% of all marriages in the United States were racially mixed; today it is about 8%. Of course, these statistics disguise difference. Asians have the highest rate of mixed marriages at 72%, Blacks the lowest at 17%, with Latinos right in the middle with 52%.

Black-White couples tend to call their children Black, while Latino-White and Asian-White generally call them White. Parents often urge their children to call themselves Asian or Latino if it leads to a preference and opting for White to avoid discrimination. Many of these children have had no extensive contact with their immigrant cultures of origin and thus deploy their ethnicity strategically and symbolically, as Herbert J. Gans and Mary C. Waters have defined it. Increasingly though, the children born of such unions are opting to call themselves multiracial, a category the U.S. Census Bureau allowed in its 2010 count. In explaining these patterns of personal and filial racial identification, Lee argues that Blacks still are constrained by the one-drop rule in identity formation, while Asians and Latinos, as relatively new immigrant groups with fewer historical racial rules governing their identities, have more freedom to call themselves what they choose.

The essays gathered here on the relationship between African Americans and immigrants point to the necessity of understanding the racial formations of national hosts and points of origin. They illustrate the rapidly shifting and ever-changing nature of racial classification, fueled by economic decline and terrorist threats. And they call for more precise, site-based study of how African Americans and immigrants cooperate and compete for work, the human and symbolic capital with which they each enter the job market, and how their political elites parse their divergences and common class interests.

Corresponding author: Professor Ramón A. Gutiérrez, Department of History, University of Chicago, 1126 East 59th Street, Chicago, IL 60637. E-mail: rgutierrez@uchicago.edu