THESIS

HISTORICAL TRAUMA: THE IMPACT OF COLONIAL RACISM ON CONTEMPORARY

RELATIONS BETWEEN AFRICAN AMERICANS AND MEXICAN IMMIGRANTS

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ABSTRACT

HISTORICAL TRAUMA: THE IMPACT OF COLONIAL RACISM ON CONTEMPORARY

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The purpose of this project is to examine tensions in present day United States between African Americans and Mexican immigrants. [1] Hyper-violent incidents of interracial gang violence between these two communities are presented by mainstream media as signifiers of the existence of the tension. Latinos, as a whole, and African Americans, whether in gangs or civilians, are often portrayed to be in competition due to three conventional explanations. [2] While scholars and media sources have validity in pointing out the significance of socioeconomic competition, struggles for political power and the problems that the language barrier create, these explanations are not complete. *El sistema de castas* or the caste system, a racial hierarchy created by the Spaniards in Latin

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[1] Throughout this project issues of identity will arise. There is a difference between the perceptions that foreign born Mexicans and Mexican Americans have with regards to African Americans and/or Blacks. Also there is a commonly held stereotype by non-Hispanic U.S. citizens that brown skin individuals that speak Spanish are Mexican immigrants. The purpose of this study is to examine, in particular, the relationship between Mexican immigrants and African Americans, however at instances Mexican American's opinions will be included as well as the experience of Latinos who are not Mexican. The reason Latinos and Mexican Americans will be included is directly because of the stereotype held that individuals who are brown-skinned and speak Spanish are Mexican immigrants. Therefore how they are perceived, it can be argued, is directly correlated to how Mexican immigrants are received by non-Hispanic U.S. citizens. For more information on stereotypes and identity politics refer to Tatcho Mindiola Jr., Yolanda Flores Niemann, Nestor Rodriguez *Black-Brown Relations and Stereotypes*, 2002.

[2] While defining a group of people is incredibly limiting and often denies unique differences the term Latino will be used in a similar fashion to how Hayes-Bautista and Chapa (1987) used it, to include all persons of Latin American origin or descent, irrespective of language, race, or culture. Thus Mexicans will inherently be included in this definition whether they immigrated to the U.S. or are U.S. citizens, Mexican Americans, who have a lineage which traces back to Mexico.

America during their colonial efforts, established how people of African descent, both free and slave, were treated in New Spain. The caste system's continued influence can be seen with the denial of African heritage and the marginalized position of Afro-Mexicans in present day Mexico. Furthermore, these prejudices remain intact when Mexican immigrants enter the U.S. It is understood that Mexico's national identity is *mestizaje*, a racially mixed nation; however, racism existed and is also present today in Mexico.[3] By combining a historical perspective with the three primary reasons, mentioned above, it is hoped that the complete picture will help resolve tensions. This thesis argues that colonization, influenced heavily by a racial hierarchy, has caused Mexican immigrants to carry with them prejudices towards African Americans that were learned in Mexico, showing that the issue is deeper than competition over resources in present times. In response to an influx of Latino immigrants, African American responses show parallels with historical nativist responses to immigrants. By combining the impacts of historical racism with conventional explanations for the existence of the tension it is hoped an understanding may develop that will help reduce conflict.

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[3] In-depth analysis of *mestizo* and *mestizaje* can be found in Peter Wade *Race and Ethnicity in Latin America*, 1997; Darien Davis *Slavery and Beyond: The African Impact on Latin American and the Caribbean,* 1995*;* Magnus Morner *Race Mixture in the History of Latin America*, 1967.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

"I am Black and beautiful. I wonder how I will be living in the future."

--Cheryl Green, 2006[4]

The date of December 12, 2006, is one that highlighted a growing tension between African Americans/Blacks and Mexican immigrants in the U.S. as portrayed by the media.[5] At the time, 14 year old Cheryl Green was living in the Harbor Gateway neighborhood of Los Angeles with her mother. Harbor Gateway is a diverse Los Angeles neighborhood that is shared by Mexican immigrants, Mexican Americans or Chicanos, and Blacks.[6] According to newspaper columnists, while Cheryl was talking with three friends, two Chicano gang members from Harbor Gateway's 204th Street gang carried

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[4] This quote is from the beginning of a poem written by Cheryl Green prior to her murder. *New York Times* columnist Randal Archibold cited the line in his article "Racial Hate Feeds a Gang War's Senseless Killing" 2007.

[5] It is understood there is a difference between African American and Black. The issue of identity and how individuals self-identify versus ascribed identity is complex. While it is recognized that there are shortcomings in this project with regards to identity, to flush out the meaning behind certain identities would require a project solely focused on identity. Therefore, in order to achieve the greater purpose of this project the term African American and Black will be used interchangeably. However, it is recognized by the author that there are differences between those two identities. Also the term "black" is not capitalized because *New York Times* columnist Archibold did not capitalize the word. When used by the author identifying terms such as Black, African American, Latino, Hispanic etc. will be capitalized.

[6] The term immigrant will be used to describe individuals from Latin America who are both documented and un-documented. Typically country of origin will be placed directly in front of the word or directly after; for example, Mexican immigrant or immigrant from Mexico. While there is a hotly debated issue surrounding the entrance of undocumented people from Latin America into the United States, the purpose of this study is focused on country of origin and not the status of these people who decide to come to the United States. Also Chicano is a term that identifies Mexican Americans; it will be used in the case study section of this project to identify Mexican Americans.

out an objective.[7] According to Randal Archibold, a *New York Times* columnist, "the Latinos were looking for a black person, any black person, to shoot…and they found one" (Archibold 2007). Social justice activists in Los Angeles, as well as Harbor Gateway residents, believed that Cheryl Green's murder was carried out in accordance with the mission of the Chicano gang to target Blacks due to a persistent tension between the two groups for at least a decade.[8] In fact, it has been noted by community activists and residents of Harbor Gateway that the tension between the two groups is so bad that, "206th Street has been declared a line blacks cannot cross…also, one of the [Mexican] suspects charged in this murder had a MySpace web page riddled with anti-black rhetoric" (Stark 2007).[9] According to Alex Alonso, an expert on gang issues in Los Angeles,

> the murder of Cheryl Green in Harbor Gateway in 2006, the murder of Kenneth Wilson in 1999, the murder of Christopher Bowser in 2000, and the murder of Anthony Prudhomme in 2000, all in Highland Park were Black residents killed in purely racially motivated fashion where the victims had no gang affiliation in communities where Black gangs were not even present (1)

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[7] Jonathan Fajardo is a Mexican American whose mother was Mexican and father was Belizean, ironically a Creole man with African blood. Daniel Aguilar, the second man charged, is a first-generation Mexican American. Fajardo was convicted of first-degree murder, attempted murder for the teens that were with Cheryl as well as participating in the murder of a fellow gang member who he and Daniel Aguilar believed to have spoken with police about the murder of Cheryl Green. Aguilar was convicted of a first-degree murder charge in connection with Cheryl's death as well as his fellow gang member's death who he and Jonathan believed to have cooperated with police after Cheryl was killed. Because the murder of Cheryl Green was found to be racially motivated both men were convicted of hate crimes as well.

[8] Prison gangs do have influence on what occurs in the streets, especially with regards to gang activity, gang violence and targets of the violence. The influence of these prison gangs is understood; however to explain the implications of these gangs in the overall Black-Latino tension would require a different focus for this project. For additional information on prison gang influence on the general population refer to Tony Rafael's *The Mexican Mafia*, Chris Blatchford's *The Black Hand: The Bloody Rise and Redemption of "Boxer" Enriquez, a Mexican Mob Killer*, Richard A. Tewksbury's *Behind Bars: Readings on Prison Culture*, Geoffrey Hunt's *Change in Prison Culture: Prison Gangs and the Case of the "Pepsi Generation."* For full articles explaining the existing tension in Harbor Gateway and the greater Los Angeles area refer to Randal Archibold's *New York Times* article, "Racial Hate Feeds a Gang War's Senseless Killing" 2007; Annette Stark's "Horror Gateway" 2007; Victoria Kim's *Los Angeles Times* article, "Two Gang Members Convicted of Hate-crime Murders" 2010.

[9] Southern California gang expert Alex Alonso notes, "There is no black gang that encroaches on the 204's turf" (Alonso 2008).

To reaffirm the nature of Cheryl's murder Charlene Lovett, Cheryl's mother, was quoted saying, "my daughter was killed because of the color of her skin" (Stark 2007). Columnist Annette Stark argues that, "this is not a gang war…The hate is so prevalent and obvious that activists and city officials alike can no longer avoid calling it by the name being used by everyone from prosecutors to opinion writers in the *LA Times*: ethnic cleansing" (Stark 2007).

Cheryl Green's murder has come to symbolize the fact that a problem exists. Blacks are being targeted, and, according to Mexican immigrant residents of Los Angeles African Americans are not the only victims of the violence and tension. A Mexican immigrant interviewed by Archibold (2007) in Harbor Gateway, claiming to be a former 204th Street gang member, said,

> Black gang members had shot or assaulted Latinos, too, and explained the violence as a deadly tit-for-tat. 'They shot a Mexican guy right around the corner from here and nobody protested or said anything'…He referred to neighborhood speculation that Cheryl's killing was in retaliation for the killing of Arturo Mercado, a Latino shot to death in the neighborhood a week before Cheryl (2)

While it appears that Harbor Gateway and the city of Los Angeles has had a violent tension foment between its Black and Latino residents within the last few decades, the most troubling prediction comes from Earl Ofari Hutchinson, an African American syndicated columnist who hosts Los Angeles' Urban Policy Roundtable. Archibold quotes Hutchinson as saying Los Angeles "is a microcosm of what could happen in big cities in the future…the kind of tension you see in L.A. in the schools, the workplace and now hate-crime violence, my great concern is this is…what could happen in other cities" (Archibold 2007). The media coverage that Cheryl Green's murder, as well as Jamiel Shaw III who was murdered in 2008 in Los Angeles, garnered has led to increased media

and scholarly attention to conflicts between Mexican immigrants and Blacks nationwide, particularly in the Southwest.[10] It appears, if media attention and scholarly debates are any indication, that Earl Ofari Hutchinson's prediction that a spreading of tension and hate-crimes between these two groups in other cities has come true. To grasp the gravity of the situation distinctions of identity must be made.

There is a tendency to consider Latinos to be synonymous with Mexican immigrants, especially in the Southwest. As Leo Chavez argues, "Mexicans are the focus" of attention and media coverage (Chavez 2008: 2). Thus, when tension exists between a group of Latinos and African Americans, the ethnicity of the Latino group is often rendered invisible. Regardless of ethnicity they are represented by the media as Mexican immigrants. Chavez argues the portrayal of all Latinos as Mexican immigrants becomes more sinister when sensationalized media goes on to depict Mexican immigrants as "an invading force from south of the border…bent on…destroying the American way of life" (Chavez 2008: 2). Therefore, it must be understood that when speaking about Black-Latino tension, there is an unfounded, yet existing, perception that Latino means Mexican immigrant. With this understanding, crimes committed by Latinos, regardless of citizenship status or ethnicity, against Blacks are falsely represented as demonstrations of conflict between African Americans and Mexican immigrants. It is essential to understand this prevailing perception because the issue of identity requires consideration throughout this project. The focus of this project is on

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[10]Jamiel Shaw III's murder; which has been labeled by mainstream media as a hate crime because he was Black and his assailant was Mexican is further complicated by the fact that the killer, Pedro Espinoza, was an undocumented Mexican. For more information about the circumstances and details refer to *Los Angeles Times* article http://articles.latimes.com/2008/mar/04/local/me-shot4/2. There is some debate about whether Jamiel's murder was solely race-related or if it was motivated by gang rivalry. However, because of the fact that Jamiel was Black and his assailant was a Mexican immigrant the media has skewed the event as a racially motivated killing.

tension between Mexican immigrants and African Americans or Blacks. However, due to the prevailing notion that "other Latin American immigrants and Latinos are often lumped with Mexican" immigrants, violence committed by Chicanos, or any other Latino, then comes to symbolize a growing tension between Blacks and Mexican immigrants (Chavez 2008: 16). Hence Cheryl Green's murder becomes emblematic of Black-Mexican immigrant tension even though the convicted assailants were Chicanos, U.S. citizens of Mexican heritage.

Aside from the aforementioned stereotype, that all Latinos are portrayed as Mexican immigrants, there is another reason why this project is focusing on the relationship between Mexican immigrants and Blacks and not Chicanos and Blacks. Mexican immigrants come to the U.S. after being socialized in Mexico, where *el sistema de castas* operated.[11] Therefore, their perceptions of Black people were developed as a result of Mexico's socialization process, whereas Chicanos were socialized in the U.S. which is unique to that of Mexico.[12] Examining the racial perceptions of people from the country where the caste system was institutionalized then provides a fresh link to the legacy of racism and how that history creates tensions between Blacks and Mexican immigrants in the U.S. Conversely, racial perceptions of Chicanos are a result of the socialization process that is specific to the U.S., therefore tying racial prejudices held by Chicanos to the caste system would be difficult. Hence, for the purposes of this project it

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[11] It is understood not all Mexican immigrants come to the U.S. as adults. Therefore, some children that are Mexican immigrants are essentially socialized in the U.S. For the purposes of this project, the researcher will be examining Mexican immigrants that were socialized in Mexico, meaning they were adults or young adults before coming to the U.S.

[12] Prior to Mexican independence from Spain, which was gained in 1821, much of the continental U.S. was Spanish territory. With that said, it must be recognized that before Mexico became independent from Spain the caste system did operate in what is now the Southwest region of the U.S.

was essential to examine the causes of growing tensions between Mexican immigrants and Blacks in the U.S.

Recent instances of gang violence and tensions between Mexican immigrants and African Americans, particularly in Los Angeles, but not limited to that city, have come to symbolize for scholars as well as media outlets a growing conflict. In order to address all issues that contribute to this two-sided tension and discover potential solutions, several questions have to be answered. Do struggles over socioeconomic resources, political power and complications arising from the language barrier fully explain sources of Black-Mexican immigrant tensions? Does competition for territory cause African Americans, civilians and gang members alike, to want to protect their neighborhoods from "outsiders" or Mexican immigrants, in turn drawing parallels to nativism?[13] Do tensions exist in the U.S. because the caste system left a legacy of racism in Mexico, causing Mexican immigrants to hold racial prejudices against African Americans? Will acknowledging the history of the caste system in tandem with contemporary explanations of tension provide a more comprehensive approach to the issue? Could this holistic understanding reduce interracial gang violence and communal tension between the two? This thesis will provide data that argue conventional explanations are worthy but incomplete. Furthermore, data suggest the legacy of racism left by the caste system in Mexico influences Black-Mexican immigrant relations in the U.S., and therefore has to be recognized as a catalyst for tensions. Only when the origin of this prejudice is

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[13] A full discussion of the shifting demographics due to an increase in immigration from Latin America will occur in Chapter 3. For an in-depth explanation of what this new population looks like, as well as perceived perceptions of this immigration refer to Leo R. Chavez, *The Latino Threat: Constructing Immigrants, Citizens, and the Nation* 2008. A much more in-depth definition and discussion about the similarities to nativism and responses from African Americans to an influx of Mexican immigrants to their communities will be developed in Chapter 4.

examined in tandem with the three primary contemporary reasons will a complete picture be revealed. It is hoped that a comprehensive explanation will promote understanding and lessen intergroup tensions.

In order to address the existence of the conflict and attempt to assuage differences several issues have to be examined. Chapter 1 has introduced how the media has sensationalized Cheryl Green and Jamiel Shaw III's murders as representations of the existence of Black-Mexican immigrant conflict nationwide. It has also addressed the prevailing, yet unfounded, perception that Black-Latino tension is synonymous with Black-Mexican immigrant tension. Prior to the tragic killing of Cheryl Green Blacks had been concerned about the affects of immigration on their community and lives; simultaneously Mexican immigrants had been showing prejudice towards Blacks upon their arrival to the U.S. However, it took the murder of a young Black teenage girl to bring tensions to the forefront. To present solutions to this conflict, the project's introduction will give a brief chapter overview, setting up the outline of how the objectives of the project will be accomplished. Once the chapter overview is completed a brief discussion about key issues will be given in order to provide a background for terms and issues that will need to be understood.

Chapter 2 will describe, in-depth, the three conventional explanations for the existing tension present today. It must be recognized that these conventional explanations are framed as issues specific to people of color, not society at large. There is a problem with this approach because the framing of the three primary reasons place the burden of improvement solely on two of the most marginalized communities in the U.S., as opposed to recognizing them as societal problems. With that said this project

will examine the primary factors cited as responsible for causing tension knowing there are larger issues within society that work to divide and pit people of color against one another. Proponents of the position that competition over socioeconomic resources is the cause of tension argue, "African Americans who see conflict cite competition for jobs…as the reason" (Mindiola, Niemann and Rodriguez 2002: 57). Others recognize within socioeconomic competition that, "antipathy [is] found…certainly in the struggle for educational resources" (Vaca 2004: 186). Academics that believe a political struggle is the primary cause argue that, "given the scarcity of political resources…attitudes among Blacks are more likely to stem from growing fears of competition in the political arena between Blacks and Latinos" (Franklin and Seltzer 2002: 1). Lastly there are proponents that contend the language barrier is the cause of tension arguing, "Hispanic immigration…introduced language change…adding to the social distance between African Americans and Hispanics" (Mindiola, Niemann and Rodriguez 2002: 14). Once each position has been defined using multiple scholarly examples, demonstrations from mainstream media that mimic conventional reasoning will be used to argue the public internalizes these explanations as complete. Because as Chavez argues, "the images we constantly consume…construct our understanding of events, people, and places…in short media spectacles are productive acts that construct knowledge about…our world" (Chavez 2008: 5). A challenge will then be made to the understanding that these three factors alone explain why tensions exist today. Not only do these reasons ignore how U.S. society has marginalized people of color and often worked to pit them against one another, they are void of a historical perspective. Due to a lack of attention paid to

historical issues which are still influential today, the explanations are not complete and require a more comprehensive approach.

The argument that "racial discrimination permeates each and every realm of life in our region: from the social to the political, education, labor, cultural and public health sectors" affirms the contention made by this thesis that the caste system has left a legacy of racism throughout Latin America, not just Mexico (Dulitzky 2005: 41).[14] However, recognition of this history's influence on contemporary relations between Blacks and Mexican immigrants is missing. Because community safety and lives are at risk, due to the existence of violent undercurrents, all factors leading to conflict must be revealed and analyzed. Therefore, it will be argued that the three primary explanations do exist; however the lack of an historical perspective has led to incomplete information. Hence an understanding of the caste system and its continued negative impact on perceptions of blackness in Mexico and other Latin American nations must be developed.

Chapter 3 will provide a selective history of the caste system which created a racial hierarchy "designed to confer…privilege to the Spanish" while marginalizing the existence of individuals with African heritage (Vaughn 2005: 117).[15] The treatment of Africans in New Spain, with focus starting in the 17th century, leading up to the current denial of African heritage in Mexico will then be linked to prejudices Mexican immigrants bring with them and act upon once arriving and living among Blacks in the

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[14] Given more time this project would provide a comparison of racial history in El Salvador to Mexico. This comparison would be used to show the impact of Mexico's caste system on regional neighbors.

[15] It will also be argued a history of racism was not confined to present day Mexico. The experience of Salvadoran immigrants will justify the claim that historical influences go beyond Mexican immigrants and touch all Latino immigrants.

U.S.[16] Specific practices and beliefs held in Mexico will be drawn upon to demonstrate the atmosphere towards African heritage and darker-skinned peoples in Mexico. These racial prejudices have an impact on Mexican immigrants' views of African Americans. Solidifying the argument that Black-Mexican immigrant tension in the U.S. is caused, in part, by the legacy of racism left by the caste system which operated in colonial Mexico. A case study of Denver will be provided once the history of the caste system is examined and connected to present day prejudicial perceptions of African Americans held by Mexican immigrants.

Chapter 4 identifies and defines five themes that arose from the analysis of data developed during the case study. To provide an accurate portrayal of the origins of tensions between Blacks and Latinos in Denver, CO it was essential to include narratives from these groups. While media coverage of interracial violence in Los Angeles has garnered national attention and echoed conventional readings provided by scholars, the experiences of case study participants do not necessarily coincide with media portrayals.[17] After analyzing interviews from participants, themes emerged that support conventional readings while others challenge or offer new perspectives to the relationship. Fifteen semi-structured interviews were dissected using a line-by-line analysis. Interviews were coded using aspects of grounded theory, such as constant

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[16] A timeline must be set in order to make this project achievable. If a complete history of race relations between Africans and the Spanish were to be complete discussions of Iberian/Moor conflicts would have to be considered. However, this would make the project historical in nature. While it is recognized that by addressing relations between African descendants and Spanish colonizers starting in the 17th century is a limitation to this project, the boundary must be defined so the project does not become solely a historical piece. The purpose of this project is to use history as a lens to view the present and what implications this may bring. For a history of Moor/Iberian relations refer to Ivan Van Sertima, "The Golden Age of the Moor," *Journal of African Civilizations* Vol. 11 Fall 1991; Chiekh Anta Diop, *The African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality* 1967.

[17] The three conventional readings were discussed in Chapter 2. They are socioeconomic competition, struggles for political power, and the language barrier.

comparative analysis. Knowledge acquired from the semi-structured interviews was coded allowing themes to emerge that reflected how the national conversation about the tension has settled uniquely in Denver. In order to understand how these themes were unearthed, it is necessary to describe the analytical tools that were implemented.

According to H. Russell Bernard, "a semistructured interview is open ended, but follows a general script and covers a list of topics" (Bernard 2005: 210). This interviewing method is important because it provides structure while allowing the participant freedom to respond however their experience dictates. Semi-structured interviewing allows for topic focus because the interview guide establishes parameters, however, participants are also able to expand on experiences or have follow-up questions asked of them. This method was chosen because of the fluidity it provided the participant and researcher. Instead of implementing a survey or asking rigid 'yes' and 'no' questions which limit expression, this interviewing method emphasizes the relevance of personal experience. To ensure participants were comfortable with the process, the semi-formal conversations took place once approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) was obtained and four criteria were met: 1) research participants were informed of the interview topics, 2) they were made aware that there were no boundaries for responses, 3) participants were made aware that a voice-recording device would be used, and 4) verbal consent for participation was given.[18] Once the interview guide was covered and the participants were given the option of elaborating on certain points or asking the

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[18] IRB approval of alteration of consent was obtained prior to conducting any recruiting or interviewing. The reason alteration of consent was applied for and approved was because written consent would require a participant key list to be kept in writing which could have jeopardized participant anonymity and confidentiality. If individuals did not want to participate their desire was respected. For those that wanted to participate but did not want to have their voice recorded, the recording device was turned off and responses were written free-hand by the interviewer.

interviewer questions, the recording was transcribed.[19] From this point, the knowledge gained was analyzed using phenomenological methodology and organized into themes.

After the data was collected it was analyzed with phenomenological methodology. Michelle Byrne writes that phenomenological methodology is used to gain "understanding of the essential 'truths' (i.e., essences) of the lived experience" (Byrne 2001: 1). Therefore, lived experiences were analyzed "to interpret the aspects of meaning or meaningfulness that are associated with the phenomenon," which in this case is Black-Latino conflict (van Manen 2002: 32). Reflecting on how personal experiences related to the phenomenon of Black-Latino tension allowed for qualitative coding to begin. According to Kathy Charmaz "coding consists of at least two phases: initial and focused coding" (Charmaz 2006: 42).[20] Hence, data was examined and re-examined in an effort to link it to explanations for Black-Latino conflict. Charmaz argues initial coding forces us to ask, "what does the data suggest" (Charmaz 2006: 47)? This allows personal experiences to explain potential reasons for the existence of the phenomenon. Focused coding was then implemented to re-analyze the data with these potential reasons in mind. Returning to the data allowed themes to develop from what was initially suggested. Thus the process for discovering and labeling primary themes required multiple steps. Data originating from semi-structured interviews were compared to the phenomenon and critically analyzed on multiple occasions, allowing for the identification of themes particular to Denver. While multiple themes developed from the phenomenological methodology and qualitative coding, prior to labeling and defining the

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[19] Upon completing the transcription the recording was destroyed so no link of the anonymous participant's voice could be connected to written responses.
[20] "At least" is the key phrase here. In order to flush out recurring themes for this project, the complete set of data was returned to four separate times. Initial categories were refined several times to develop the six prominent categories.

five themes which will occur in Chapter 4, information about the interview process as well as limitations of the research project must be addressed.

The unique position of the researcher shaped, at least in part, the process of obtaining interviews as well as analyzing the data. Because the researcher was born and raised in a Northeast Denver neighborhood he was allowed access to participants as a communal insider. An insider is defined as someone that, "shares the culture…of the researched" (Irvine, Roberts and Bradbury-Jones 2008: 36). In fact, the researcher began the initial recruiting process by communicating with close contacts who have lived most, if not all, of their lives in neighborhoods important to the research topic – neighborhoods that were predominantly African American, but have changed due to influxes of Latino immigrants, primarily Mexicans, and whites.[21] However, this insider status could have been a hindrance because data analysis may have been tainted by the level of familiarity with the interviewees. Also, linguistically the researcher was an outsider when it came to interviewing participants whose first language is Spanish.[22] While all Spanish-speaking participants were proficient in English and interviews were carried out in English, this was a limitation because participants may not have been able to find the words to completely express themselves. Another potential limitation of the case study has to do with the sample size.

Given the relatively short amount of time to recruit, travel to meet with, interview and analyze data, fifteen individuals participated in the semi-structured interviews.[23] This sample size is small; however, Glaser (1998) contends that small samples do not

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[21]It must be stressed the initial recruiting process waited until IRB approval was obtained for the project.
[22] The researcher is conversational in Spanish, however in order to conduct interviews in which subtle nuances are essential to obtaining the full picture, all interviews were conducted in English.
[23] This time frame was less than six months. From August 23, 2010, to February 1, 2011.

pose problems because qualitative data analysis methods aim to develop conceptual categories, not particular claims about human behavior as a whole. Therefore, each piece of data did not define the relationship between Blacks and Mexican immigrants in Denver; instead data were viewed as insightful information that could formulate categories specific to the experiences of participants. Keeping insider/outsider status and limitations in mind, the researcher approached the semi-structured interviews, as well as data analysis, as unbiased as possible in order to develop untainted themes. The final methodological consideration involves confidentiality.

It is of utmost importance to note that the confidentiality, security and needs of participants were respected above everything else. Pseudonyms replace identifiers such as names and specific locations or neighborhoods to protect the privacy of participants. Also, in order to ensure the safety of participants, if at any time the individual wished to end the conversation, the option was given to stop the voice recorder and destroy the tape upon their request. Furthermore, if a participant chose not to have their voice recorded, the interviewer took free hand notes. Even though verbal consent was obtained prior to interviewing all participants, the researcher stressed that they were entering a voluntary conversation that could cease at any moment they chose. Participants were also given the option of deciding if they wanted to omit information they had divulged during the interviewing process. All of these steps were taken as a means of protecting individuals who were willing to assist the researcher by detailing their experiences in Denver.

However, in order to substantiate the development of themes, it is necessary to reveal the perspective of participants by disclosing information such as ethnicity, nation

of origin, gender, and employment or position in society.[24] Among the fifteen

participants, four were identified as Mexican immigrants, two were Salvadoran

immigrants, two Mexican Americans or Chicanos, three white, and four as Black or

African Americans.[25] One Chicano and one Black participant are gang members, active

in Denver street gangs.[26] One Chicano and one African American are former gang

members.[27] One African American is a retired District 2 police officer, a district that

patrolled Northeast Denver. Six of the fifteen were women. It must be understood that

this project did not provide a gender-based data comparison. The perspectives of male

and female interviewees were analyzed together, not comparatively. A future direction

for this project is to revisit the same data set with a gendered lens. Comparing the

experiences and perspectives of female interviewees to those of male participants will

provide a gendered analysis of tensions between Mexican immigrants and Blacks. No

other identifiers will be included to protect the confidentiality of the participants.

However, it is important to note that these individuals were selected because of the

unique perspective they were able to offer with regards to Black-Latino relations in their

communities. Current as well as former gang members, Black and Chicano, provided

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[24] Some participants considered being active gang members their job. In the eyes of society this places them in a certain position in society. Other participants are retired from jobs they brought up during the interview. Furthermore, some are former gang members who contribute greatly to their community and society at large.

[25] Mexican Americans often identify as Chicano. From here on Chicano will be used to describe these individuals because it was the label they preferred.

[26] Active means these individuals have been recruited into, jumped into or initiated into their respective gang, and they actively promote their gang through several means. They have marked themselves with identifying tattoos, they represent the color specific to their gang (for instance red is the common color worn by Bloods gang members, blue is a Crip identifier), they carry out missions on behalf of the gang such as graffiti to mark territory to other crimes in order to financially support themselves and fellow gang members.

[27] These individuals have denounced their involvement with their former gang, and while they still may live in the gangs neighborhood and associate with active members they do not carry out missions on behalf of the gang anymore.

insight into interracial violence. The experience of Salvadoran immigrants offered a unique contrast to that of Mexican immigrants, while simultaneously revealing similarities. Also whites, as outsiders of the relationship, offered a different angle that was important to consider as well.[28] The conclusion chapter followed a definition of each theme demonstrated by quotes from interviewees obtained during the case study.

Chapter 5 will conclude the project by reiterating that the three conventional explanations are worthy but not complete. The inferior status prescribed to African slaves during colonial efforts in New Spain was so deeply ingrained that it continues to shape perceptions of blackness and cause tension between Blacks and Mexican immigrants in the U.S.[29] Similarly data revealed media sensationalism and territorial disputes are factors of Black-Mexican immigrant tensions. The knowledge gained from interviewees will be disseminated to community leaders in Denver to stress the importance of understanding the history of the caste system, African American responses to immigration, and media sensationalism as factors of tension. While there may not be any direct positive results brought to the community or project participants from this research, their narratives may develop potential solutions to tensions. Before defining the conventional readings complex issues that appear throughout the project must receive attention. The first of these is the concept of identity.

Kimberle Crenshaw argues, "the problem with identity politics is…that it frequently conflates and ignores intra-group differences" (Crenshaw 1991: 1242). It is of utmost importance to recognize and understand that identities spoken about in this project

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[28] There is also a significant Asian and Native American population in Denver. Unsuccessful attempts were made to include representatives from these groups.

[29] Experiences of Salvadoran interviewees support the argument that racial prejudice towards Blacks in Latin America is not limited to Mexico.

are multiple, situational and contested. Identities are multiple in that some individuals may self-identify as Black, others African American; some individuals identify as Chicano, others Mexican American – to name only a few of the complexities. Therefore, when terms such as Latino or Black are used, they may be interpreted in multiple ways and may not fully account for intra-group differences. Identity politics are situational because depending on who is speaking, with whom they are speaking and the location of their discussion, much can vary. For example, *New York Times* columnist Randal Archibold ascribed the term "Latino" to Cheryl Green's killers; both men had Mexican heritage and may have self-identified as Chicano, Mexican American or Mexican. Therefore identity issues are situational. Finally identity issues are contested; how individuals are identified and which labels are appropriate is always debatable. The common misconception that "Mexico, Mexican immigrants, and the U.S.-born of Mexican origin" are synonymous with Latino can and should be contested, especially considering regional differences (Chavez 2008: 22). Yet the perception exists in mainstream discourse and demands consideration. To accomplish this project, the complexities of identity politics must be understood. The majority of examples of tensions will be specific to the Black-Mexican immigrant relationship. However, when tensions between Blacks and Latinos are mentioned these examples must be understood that Latinos are often represented as Mexican immigrants.

The relationship between Mexican immigrants and African Americans is an incredibly difficult issue to address straightforwardly because these identities themselves are hard to comprehend. Mexican immigrants come to the U.S. under multiple circumstances. Employment visas and general family based visas are common legal

avenues for entry. While the existence of undocumented (without proper visa papers) Mexicans is hyper-exaggerated it must be noted that there is a significant presence of undocumented Mexican immigrants in the U.S. Whether Mexican immigrants cited in this thesis overstayed a visa or crossed the U.S./Mexico border without documentation is for others to debate. However a difference between documented and undocumented Mexican immigrants is important to recognize here. The fear of deportation looms over undocumented Mexican immigrants constantly and their willingness to cooperate with research studies, law enforcement officials or residents within the community they live in may be lessened because of this threat. Documented Mexican immigrants as well as Mexican Americans do not have such a burden and therefore may be more willing to participate in research studies, cooperate with law enforcement agents with regards to community issues or interact with neighbors. Also, as mentioned earlier there is a widely held stereotypical assumption that any brown-skinned, Spanish-speaking person in the U.S. is a Mexican immigrant. Often they are also assumed to be undocumented. Therefore Latinos, in general, have to deal with this image constantly, potentially impacting how they view those who hold such stereotypical views. Thus it is essential to compare and contrast the narratives of Latinos from Mexico and El Salvador in order to challenge the perception that all Latinos are Mexican immigrants with similar experiences.

Throughout Black communities in the U.S. there are issues of identity as well. Individuals who identify as African American, as African or a specific African ethnicity, or as Black may view immigration completely different. Depending on their respective experience and heritage they may view Mexican immigrants with respect, or as another

challenger to an already marginalized survival. There are regional issues to consider as well. In the Southwest, Blacks are in contact with Mexican immigrants whereas in the Northeast they may interact with Puerto Ricans of Dominicans more often. Because all Black interview participants are from Denver, the regional view on immigration as an issue created by Mexicans must be considered. These contrasting perspectives will have to be given respect.

Gender issues within these diverse groups also create multiple perspectives. For example, when a similarity between nativism and Black responses to Mexican immigrants moving into Black communities is brought up it is with a hyper-masculine lens. Blacks are demonstrating a need to protect their community from an invading, penetrating outsider.[30] This approach is obviously of one perspective and may not address all reactions Blacks have to Mexican immigrants. Gender issues within Latino culture may also have a significant role in this study; thus gender implications are important to understand as this study is read. As previously mentioned, the future direction of this project is to compare female and male perspectives on the tensions to understand what role gender plays in this issue.

Class issues create different opinions about the impacts Mexican immigrants have on Blacks or African Americans as well. While the case study was carried out in relatively poor neighborhoods of Denver, this does not mean that conclusions from the interviews are representative of all Blacks, African Americans, Mexican immigrants, Chicanos, Salvadorans or Latinos in general. As economic upward mobility increases, perspectives change on who is viewed as competition. There are also intra-group tensions around class. For example, tensions exist between Mexican

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[30] The image of Latinos as invaders will receive coverage in subsequent chapters.

Americans/Chicanos who have fought to establish a position in U.S. society over generations and Mexican immigrants who often come poor and without education. All of these factors have to be addressed in order for the conclusions of the project to have impact and relevance.

A brief discussion on how conventional explanations between Mexican immigrants and African Americans are framed will now be given.

Tension in urban communities across the U.S., typically between predominantly longstanding African American communities and Mexican immigrants who move into them, have conventionally been explained by scholars and media sources through three dominant factors.[31] According to Steven Shulman and Hannes Johannsson (2004),

> Ethnographic evidence shows that immigrants have displaced low-skill and African American workers…Since African Americans are especially likely to be low-wage workers for whom immigrants are potential substitutes, they are especially likely to be adversely affected by immigration (85)

Thus there is a competition for job placement and economic capital between the two groups. As noted, because both African Americans and immigrant populations are likely to be employed in low-skill sectors of the economy, a natural relationship develops in which immigrants are viewed as a threat to the economic survival of African Americans

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[31] It must be noted that tensions in U.S. urban areas are not solely between immigrants from Mexico and African Americans. Tensions exist between multiple ethnic groups and within most ethnic groups. Inter- and intra- racial or ethnic conflicts exist through the country. Similarly, there are tensions across class-lines, gender issues, issues around sexuality, and disability. Also to assume that all immigrants from Mexico and African Americans that they interact with have tensions or conflict is completely inaccurate. For the purpose of this study, focus will however be given to examples and situations in which Mexican immigrants or Mexican Americans and African Americans have had disagreements, tensions or incidents of violence. According to 2009 U.S. Census population estimates there are roughly 48 million individuals residing in this nation who identified as Hispanic or Latino. Further according to 2004 statistics collected by the Migration Policy Institute, "Mexico represents the largest source of immigration to the United States. Of the 32.5 million foreign born covered in the March 2002 CPS, 9.8 million or 30 percent were from Mexico…The rest of Latin America accounted for 7.3 million or 23 percent."

and vice versa.[32]   Also, educational resources are a social asset that is struggled over.

Nicolas Vaca, author of *The Presumed Alliance*, argues "antipathy [is] found…certainly

in the struggle for educational resources" (Vaca 2004: 186). Therefore, competition for

socioeconomic resources, which are already limited for both groups within the

hierarchical U.S. society, is a genuine aspect of Black-Latino tension. The second arena

of tension has to do with political representation and power.

> According to Suzanne Oboler and Anani Dzidzienyo (2005)
>
> given that in early 2003 the U.S. Census Bureau announced with great fanfare that "Hispanics," at roughly 37 million people, had surpassed the estimated 36.2 million African Americans to become the largest minority in the United States…a repositioning of African Americans in the U.S. polity and society is also likely (16-17)[33]

Thus, because of this shift in demographics, largely due to immigration from Mexico,

"Hispanics" have surpassed African Americans, putting African American political

demands at risk of being reprioritized in favor of the, as of 2003, most numerous group of

minorities in the United States. This reprioritization due to demographical shifts, referred

to by intellectuals as the "browning of America," posits struggles for political power as a

source of Black-Latino tension.[34]   The third conventional explanation is the

complications that result from the language barrier between the two groups.

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[32] It must be noted that Latinos are currently the most numerous and therefore most recognizable group of immigrants entering the U.S. Throughout history the nation of origin and ethnicity of who the "immigrant" was has changed. Germans, Irish, Italian, Chinese and Southeast Asians have all been marginalized as the new "immigrant" population at one time.

[33] Someone who identifies as "Hispanic" has been defined by the U.S. Census, since its initial usage in the 1980 Census, as those who indicated that their origin was Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central or South American, or some other Hispanic origin. It should be noted that persons of Hispanic origin may be of any race. Once again it must be noted that identity politics are interwoven throughout this work and that an understanding exists that a label is limiting and may not be applicable to all; with that said this project cannot get caught in continually explaining the usage of a certain term in order for the objective to be accomplished.

[34] More will be discussed in Chapter 2; however for a full explanation of the "Browning of America" refer to Leo R. Chavez, *The Latino Threat: Constructing Immigrants, Citizens and the Nation* 2008.

Shulman argues, "the English-only movement shows…worries about immigration go beyond concerns about the sheer number of people living in the U.S. There is a palpable fear that immigration is eroding…cultural commonalities" (Shulman 2004: xi). It will be argued then that African Americans, who because of slavery have painfully deep-rooted roles in the construction of this nation's wealth, prosperity and culture, feel that increasing amounts of Spanish-speakers pose a threat to the U.S. culture they were integral in developing. The reaction to this threat Mexican immigrants and the Spanish language represent shares similarities to nativism because African Americans feel a need to protect their community from the "other" who is intruding and bringing with them culturally erosive practices such as the continued practice of speaking Spanish. In addition to this is the basic idea that language differences increase communication problems, even if an expert translator is used because cultural differences may be misunderstood. (University of Colorado Conflict Research Consortium 1998).[35] The language barrier essentially makes the resolution of community issues much harder because residents are unable to fully express their opinions, thoughts and feelings.

Scholars and the media influence the popularity of these three factors; which is not to say that they do not exist or do not strain the relationship between African Americans and immigrants from Mexico.[36] However, little research or discussion mentions the fact that these two groups have historical ties pronounced by phenotype-

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For a complete discussion about neoliberalism and profiting from cheap labor sources refer to Noam Chomsky's *Profit Over People: Neoliberalism* 1999.

[35] http://www.colorado.edu/conflict/peace/problem/langdif.htm. CU's conflict research consortium has information about cultural differences and impacts on communication as well as language barriers and the impacts on communication and community building.

[36] Once again it must be argued that these three conventional explanations miss a larger societal issue. People of color occupy marginalized positions within the U.S., and to fight for equality they often have to do it at the expense of another minority group. Therefore, the conventional explanations, while valid, fail to recognize how U.S. society has created these issues in the first place.

based hierarchies and racism. According to Roberto Marquez, "the most omnipresent datum about anti-Black Latin American racism is the absurdity and obstinacy of the negation of its existence" (Marquez 2000: 8-22). When people of African descent were stolen from Africa and brought west to the Americas the Spaniards implemented *el sistema de castas*, the caste system, in order to solidify a hierarchy which helped do two things: 1) justify their treatment of African slaves and darker-skinned humans, and 2) to keep darker-skinned humans locked into a position of inferiority, making it harder for them to resist or break free from their subordinate position. As Roberto Marquez noted the denial of anti-Black racism in Latin American countries, originating through the caste system, exists even to this day. To develop how all of these factors are interwoven, an in-depth examination and critique of the three conventional issues will follow.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Socioeconomic Competition

One of the most common explanations for the existence of tension today between African Americans and Mexican immigrants is that of socioeconomic competition. Proponents of this explanation argue that tensions exist because the two groups view each other as competition for social resources such as jobs, wages and education. Shulman and Johannsson contest that because "African American workers are especially likely to be found in the low-wage sector of the labor market, which is most affected by immigration…the result is a drop in employment opportunities for African Americans" (Shulman and Johannsson 2004: 85). Weiss and Reid (2005) bolster the position that tensions arise from socioeconomic competition by arguing that as the low-skill number of Latinos residing in the United States grows, this invariably increases the pressure on the supply of low-skill jobs which is critical for the mobility of Blacks. Furthermore, Vaca contends that, "when the construction industry fell into the doldrums in the late 1980s, Latinos made an easy transition into the service industry, taking jobs as janitors, waiters, dishwashers, and laborers—jobs that had traditionally been filled by Blacks. This phenomenon left…Blacks feeling that 'the Latinos are taking over'" (Vaca 2004: 6).[37]

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[37] Vaca poignantly observes that, "the academic world is divided over whether immigrants take jobs away from unskilled African Americans. In either event, the perception is that they do…if it is believed to be true by African Americans, then it has to be addressed" (Vaca 2004: 193). While evidence presented by Shulman and Johannsson (2004), Vaca (2004), and Weiss and Reid (2005) supports the position that tension does arise from socioeconomic competition, because immigrants do take work from Blacks, there

Mark Sawyer (2005) further supports the argument by stating that "intensified conflicts with African Americans" have developed because immigrants from Latin America, in particular Mexico, are increasing the struggle for scarce unskilled jobs (Sawyer 2005: 163). Mindiola, Niemann and Rodriguez (2002) use results of a survey, given to Blacks and Latinos, citizens and non-citizens alike, to argue that the intensification of competition over jobs has influenced Black perceptions on immigration policy. Mindiola, Niemann and Rodriguez assert, "African Americans support the idea of a national identification card…the support is not surprising as many perceive immigrants as an economic threat" (Mindiola, Niemann and Rodriguez 2002: 102).[38] Deborah Prentice reaffirms the argument that socioeconomic competition impacts how African Americans address immigration policies by contending, "African Americans are more likely to oppose liberal immigration policies" if they perceive or experience economic competition with Latinos (Prentice 1999: 65). Therefore, when a correlation is drawn between increases in Latino immigration and heightened competition for socioeconomic resources, African Americans are reluctant to support pro-immigration policies. When taken together, what is significant about these aforementioned observations is that they emphasize and reduce Black-Latino tensions in terms of socioeconomic competition. The above position highlights the importance of competition over jobs; however,

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are still scholars who are skeptical. However, as Vaca (2004) argues, because there is a perception that this competition exists and Blacks perceive themselves as suffering because of the competition then the issue must be dealt with, regardless of its validity. Vaca (2004) has established that the first step in creating a resolution is for those who do not see a connection between tensions developing because of increased socioeconomic competition need to understand it is a perceived reality for some, thus requiring attention.

[38] The survey Mindiola, Niemann and Rodriguez (2002) carried out shows that Hispanics, both foreign-born and U.S. citizens, also support the carrying of a national identification card to prevent undocumented immigrants from obtaining jobs in the U.S. However, African Americans favored this nation-wide identification system more. The authors also linked greater African American support of this identification system to their perception that immigration was causing socioeconomic competition between Blacks and Latinos.

struggles for educational resources are also a factor within socioeconomics that scholars use to discern tension between the two groups.

Rene Rocha (2007) argues that animosity within the Black community is a result of Blacks feeling like access to educational resources has been affected by competition from the growing Latino immigrant population. Rocha continues this assertion by claiming that "Latinos have sparked a shift in the majority of students, administrators and staff from African American to Latino, when African Americans previously held a majority" (Rocha 2007: 316). Rodolfo de la Garza reinforces Rocha's contention by stating that a shift in demographics, due to Latino immigration primarily from Mexico, has elevated tension because of "the reallocation of public resources to Latinos rather than to African Americans" (de la Garza 1997: 453). John J. Betancur contests that demands for bilingual education programs from Latino immigrants, which is the source of the tension, is opposed by Blacks because, "many African Americans…view it as an extra expenditure and 'privilege'" (Betancur 2005: 164). Solidifying the argument, Mindiola, Niemann and Rodriguez contend, "the increase in resources for bilingual education, including salaries for bilingual teachers…create tensions for African Americans" (Mindiola, Niemann and Rodriguez 2002: 15). John Horton (1988) argues that Black-Latino tensions in Los Angeles are symbolic of funding for bilingual programs being the source of animosity. Horton contends, "the recent influx of Latino immigrants led to conflicts around the development of multiculturalism [multilingual programs] in schools" (Horton 1988: 162). Vaca provides an example of how the tension develops when he argues in the struggle over bilingual programs in schools, "the needs of Latino children are different from those of Black children and Latinos will actively work to

address those needs…Unfortunately…this will result in clashes with the needs of African Americans" (Vaca 2004: 192). Therefore, not only are the needs of Black children represented to be in conflict with the needs of Latino children, which create clashes, but the needs of Latino children become simplified to requiring access to bilingual programs. This results in harmful generalizations of Latino children.

Chavez (2008), developer of the "Latino threat narrative," argues that harmful assumptions abound when Latinos, whether citizens or foreign-born, are viewed uniformly.[39] In this narrative Chavez contends that

> Latinos, especially Mexican immigrants and their children are seldom represented as agents of positive…their unwillingness to integrate denies them the opportunity to influence the larger society…except in the negative—as a threat to existing institutions (e.g., education) (41)

Mexicans represent the largest immigrant population in the U.S. Therefore groups competing with Latinos for services perceive Latino/s to be synonymous with Mexican/s who have, according to Chavez (2008), garnered the label as threats to existing socioeconomic institutions. Latino children have needs which have shifted curricula and brought a demand for bilingual programs in previously English-only speaking schools, thus morphing the hegemonic learning system. These changes or threats to the status quo are viewed as undesirable, especially among African Americans who show struggles in educational attainment as it is. Garibaldi maintains, "Black males have achieved some gains in educational performance and attainment but national data show they are still disproportionately represented in negative indicators" (Garibaldi 2009: 25). Therefore, the shifting emphasis towards the needs of the growing Latino student-body creates tension over access to socioeconomic services. Educational resources are reallocated to

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[39] Leo R. Chavez, developed the Latino threat narrative in his book *The Latino Threat: Constructing Immigrants, Citizens, and the Nation* (2008).

Latinos, and African Americans feel this takes away from their own educational performance, which Garibaldi (2009) argues was marginal even prior to the shift in funding.

However, the argument that socioeconomic competition is the main cause of tension between Blacks and Mexican immigrants is limited. The scope of the position leaves out key factors necessary for a sophisticated understanding of the complex relationship. Political competition and the language barrier are additional factors cited by other scholars that contribute to the tension. Also, as this thesis will argue later, these explanations are rooted in solely contemporary issues, void of historical implications.

Nevertheless explaining socioeconomic competition as a source of tensions between Mexican immigrants and Blacks has value. Economic and census statistics show that Latino immigration to the United States has impacted the socioeconomic standing of African Americans. Frank Bean, Mark Leach and Lynsay Lowell reveal the significance of Latino immigration on African Americans when they argue, "Latino male immigrants accounted for almost one half of the growth in low quality jobs from 1990 to 2000" (Bean, Leach and Lowell 2004: 511). Edward Shihedah and Raymond Barranco complete the connection by arguing, "because even a minor drop in the relative supply of low-skill jobs may affect the economic prospects of blacks, Latino immigration and black mobility seem inexorably linked in the United States" (Shihedah and Barranco 2010: 1394). Amidst current discussions on immigration reform Tomas Jimenez (2010) uses population statistics to demonstrate that immigration from Mexico has not slowed down.[40] Jimenez's statistical observation coupled with arguments developed by Shulman

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[40] For the statistics used by Tomas Jimenez refer to Jimenez's *Replenished Ethnicity: Mexican Americans, Immigrants, and Identity* (2009). For more information on immigration policy and reform, in particular

and Johannsson (2004) support the stance that tensions arise from socioeconomic competition. Therefore, these scholars have offered valuable insight by linking increases in Mexican immigration to decreased economic opportunities for Blacks. Furthermore, focusing on socioeconomic competition is critical because the relationship between Latinos and Blacks in the U.S. is primarily structured by capitalism.

According to Noam Chomsky (1999) there is a basic understanding under capitalism that when an employer can reduce costs by hiring cheaper labor they will do so. Unfortunately, for African Americans they are often employed in these low-wage sectors of the U.S. labor market that favor employing immigrants.[41] The tension that develops from competing for jobs in the same sector of the labor market is explained by Edna Bonacich's theory of ethnic antagonism. Bonachich argues "that ethnic antagonism first germinates in a labor market split along ethnic lines" (Bonacich 1972: 549). Because undocumented Mexican immigrants cannot demand equal pay or unionize, employers hire them at a cheaper price compared to Blacks who have citizenship and can exercise these labor rights. The two groups then become competitors within the same strata of the labor market, splitting the labor sector, pitted against each other by employers who exploit the vulnerability of Mexican immigrants at the cost of Black employment. Michael Omi and Howard Winant (1994) contest that a split labor market develops when a "dominant" group feels its wages and employment opportunities are threatened by a cheaper source of labor.[42] This perception causes "racial/ethnic

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the Dream Act, refer to Jessica Sharron, "Passing the Dream Act: Opportunities for Undocumented Americans" 47 Santa Clara Law Review 599 (2007).

[41] For a complete discussion about neoliberalism and profiting from cheap labor sources refer to Noam Chomsky's *Profit Over People: Neoliberalism and Global Order* 1999.

[42] The word "dominant" does not refer to socioeconomic power in this instance. Neither Blacks nor Latinos in the low-wage sector can be considered economically dominant. What is meant is that because

conflict…between 'dominant' and 'subordinate' workers as the former seek to prevent the latter from bidding down the price of their labor" (Omi and Winant 1994: 33). As capitalism favors the employment of cheap immigrant labor, ethnic antagonism arises between those employed in low-wage sectors. Blacks in the low-wage sector view Latino immigrants as a threat to the value of their labor and source of their employment. Racial formation theorists Omi and Winant (1989) explain why Blacks are often employed in the low-wage sector in the first place by arguing that the racial category of "black" developed simultaneous to slavery.[43] Today, socioeconomic opportunities for African Americans are impacted by what Omi and Winant (1989) referred to as "the shaping of a specific racial identity" or the racialization of Africans to justify and maintain slavery. Analyzing the arguments of Omi and Winant in tandem with Shulman and Johannsson creates the foundation of the explanation that tension between African Americans and Mexican immigrants is a result of socioeconomic competition. Shulman and Johannsson argue that immigrants often find employment in the low-wage sector African Americans have been relegated to due to Omi and Winant's theory of racialization. Hence Mexican immigrants, the most numerous group of immigrants in the U.S., are seen as competition by Blacks for socioeconomic resources; this struggle leads to tension.

Blacks have occupied this sector, under the split labor market they would be considered "dominant" while Latinos who represent a newer force in this sector would be considered "subordinate."

[43] Omi and Winant argue that, "in the United States, the racial category of "black" evolved with the consolidation of racial slavery. By the end of the seventeenth century, Africans whose specific identity was Ibo, Yoruba, Fulani, etc., were rendered "black" by an ideology of exploitation based on racial logic -- the establishment and maintenance of a "color line."...A period of indentured servitude which was not rooted in racial logic preceded the consolidation of racial slavery. With slavery, however, a racially based understanding of society was set in motion which resulted in the shaping of a specific *racial* identity" for Blacks (Omi and Winant 1989: 26).

While interaction between African Americans and Mexican immigrants has been present since the beginning of the 20th century, the decade of the 1990s has generally been written about as the beginning of tensions. According to Fred Goldstein (2008) there is a reason why the 1990s has been the focal point of research. Goldstein contests, "NAFTA [North American Free Trade Agreement], which went into effect in January 1994, subjected the workers and peasants of Mexico (population over 100 million) to a wave of capital investment and super-exploitation from U.S. corporations" (Goldstein 2008: 5).[44] Goldstein (2008) argues that the opening of Mexico to capital investment and corporate exploitation resulted in an increased number of Mexicans who moved to the United States. Peasant land was purchased by corporations and rural Mexicans were left with no choice but to leave. This landlessness, according to Goldstein (2008), forced rural-Mexicans to either move to urban centers in Mexico such as Mexico City or come north to the U.S. where job opportunities and higher wages were worth the risk of crossing the U.S./Mexico border without waiting for proper documentation. As Bean, Leach and Lowell (2004) demonstrated, this increase in immigration had extreme consequences on African Americans who occupied positions in the low-skill, low-wage sector. These Blacks witnessed Latino immigrants gain nearly half of the employment in that sector during the 1990s. NAFTA did create a push factor in Mexico by destabilizing its economy. The free-trade agreement, by forcing more Mexicans to leave Mexico in search of economic survival, also propelled a split in the low-wage labor market here in the U.S. between cheaper Mexican-immigrant workers and Blacks who previously held such occupations. Whereas scholars that focus on socioeconomic competition in the U.S.

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[44] For a deeper discussion of NAFTA and the implications it had on Mexico refer to Fred Goldstein *Low-wage Capitalism: Colossus with Feet of Clay – What the New Globalized, High-tech Imperialism Means for the Class Struggle in the U.S* 2008.

rarely address the impacts of NAFTA in furthering Omi and Winant's split labor market theory, this connection only adds to the strength of the argument.

What is important about academia's position is that it is not limited to the university; these perceptions enter into public discourse via popular media which often echoes explanations common within scholarly dialogue. Evidenced in articles from popular media sources such as *Times* and *Newsweek* is the connection between explanations provided by scholars and reasoning delivered to the general public.

Mindiola, Niemann and Rodriguez contend that "while the media have helped to shape negative stereotypes of African Americans and Hispanics, they are doing little to reverse or diffuse them" (Mindiola, Niemann and Rodriguez 2002: 29). Individuals exposed to these negative stereotypes, Blacks and Latinos included, internalize these assumptions about one another as well. Chris Levister (2006) of the *Black News Voice* contends that socioeconomic competition, especially in the low-skilled sector, has led to tension between Blacks and Latinos.

> During the noisy debate over illegal immigration arguments about "fairness" and "compassion" have filled the air. But for low-income, low-skilled people such as Barbara Braswell, a disproportionate number of them Black – another idea, "competition" confronts them nearly every day. "It's all about the money. Most African-Americans are not willing to work for slave wages." She points out traditionally Black jobs and Black neighborhoods now belong to Latinos (1)

This example resonates with Vaca's contention that Blacks felt Latinos were taking over economically because increases in immigration were cited as leading to competition that was displacing Blacks from jobs they traditionally held.

Time magazine furthered academic assertions that Mexican immigrants were creating national socioeconomic competition when in June of 2001, *Time* magazine's

cover read, "Welcome to Amexica: The border is vanishing before our eyes, creating a new world for all of us." This blurring of America due to Mexican immigration, referred to by *Time* as "Amexica," undoubtedly had implications in the African American community, because as Shulman and Johannsson argued, immigrant's position in the labor market typically creates competition for Blacks, leading to an increase in tension between the two. A *Fox 11 News* story solidifies the connection to tensions, including hyper-violent gang incidents, resulting from socioeconomic competition. The coverage argued that

> as neighborhoods change a low-level war is brewing in communities across southern California, it's a racial battle between Black and Latino gang members…troubling shifts in population especially with Latinos moving into traditionally African American neighborhoods…the racial conflict cuts both ways

The coverage then goes on to cite Pasadena's Assistant City Manager, Brian Williams, as saying, "We're guna have to break some of those barriers down, some of those barriers are economic." When taking television, newspaper, and magazine coverage together as a whole, it becomes apparent that popular media resonates with scholarly arguments. Tensions between Latinos and Blacks, including gang violence, become a result of shifting demographics creating increased socioeconomic competition between the two.

Furthermore, a *Newsweek* article published by Arian Campo-Flores (2010) reinforced the notion of tensions resulting from socioeconomic competition by citing an article in which researcher Gordon Hansen argued, "among low-skilled workers, opposition to immigration stemmed mainly from the competitive threat posed by the newcomers" (Campo-Flores 2010).[45] This echoes the position of Weiss and Reid (2005) in that increases in low-skilled Latino immigrants living in the U.S. put pressure on Black

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[45] For Gordon Hansen's study refer to "Why Does Immigration Divide America? Public Finance and Political Opposition to Open Borders."

economic mobility, certainly presenting a threat to Blacks employed as low-skilled

workers.[46] Once again mainstream media which informs the opinion of much of

America's population, according to Chavez (2008), has replicated debates within

academia, shaping how the public views the issue. In a *New York Times* article by Julia

Preston (2009) a quote from Sociology Professor Chris Baker is used to demonstrate the

impact of Mexican immigration on the work force. Preston quotes Baker as saying, "the

employers hire Latinos, and after that, they leave…It goes from white to black to Latino

to – gone" (Preston 2009). Preston continues her argument that tensions exist because of

competition over socioeconomic resources when she states, "some residents did not take

kindly to immigrants…their ire was…mainly directed at the school board, for devoting

tax money to an international center to help Spanish-speaking students learn English"

(Preston 2009). Preston sums up the socioeconomic position: as competition for jobs,

wages and educational resources increases, due to Latino immigration, Black-Latino

relations become strained.

Popular media outlets justifiably report to the public that tension develops from

socioeconomic competition. There is ample evidence that struggles for social and

economic resources develop as immigration increases. Therefore, logically it follows

that tensions between Blacks and Mexican immigrants are a result of increases in

Mexican immigration creating greater levels of socioeconomic competition. However,

what is troubling is that this explanation does not represent the full picture; it leaves out

other contemporary issues and skews how the general public perceives the relationship

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[46] Of course all Blacks are not low-skilled workers. In the United States low-skilled as well as high-skilled workers are represented by all races, ethnicities and nationalities. However, as Weiss and Reid (2005) argue, an increase in low-skilled Latinos in the U.S. puts pressure on the opportunities of low-skilled Blacks.

between Blacks and Mexican immigrants by influencing what popular media

disseminates. The position that political competition between Blacks and Latinos is

primarily responsible for tension between the two groups provides another example of

how academia influences media representations of issues that Americans often internalize

as completely factual.[47]

Struggles for Political Power

Oboler and Dzidzienyo (2005) argue that since "Hispanics" recently overtook

African Americans as the largest minority group in the United States a repositioning of

African Americans in U.S. politics will occur. The point made is that African Americans,

who have fought against a predominately white political system for civil rights and

political power since being brought to the U.S., now have to politically contend with

Latinos as well. Claudine Gay reinforces the position that tensions arise due to political

competition by arguing

> the increased presence of Latinos over the last several decades has caused a rise in
> the multi-minority population…the close contact and proximity of African
> Americans and Latinos…lead many to speculate that these two groups inevitably
> compete for finite political resources (984)

Mark Sawyer (2005) perpetuates the position that the growing number of Latinos in the

U.S. represent a political threat to Blacks by stating, "African American political agents

who, in the wake of the erosion of gains acquired during the civil rights era, want to hold

on to Black status as the most important minority" (Sawyer 2005: 269). Effectively

tension exists because African Americans feel like the gains they struggled for during the

Civil Rights era of the 1950s and 1960s have been negatively impacted by Latino

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[47] It is understood that undocumented Mexican immigrants do not have a political voice to be included under the umbrella term "Latino." However, stereotypes do exist that benefits of citizenship, such as the right to vote, are afforded to Mexican immigrants. Hence, it can be argued that tension between Latino and Black voting blocs includes Mexican immigrants.

population growth. The gains of the Civil Rights era were monumental for all people of color. However, Sekou Franklin and Richard Seltzer (2002) contend that there is still a lack of political power for Blacks which results in tension as Blacks witness Latino numbers strengthen. Franklin and Seltzer contend that "given the scarcity of political resources…attitudes among Blacks are more likely to stem from growing fears of competition in the political arena between Blacks and Latinos" (Franklin and Seltzer 2002: 1). While the shifting demographic has undoubtedly intensified tensions as Blacks and Latinos struggle for their demands to be recognized, other scholars argue tension that develops from political competition is rooted in a perception of citizen versus non-citizen.

Claudia Sandoval (2010) argues that political tension between Blacks and Latinos stems from differences of how belonging/citizenship is understood and defined. Chavez's "Latino threat narrative" informs us that assumptions exist within the Black community that Latinos are Mexicans here without documentation and thus do not legally belong. Sandoval (2010) deduces from this assumption that African American's believe their claims to political power are justifiable and should be honored over Latino demands.[48] This presumption is harmful to Latinos who hold citizenship; and, to Mexican immigrants who become scapegoats when African American political demands are not honored. This perception underlines scholarly beliefs that tension between Latinos and Blacks erupts out of struggles for political gains. These factors are not the only explanation as to why struggles for political power are cited as a reason for conflict between these two groups. Scholars argue that the perception amongst Blacks and

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[48] Data from the 2007 Los Angeles County Survey is one example that demonstrates Blacks believe that 50% of immigrants in the country are undocumented (illegal is the term used) and that this same group believes that 46% of Mexicans are here without documentation (once again illegally is the term used).

Latinos that they are socially and politically different reinforces the political competition logic.

Emory Bogardus's (1928) theory of perceived social distance has led scholars to argue that perceived differences can be used to explain why tension develops from political competition between Latinos and Blacks today.[49] Social distance, which is often only perceived, simply refers to the nature of the relationship and frequency in which two groups are willing to engage. From this theory of social distance, Meier and Stewart "argued that social distance not only explains social relationships between groups but also the political behavior of groups towards one another" (Meier and Stewart 1991: 1127). Therefore, social distance, regardless of it being actual or perceived, between Blacks and Latinos ends up making the two groups treat one another as political competition creating tension in the complex relationship.[50] One of the reasons the relationship is so complex is because political agendas are never unanimous within racial or ethnic groups, let alone across two racial or ethnic groups.

It is of utmost importance to recognize that assuming both Blacks and Latinos are monolithic groups with streamlined political agendas is damaging. As Rocha (2007) suggests the degree of social distance between Blacks and Latinos is contextually based on several factors including social status. According to Rocha (2007) when Latinos find

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[49] According to Emory Bogardus' theory of determining social distance, surveys were conducted in which respondents were asked, "Which best represents your comfort level in interacting with this social group 1) Close kinship by marriage 2) My Club as Personal Chums (often modified in contemporary surveys as "Close Friendship") 3) Neighbors on my street 4) Employment in my occupation 5) Citizenship in the country 6) Visitors only to my country 7) Would exclude from my country."

[50] It is important to note that social distance is often only perceived. In some cases if it exists at all it is minimal. While Blacks and Latinos may, but not always, speak different languages, practice different religions, have conflicting historical/cultural orientations (Latinos often emphasize European ancestry whereas Blacks have difficulty determining ancestry due to the lack of records kept during slavery) and compete economically they share many things also. However, a perception does exist, while it may not be across the board, that the two groups are different and lack social interaction, therefore the theory applies that this social distance has created political competition which causes group tension.

themselves close to the socioeconomic status of whites, the Latino desire to politically unite with Blacks is lessened because Latinos favor coalitions with whites. Therefore the status of Latinos influences their need to politically collaborate with African Americans. Assuredly, greater tension develops when Latinos perceive greater social distance and have less reason to politically unite with Blacks. Conversely, Randall and Delbridge (2005) argue that Black political alliance with Latinos is contextual based on location and the time Latinos have lived in a given community. The historians contend, "a recent survey of residents in a North Carolina county with a rapidly growing Latino immigrant population found that African Americans and Anglos express lower levels of social distance to each other than they do toward any other group" (Randall and Delbridge 2005: 124). Because Latino immigrants are only recently establishing themselves in southern states such as North Carolina, the possibility for political cohesion between Latinos and Blacks or Whites is low. In accordance with Meier and Stewart's (1991) argument, newly arrived Latino immigrants are perceived by Blacks to be socially distant which fosters tension because the two interact as political opponents. While political competition is contextual scholars argue that tension over politics and representation is real and influences the relationship between the two negatively.

Perhaps nowhere has this tension played out more intensely than in Compton, CA, during the early 1990s. In an area adjacent to Los Angeles that saw its White population flee after the 1965 Watts riots, Blacks gained control of city council, city hall, the school board and public employment in Compton. Vaca (2004) argued as soon as the Latino immigrant population began to grow in the early 1990s there were political disputes over public employment discrimination against Latinos as well as conflicts over political

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representation in city council and school board representation and decisions.[51] Vaca

(2004) writes that the Black power structure, which had endured racist white leadership

until whites fled, had to address a vital question:

> How should they react to the growing presence of a new 'minority' group who
> was demanding inclusion in Compton's political…structures? Should they recall
> their own experience in trying to break into the white power structure? Or should
> they view Latinos as challengers (128)?

Vaca contends that Blacks chose to retain their power and treat Latinos as a threat.

Furthermore, according to Vaca, Black Mayor Omar Bradley justified this decision by

arguing that he was powerless to give political representation to Latinos saying, "what

does the African American do to empower them [Latinos] when it's constitutionally

illegal [for non-citizens to vote]" (Vaca 2004: 140). The assumption made by Mayor

Bradley that Latinos living in Compton were undocumented demonstrates the

overarching stereotype that Latinos are viewed as Mexicans immigrants, without

documentation, who are responsible for political competition Blacks are faced with.

Vaca (2004) argues this statement not only reinforced Black perceptions that Latinos are

undocumented Mexican immigrants, it also worked to pit the two groups against one

another politically because Latinos, justifiably, took great offense to it. The Black

population in Compton was subjugated to similar treatment by Whites who lived there

until the Watts riot of 1965; however Blacks were unable to relinquish or share any gains

they had earned with the growing Latino population. The explanation for this power

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[51] African Americans, especially in areas with large Latino populations, have often taken a political stance
to stamp out bilingual programs from schools. Latinos who feel attacked argue that educational
attainment within the community is drastically affected when the bilingual needs of Latino children, as a
growing student-body population, are neglected. This has led to political battles for control of school
boards and administration between Blacks and Latinos who view each other's agendas as conflicting.
These battles create tension.

move, at least from the Mayor of the city, was that Latino demands for the equal distribution of political power could not be met because Latinos immigration status made their political demands invalid.

A similar political struggle, this time solely over educational politics, arose in Houston, TX, in the late-1990s. According to Mindiola, Niemann and Rodriquez (2002) Hispanics felt that a Hispanic candidate would at least be considered to replace the White superintendent who had resigned from the Houston Independent School District (HISD). This hope of a consideration was based on the fact that the student body in HISD had shifted towards being predominantly Latino. Thus Hispanic community members felt that this growth justified the nomination or at least consideration of a superintendent who represented the largest student body population, Latinos. When the school board decided after a closed meeting to elect an African American superintendent tensions between Latinos and Blacks flared.[52] A political division between Blacks who felt this promotion was deserved and Latinos who felt they were slighted created the tension. Mindiola, Niemann and Rodriguez demonstrate how the tension over educational politics played out in the following weeks by explaining

> A group of Hispanic leaders attempted to block the selection through court action but were unsuccessful. For weeks African American and Hispanic leaders used the media to accuse each other of unfair treatment. A prominent African American leader accused Hispanic leaders of conducting a political lynching of the newly elected Black superintendent (17)

A political blame-game resulted as both groups felt like their demands were superior. Indeed, having representation in government positions is necessary for community

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[52] The exact composition of the school board is not known, however it is said the "school board…selected one of its own, an African American," suggesting the majority of members were African American (Mindiola, Niemann and Rodriguez 2002: 16). Still, it is hard to determine the exact number of Blacks, Whites and Latinos that sat on the school board during this specific election.

success. When groups view one another as challenges to gaining political representation or power, scholars contest that tensions arise.

However, the position that struggles for political representation is the main cause of tension between Blacks and Mexican immigrants does not offer a complete perspective. Similar to scholars that argue socioeconomic competition primarily leads to tension, those that contest political struggles are the true reason leave out key issues required for an entire understanding of the intricate relationship between Blacks and Latinos. As stated in section one of chapter 2, socioeconomic competition has value; the language barrier is another concept that is required in addressing potential factors that lead to tension between Blacks and Latinos. Also, while struggles for political power and representation form a piece to the puzzle they do not offer a historical perspective on the relationship between Blacks and Latinos.

Nonetheless as demonstrations from Compton, CA, and Houston, TX, prove Latinos and Blacks do experience tension over political issues. Struggle for political power, especially among groups of people of color that have been marginalized within mainstream politics, is intense. Stella Rouse, Betina Wilkinson and James Garand (2010) used statistics from a survey to demonstrate the extent of political competition as the source of intergroup tension. Statistics showed that "33.7% of Blacks somewhat or strongly agree that political competition exists with Latinos" (Rouse, Wilkinson and Garand 2010: 179). As one-in-three of Black participants agreed, at least to a degree, that there is political competition with Latinos, this information can be used to justify where tension between the two develops from. Therefore, due to the highly contested nature of politics there is validity in arguing tension between Blacks and Latinos is a result of

discrepancies in political agendas. Unfortunately, extensive popular media coverage

about tensions developing over political struggles often makes the animosity worse.

Beginning in the early 1990s *The Los Angeles Times* began to associate conflict

between Latinos and Blacks to political disparities. In an article entitled "The Tensions

between Blacks and Latinos: How Volatile?" published by *The Los Angeles Times* in

1991 the claim was made that

> Blacks were looking for more support from the Latino community in protesting
> the Rodney King beating…Latinos were looking for more support from the Black
> community pushing to make public schools responsive to the needs of thousands
> of Latino children. This is on top of an open political rivalry as African
> Americans struggle to maintain hard-fought gains and Latinos…struggle to win a
> greater share (2)

Because, as the article argues, neither side felt their expectations were met political

resentment developed "which too often explodes into violent episodes." More recently

coverage by *The Los Angeles Times* of Jamiel Shaw III's murder in 2008 demonstrates

how media coverage still links politics to the conflict between Blacks and Latinos in

California. Staff writers Andrew Blankstein and Richard Winton (2008), focus on the

fact that Jamiel's alleged killer was an undocumented immigrant from Mexico, who had

come to the U.S. when he was four years old. The staff writers note that Jamiel's killing

has increased anti-illegal-immigration sentiment in Los Angeles; causing many Blacks to

attack Special Order 40, which limits the ability of police officers to check the

immigration status of individuals they arrest (Blankstein and Winton 2008).[53] The

attention of media coverage by *The Los Angeles Times* on Jamiel Shaw III being Black

and his perpetrator an undocumented Mexican only heightened Black support of anti-

immigration law. While addressing violent youth crime is the true issue, coverage

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[53] For a full explanation of Los Angeles Special Order 40 refer to http://www.judicialwatch.org/lapd-
special-order-40.

intensified Black and Latino tension over politics as Blankstein and Winton (2008)

concluded a halt to undocumented immigrants entering the country would have

potentially saved Jamiel's life.

By no means was the killing of Jamiel Shaw III justifiable.[54] Murder never is.

However, extensive coverage of his murder as a case of an innocent young Black man

being victimized by the ills of undocumented Mexican immigration has led to increased

anti-immigration support in the African American community. The tension between the

two becomes worse because Latinos feel attacked as coverage convinces more and more

African Americans to politically support anti-immigration policy as the solution.

According to Bill O'Reilly, a staunch anti-immigration supporter, "all the Mayor [Los

Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa] cares about is pandering to the open border

people…Jamiel was just walking around, he was at the wrong place at the wrong time"

and was killed by a Mexican immigrant (O'Reilly Factor 2008). Alonso (2008) who

provides expert testimony on gang affiliation and activities does not dispute the fact that

Jamiel was a good person. However, Alonso argues that media coverage has increased

the division of Latinos and Blacks by highlighting political differences; while

simultaneously ignoring ties that Jamiel had to the Black P. Stones, a Blood gang which

is a rival to his killer Pedro Espinoza's 18th Street gang (Alonso 2008). It is impossible to

dispute the fact that Jamiel was Black and that his offender was an undocumented

Mexican immigrant. Yet for the media to allow this incident to serve as a means of

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[54] Jamiel's murder occurred in the Arlington Heights neighborhood of Los Angeles which, according to
gang expert Alex Alonso, has noticeable issues with gang activity and violence. The mainstream media
coverage dismisses gang expert Alex Alonso's belief that gang association led to Jamiel's killing. Instead
Jamiel's murder is often portrayed as a race-motivated killing by an undocumented Mexican immigrant.
Furthering tensions as the political divide grows because Blacks and Latinos feel they are forced to take
sides.

revitalizing anti-immigration policy in the African American community, which has already been a divisive topic, is unnecessary. Animosity festers as the two sides feel divided over political issues that arise over the coverage of a senseless murder.

In a less complicated and traumatic instance Jamie Reno (2008) of *Newsweek* propelled tension between Blacks and Latinos by covering political discord between the two groups. Jamie Reno cites Earl Ofari Hutchinson as saying, "the tensions between blacks and Latinos and negative perceptions that have marred relations…for so long unfortunately still resonate…there will still be reluctance among many Latinos to vote for an African-American candidate" (Reno 2008). By focusing on the tension between the two groups, instead of examples of coalition building, the message was delivered via *Newsweek* that Black candidates could not rely on Latino support, especially for then presidential nominee Barack Obama. While it would be absurd to assume that all Latinos would favor one political candidate, or give no support to another simply based on race, as if Latinos made unanimous political decisions, arguing that many Latinos will be reluctant to vote for an African American only serves to highlight tensions as a result of political competition. As Rios and Mohamed (2003) demonstrate after conducting a study about the implications of a shifting new media environment, "clearly, the multichannel cable environment…showed evidence of polarization…between ethnic groups" (Rios and Mohamed 2003: 50). This polarization between ethnic groups, as scholars have argued is a result of struggles for political power and representation. Popular media coverage that resonates with the position that tension arises from political competition only propagates these notions to the general public. While examples from Houston, TX, and Compton, CA, serve as evidence that tension does develop out of

political struggles, this position does not consider socioeconomic and language barrier issues.

   To complete the conventional explanations of where tensions between Latinos and Blacks develop from the issue of the language barrier will now be addressed.

Language Barrier

   Increases in immigration, especially from Mexico, and the greater presence of Spanish speakers in the U.S. have caused resurgence in what are known as English-as-the-official-language policies. According to a hearing before the Subcommittee on Education Reform in July, 2006, Congresswoman Lynn Woosley delivered an argument demonstrating how English-only policies were divisive, unnecessary and harmful.[55] Rep. Woosley argued that English-only policies were only a ploy to deter the real issue of immigration reform, saying, "English is not under attack…immigrants want to learn English; and instead of promoting unnecessary divisive policies, we ought to simply help immigrants to learn English" (Subcommittee hearing 2006: 3). As Mexican immigrants and other Latino immigrants come to the U.S., a commonly mistaken belief is internalized that English-speakers and American culture are under siege.[56] According to Chavez's "Latino threat narrative" there is a perception that Mexican immigrants are dividing the nation by refusing to adopt the English language and creating a rigid

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[55] The Subcommittee on Education Reform of the Committee on Education and the Workforce heard arguments for and against House of Representatives Bill 997 which is entitled the "English Language Unity Act." In 2006 Representative Lynn Woosley, from the U.S. House of Representatives of California, presented her position that English-only policies were divisive and being used to distract attention from the true issue of immigration reform.

[56] Spanish-speakers are often the linguistic-group singled out for creating this "attack on English," however it is important to recognize that immigrants come to the U.S. speaking Asian dialects, European dialects, African dialects and Indigenous dialects. The English-only movement, as opponents of it argue, is a tactic implemented to make Spanish-speaking immigrants appear destructive and unwilling to adjust to their new country of residence. Singling out Spanish-speaking immigrants as undesirable serves to foment support for anti-immigration legislation.

language barrier. Chavez contends there is a "threat posed by Spanish-speaking Mexican immigrants…who supposedly maintain linguistic and socially separate lives from the rest of U.S. society" (Chavez 2008: 26). Mauro Mujica, a proponent of the English-only House of Representatives Bill 997, reaffirms the existence of this perception by arguing, "America is at risk of facing Canadian-style linguistic divisions unless we change our assimilation norms…making English the official language is the first step to establishing these norms" (Subcommittee hearing 2006: 6).

Unfortunately, this perceived threat is not limited to groups such as U.S. English Inc., for which Mujica serves as the Chairman of the Board. Academics argue that African Americans harbor similar beliefs that Spanish-speaking immigrants create negative impacts on their communities. According to Mindiola, Niemann and Rodriguez

> African Americans are uncomfortable with the Spanish language…for the past decade…there has been a strong anti-bilingual education, English-only movement. This movement…justifies African American…sentiments against speaking Spanish and against those who do speak Spanish (88)

Support of English-only policies has taken root in Black communities because it is felt that Spanish-speaking immigrants are threatening U.S. values by perpetuating the language barrier which is portrayed as divisive.[57] While statistics show English acquisition among Latino immigrants is high, there is a perception that Spanish-speaking immigrants do not learn English and immigrants' reluctance to do so is hurting the fundamental values of the U.S.[58] Simply put, Mindiola, Niemann and Rodriguez argue,

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[57] It must be understood that values in the U.S. are not the same for each race, ethnicity, gender, class, age, or sexual orientation. Even within a certain group what is considered a value is not consistent. The point being made is that a perception exists that Latino immigrants that speak Spanish are challenging the status quo in that English is the primary language in the U.S.

[58] A study by the Lewis Mumford Center for Comparative Urban and Regional Research at Albany found that 92% of second generation Hispanics speak English "well;" and the 2000 Census reported of those who choose to speak Spanish at home, 72% speak English "well" or "very well." The study conducted by

"the spread of the Spanish language has created backlash among…African Americans" (Mindiola, Niemann and Rodriguez 2002: xii). Not only do scholars assert that some African Americans view Mexican immigrants negatively because they create a linguistic division, others contend that conflict between Blacks and Mexican immigrants hinge on how the communication barrier foments divisive stereotypes.

Nicholas De Genova and Ana Yolanda Ramos-Zayas (2003) provide an example of how the language barrier creates conflict by perpetuating stereotypes about Latino immigrants. During a cultural diversity festival at Chicago's Foundations Alternative High School, a predominantly Black school on the North Side, animosity erupted over the language barrier when Black students responded to poetry being read in Spanish. When a Mexican woman read an autobiographical poem in Spanish "Black students…had begun to giggle. Some of the African American students complained or made jokes…One student declared, 'They should speak English. We're in America'" (De Genova and Ramos-Zayas 2003: 190). In response a Mexican girl said, "I think the Blacks were disrespectful of us…Spanish is part of our heritage…but those Black girls…were saying negative things about the language and making fun of it" (De Genova and Ramos-Zayas 2003: 191). The argument that speaking Spanish is unacceptable because "we're in America" demonstrates the prevailing stereotype that those who speak Spanish are immigrants unwilling to assimilate. The perpetuation of this stereotype by Black students during a poem reading done in Spanish led to tension with Mexican students who felt disrespected. While these comments came from high school students

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the Lewis Mumford Center, entitled "Language Assimilation Today: Bilingualism Persists More Than in the Past, But English Still Dominates" can be found on line at http://mumford.albany.edu/children/researchbriefs.htm. Also 2000 U.S. Census data has been cited in the Works Cited section of this research project.

and the history of Mexicans and Blacks in Chicago has complexities unique to that city, the example is symbolic.[59] It represents a division between Mexicans coming to the U.S. speaking Spanish and feeling a backlash from English speaking citizens, Blacks included, who feel Mexican's inability or slow-paced adoption of the English language is unacceptable. While linguistic differences between Mexican immigrants and Blacks allow harmful prejudices to develop into tension, other academics assert that animosity develops because Blacks do not respect Latino immigrants' needs for bilingual programs and Latino immigrants in turn feel discriminated against due to language.[60]

According to Vaca (2004) Latinos claimed that a disparity existed between proficient bilingual educators and the number of Spanish-speaking students. Latinos in turn accused Black administrators, who held the majority of decision-making positions, with discrimination. Being accused of discrimination did not sit well with Blacks. John Steward a Compton school board member was quoted as saying, "I have no respect for the language issue. This is America. Because a person does not speak English is not a reason to provide resources at public expense" (Vaca 2004: 132). In accord with the theory of social distance, Black school board representatives and decision-makers were unwilling to sympathize with the needs of Latino constituents in Compton and took an adversarial approach to their needs for better bilingual instructors and programs. Blacks felt that the educational gains they fought for during the 19th and 20th century should not

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[59] For a history of Black-Mexican immigrant relations in Chicago refer to Mary E Pattillo's *Black on the Block: The Politics of Race and Class in the City*; Nicholas De Genova's *Working the Boundaries: Race, Space, and "Illegality" in Mexican Chicago*.
[60] A landmark on the road to bilingualism was the U.S. Supreme Court decision *Lau v. Nichols* (1974). It was ruled an unconstitutional denial of equal protection to provide only an English-language education to non-English-speaking school children. While this set the grounds for the implementation of bilingual programs, they remain a highly contested issue on the grounds that they take funding away from other necessary educational programs.

be shared with Latino immigrants who, by not adopting English, clearly demonstrated their lack of wanting to become a part of America.[61] Unfortunately both Latino immigrants and Blacks have educational gaps that imperatively need to be addressed yet the language barrier has pitted the needs of both groups against each other. The growth of Latino immigrants, especially Mexicans, in this country has shifted demographics and approaches to education have had to accommodate this shift. As the previous demonstrations argue, conflict develops because the linguistic needs of Latino immigrants' children clash directly with Blacks and their children who speak English. Worse yet is the perception that bilingual programs are solely devoted to Spanish-speakers and that a majority of, if not all, Latino immigrants require them, thus stigmatizing all Latinos as drains on educational services.

Leo Chavez's (2008) "Latino threat narrative" argues that Latinos, regardless of country of origin and citizenship status, are defined as a homogenous population that is creating tension due to the maintenance of Spanish as their primary language. Mexican immigrants, who receive a majority of the blame, then represent linguistic threats, invading the dominant culture which Blacks have fought to become a part of. Thus, in accordance with Antonio Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony, Mexican immigrants who maintain Spanish upon coming to the United States challenge the hegemonic language and foster tension.[62] Therefore, Spanish-speakers, who embody a threat to the

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[61] This is not to say that all African Americans want to be incorporated or assimilated into the fabric of mainstream American society. Within the Black community cultural and linguistic revitalization is real and there have been historic efforts by Black Separatists to form an all-Black region in the Southeast. Other Black Separatists have proposed leaving North America altogether and returning to Africa. The formation of Liberia is a prime example of African-Americans leaving the United States to pursue their freedom and needs.

[62] Antonio Gramsci lived from 1891-1937. In 1926 he was imprisoned by Italian Prime Minister Benito Mussolini's Fascist government for being a leader of the Communist Party of Italy. During his imprisonment Gramsci developed his theory of cultural hegemony, which can be understood as a system

dominant language, are opposed by those who actively or passively operate within the hegemonic system, i.e. African Americans. Hence, the language barrier, which is framed as a creation of Spanish-speakers unwilling to assimilate linguistically, has led to tension between Blacks and Mexican immigrants. Another, more simplistic, explanation for the language barrier creating Black-Mexican immigrant tension is that it hinders communication which in itself leads to misunderstand and conflict.

Mindiola, Niemann and Rodriguez contend "Hispanic immigrants live among African Americans…but their contact…is limited given that most immigrants are monolingual Spanish speakers…Obviously, these linguistic differences restrict interaction" (Mindiola, Niemann and Rodriguez 2002: 47). The language barrier creates an increased social distance which leads to tension and conflict between the two groups. As Mindiola, Niemann and Rodriguez point out the proximity of Spanish-speaking immigrants to African Americans only makes the communication divide more apparent, exacerbating not mitigating the tensions.[63] An example from a forty-three-year-old Black woman in Houston explains, "when Mexicans speak…and Blacks can't understand, the first thing that comes out of a Black person's mind is that they are talking about them…this is where the conflict comes in. It's happening everywhere" (Mindiola, Niemann and Rodriguez 2002: 52). Aside from reaffirming the perception that Spanish-speakers are Mexicans regardless of actual ethnicity, this demonstration shows the

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of values, attitudes or beliefs that support the established order. Gramsci recorded his thoughts while in prison; they became the *Prison Notebooks* which contain his thoughts on hegemony. Most were not published until after his death decades later. For the purpose of this project Antonio Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks Volume 1* (1991) will be cited.

[63] Scholars such as Macedo, Dendrinos and Gounari argue theoretically that the English language has been and continues to be a colonial tool for measuring assimilation and that Spanish usage for Mexican immigrants' drops significantly after the 2nd generation. However, before English acquisition is accomplished the language barrier creates tension.

language barrier creates tension because it fosters mistrust of Mexican immigrants in Blacks.

However, while the above examples highlight the complexities of communication divisions and how they can result in conflict, the argument is not complete. Statistics show English is acquired by newly arrived immigrants and by the second and third-generation Spanish is spoken minimally. According to a Mumford Center study carried out by Richard Alba in 2004,

> The very high immigration level of the 1990s does not appear to have weakened the forces of linguistic assimilation. Mexicans, by far the largest immigrant group, provide a compelling example. In 1990, 64 percent of third-generation Mexican-American children spoke only English at home; in 2000, the equivalent figure had risen to 71 percent (1)

Also Mindiola, Niemann and Rodriguez, scholars that recognize the potential divisiveness of the language barrier, contend, "individuals and coworkers can find ways to communicate across linguistic boundaries" (Mindiola, Niemann and Rodriguez 2002: 14). However crude these forms of communicating across languages may be, it provides evidence that the language barrier is not infinitely divisive. In addition, the argument does not factor in the importance of socioeconomics, or how political disparities outside of English-only policies may create conflict between Latinos and Blacks as well. Once again the explanation is also devoid of a historical lens.

Nevertheless language barriers are difficult to adjust to and work around. There is value to arguing that Spanish-speakers may conflict with English-speaking Americans and vice versa. Demographic changes have indeed prompted a revitalization of English-only policies, creating an "us" and "them" discussion which is divisive. Bilingual education does create intense positioning around funding for schools. Speaking Spanish

in the U.S. which is predominantly an English-speaking nation can in fact lead to stereotypes about the Spanish-speaker as being divisive or unwilling to adapt to the U.S. Also there is truth to the position that separate languages make understanding difficult, which can lead to distrust and conflict. What is troubling about this position though, is that popular media simply projects the ideology that Latino immigrants create conflict by maintaining the Spanish language. Aside from academics' lack of attention to socioeconomic, political and historical factors the media then takes the issue and reduces it to Spanish-speakers are burdensome threats to Americans.

Fox News' program *Fox and Friends* aired Alabama Gubernatorial Candidate Tim James' campaign ad and praised it as visionary, poignant and powerful. The campaign issue James was taking a stand on was the support of English-only policy. James remarked, "Why do our politicians make us give drivers license exams in 12 languages? This is Alabama, we speak English, if you want to live here, learn it. We're only giving that test in English if I'm governor" (*Fox and Friends* 2010). While this quote was solely in support of an Alabaman measure to legalize statewide English-only policies and has nothing to do with African American opinion on the English-only debate, it may have influenced Alabamans.[64] Also, the extreme praise from *Fox* reporters given to James' gubernatorial platform resonates with arguments presented in support of bills such as House of Representatives Bill 997. *Fox and Friends* presented the language barrier as divisive, troublesome and in need of being broken down by promoting the introduction of English-only policy. Indiana Senator Mike Delph was quoted by *Fox*

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[64] First it must be noted that Alabaman Gubernatorial Candidate Tim James dropped out of the race for governor. Also there are no statistics that demonstrate the impact his ad had on Alabamans, the nation or African Americans in particular. The point being made is that *Fox News* supported the ad and this may have increased support for English-only policy which as argued earlier is a subcomponent of the anti-immigration stance.

News Latino reporter Elizabeth Llorente as justifying his English-only support because, "his state's residents are tired of pressing "1" for English when calling businesses, or hearing Spanish announcements over the Wal-Mart intercom or struggling to understand a worker in the McDonald's drive-thru" (*Fox News Latino* 2010). What is significant about this statement is there is a perception that solely Spanish-speakers are making life more difficult for English-speaking Americans. It fails to recognize the diversity of languages spoken in this nation, while simultaneously perpetuating stereotypes about Spanish-speakers. This thesis argues that national media support of English-only policy impacts how African Americans respond to language differences in their community.

While African Americans have legitimate claims to educational funding and have dedicated efforts to increase educational achievement for its youth, the media has propelled a false notion that immigrants and their needs for bilingual education are the reason education funding and achievement are low for Americans, Blacks included. The reason anti-bilingual reports perpetuate stereotypes and conflict is because they help construct the public's perceptions on intense issues. Chavez argues, "the images we constantly consume…construct our understanding of events, people, and places in our world. In short, media spectacles are productive acts that construct knowledge about subjects in our world" (Chavez 2008: 5). Therefore, it can be deduced that African American's opinion on Spanish-speaking immigrants may be influenced when media sources focus on the threat Mexican immigrants pose for Americans.[65] As Latino growth continues to shift demographics, media sources have speculated that an inability or disinterest in assimilating to American culture may become problematic.

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[65] While Chavez's theory on the media spectacle does not leave room for self-agency, the influence of media on American society cannot be denied.

Business Week's March 15, 2004, cover showed a Hispanic family and read, "Hispanic Nation: Hispanics are an immigrant group like no other. Their huge numbers are changing old ideas about assimilation. Is America ready?" According to Robert E. Park's theory of race relations, shedding the native-tongue and acquiring English was a step to integrating oneself into American society. As the cover of *Business Week* suggests huge numbers of Latino immigrants are challenging these old conceptions by maintaining Spanish, a trend that has been portrayed as threatening. As media sources continually project Hispanics/Latinos as coming to the U.S. prepared to establish separate enclaves where they continue their culture, language and customs, the impact cannot be ignored. The media, using the growing presence of Spanish as evidence, has promoted an argument that the nation is under attack by Latino immigration. This, in accordance with the theory of media spectacle, only increases division between Latinos and other U.S. residents, including Blacks. While the media is an influential aspect of conscience-building in America, it has reduced the complexities of the language barrier to an "othering" of Spanish-speakers. This gives justification for divisive policies, while not addressing the complete issue of where tension between Blacks and Latinos develops.

The objective of this project is to argue that a full explanation for the existence of tension between Mexican immigrants and Blacks requires the simultaneous consideration of multiple factors. First, socioeconomic competition, political competition and the language barrier need to be recognized as three interrelated variables that combine to create an atmosphere conducive to tensions.[66] Secondly, race relations in Mexico, dating

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[66] Further research on how these three variables intertwine to influence levels of tension between Mexican immigrants and Blacks is needed. Also further research on how U.S. society contributes to the formation of these issues as being specific to minority groups demands greater focus on societal ills overall.

back to the enslavement of Africans by the Spanish during colonization, need to be given

attention as a factor that continues to influence Mexican immigrant's perceptions of

African Americans once Mexicans emigrate.[67]

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[67] Chapter 3 will address this history. It is understood that Mexico embraces *mestizaje*, or racial-mixing, as the nation's foundation. This project does not intend to create a new history of Mexico. However, recognizing the fact that race was a significant factor in determining social position historically, with continued impacts today, should occur to complete the explanation of the origins of tension between African Americans and Mexicans immigrants presently.

CHAPTER 3

A LEGACY OF RACISM IN MEXICO

In order to prove that race relations in Mexico are essential to understanding why tension exists between Mexican immigrants and African Americans, a focused history of race in Mexico will be provided. This selective historical background will be used to argue Mexican immigrants develop prejudicial notions of blackness in Mexico prior to emigrating which lead to conflict with African Americans. The focused history will begin with Spanish colonization and the enslavement of Africans as the workforce of this colonial project. It will then proceed to demonstrate the present social and economic marginalization of Afro-Mexicans in Mexico, finishing with Mexican immigrant's interactions with African Americans upon arriving in the U.S.

The colonial efforts of Spaniards in the "New World" led to the formation of New Spain, one of the Spanish Crown's most profitable colonial conquests.[68] According to Matthew O'Hara "the Spanish Crown's goal of evangelizing and incorporating the peoples of the Americas into a larger community of Christian and Catholic believers had helped justify its entire colonial project in the New World" (O'Hara 2010: 2). Contact between indigenous populations and the Spanish, initiated by Spaniards with the purpose of religious conversion, economic growth and territorial expansion laid the foundation for present day Mexico. Historians also note that throughout the process of "evangelizing

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[68] New Spain was the colonial name of Mexico. It was a colonial territory of the Spanish which was comprised of Spanish colonizers, indigenous natives (who were often enslaved, their population was devastated much like Natives indigenous to North America), African slaves, freed Blacks, and slaves from the Pacific Islands, in particular Filipinos who were referred to as "aetas" or Chino slaves.

and incorporating the peoples of the Americas" Spaniards imported enslaved Africans as a supply of labor to help their efforts of colonization.[69]

According to Sagario Cruz-Carretero, "the peak of the slave trade with New Spain occurred during the 17th and 18th Centuries, coinciding with a greater decline of the indigenous population" (Sagario Cruz-Carretero 2005: 18).[70] In order to maintain economic, social, and political power as demographics shifted, the Spanish elite of New Spain implemented *el sistema de castas*, or the caste system. Ben Vinson III contends, "the…colonial caste system was a complex socio-racial, hierarchical classification scheme that attempted to structure and order Hispanic society in the New World" (Vinson 2008: 169). Furthermore, Pat Carroll (2009) explains, "the *sistema de castas* normally utilized just six racial phenotypes in…record keeping…*blanco…negro…mulato…pardo…mestizo…indio*" (Carroll 2009: 85-86).[71] While Carroll's list is not ordered from most valuable race to least, the caste system he defined established a racial hierarchy which placed fair-skinned Europeans/Spaniards at the top and African or dark-skinned individuals at the bottom.[72] A wide variety of

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[69] For a history on the experience slaves had coming to and living in New Spain refer to Gonzalo Aguirre Beltran's "The Slave Trade in Mexico" 1944.

[70] The decline of the indigenous population not only sparked heightened importation of African slaves, it also created an increase in miscegenation between indigenous populations and slaves which strengthened the labor force that would be used to expand the empire of the Spanish Crown.

[71] According to Carroll (2009) Spaniards designated themselves as *blanco* or white, *negro* identified a Black or very dark-skinned individual, *mulato* was a mixture of Black/white, *pardo* was a mixture of Black/Indigenous, *mestizo* was a mixture of white/Indigenous, *Indio* was used to label the indigenous people of Mexico.

[72] While the Spaniards had a caste system that operated based on race, the indigenous population also implemented a caste system which was based on ethnicity. Essentially there were two caste systems that operated in New Spain, that of the colonizers and that of the colonized. Africans had to navigate their existence with both systems in mind, often attempting to construct their own image/identity in favor of the caste system in which they lived. While these differences are important and cannot be overlooked evidence of records assures us that racial stratification was in existence and therefore supports the argument of this research project. Contemporary examples will be given to show how the race-based Spanish caste system influences Mexican society to this day and Mexican immigrant's perceptions of African Americans as well.

historians demonstrate the function race had in determining individual worth within the caste system.

Bobby Vaughn argues, "the *castas* created explicit hierarchies based on race…the system was designed to confer…privilege to the Spanish…in turn, the darker more indigenous or Black mixtures were to move only within prescribed spheres of the colonial social order" (Vaughn 2005: 117). By distinguishing people based on race, the Spaniards were effective in protecting their elite status and dividing groups of darker-skinned individuals. Nicole Von Germeten argues the caste system solidified Spanish superiority and protected them from a unified rebellion, "by emphasizing and encouraging subtle distinctions between…subject groups" (Von Germeten 2009: 138). As Pat Carroll contends, "race acted as the principal identifier…in New Spain's *sistema de castas*," and the darker the skin the less valuable you were within the hierarchy (Carroll 2009: 87). Furthermore, Irene Diggs (1953) asserts race or skin color, hair texture, thickness of lips and nose form were traits used to categorize individuals within the "pigmentocracy," and that African features such as dark-skin or kinky hair relegated an individual to the lowest rung of *el sistema de castas*. Bobby Vaughn argues, "the colonial *casta* system was obsessed with blackness…the specific quantity of 'black blood,' however small, was crucial to the…racial categories" (Vaughn 2005: 133).[73] These observations demonstrate the importance race held in determining value in New Spain's caste system. Similarly, the examples provide evidence that racial prejudice

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[73] Maria Elena Martinez (2008) points out this notion of "purity of blood" or "*limpieza de sangre*" originated in Spain as a mechanism to categorically marginalize Jewish, Moorish and Muslim converts. However, she continues to point out how the concept was transplanted to New Spain, adapted to the colonial society and used to justify Spanish rule and the subordinate position others occupied due to their unwanted ancestral lineage. The concept of pure blood and adherence to it reaffirmed the existence, legitimacy and meaningfulness of the caste system in New Spain.

towards Africans or Blacks served as a mechanism for maintaining social order and preserving a privileged status of the Spaniards. Academics contend that not only did the racial hierarchy categorize Africans or dark-skinned individuals as inferior; race also determined one's economic position in New Spain.

Von Germeten (2009) argues that economic positioning adhered to the racially based hierarchy. This is demonstrated when she writes, "Afro-Mexicans…all suffered legalized racism in the colonial era. They were excluded from many professions" (Von Germeten 2009: 138). Ellen Yvonne Simms contends that because of skin color the Afro-Mexican was relegated to perform, "the most onerous and demanding work…and endured the brunt of hard labor and physical punishment" (Simms 2008: 232).[74] Within the urban centers of New Spain, Ben Vinson contends that Blacks' economic status was constrained because Blacks "had been heavily associated with domestic labor in urban Mexico" (Vinson 2009: 110). Frank Proctor also asserts Blacks were confined economically in urban centers as "domestic servants and 'status symbols…used by elites…to advertise their social standing'" (Proctor 2009: 23). Enslaved Blacks were not only relegated to the inferior position of domestic servant because of their skin color, but also served as symbols of status for the Spaniards, reaffirming Spanish superiority over Blacks. Proctor continues the argument that race determined economic situation by asserting African slaves were limited to impoverished lives, forced to work in the least desirable occupations including "woolen textiles and…sugar production" (Proctor 2009: 23). Colin Palmer argues there was little Afro-Mexicans could do to challenge their

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[74] It is recognized that within Mexican society the term Afro-Mexican holds little relevance because the nation embraces a heritage of racial mixtures or *mestizaje*. However, research has proven that Mexicans with pronounced African heritage or features are uniquely situated within Mexican society. Therefore, it is essential to discuss Afro-Mexicans for this project, while the intention is not to delegitimize the importance of *mestizaje* heritage.

inferior position due to their race, because they "faced a body of restrictive legislation which limited their upward mobility, doomed them to an inferior status, and permitted them only limited participation in the Spanish-dominated society" (Palmer 2009: 179).[75] If Afro-Mexicans tried to challenge their position within the racial hierarchy, extreme violence was used to discipline and served as an example for others wishing to contest their marginalized position in the color based hierarchy.

According to Proctor on May 2, 1612 people gathered in Mexico City's central plaza "to witness the hangings of thirty-five Afro-Mexicans…condemned as leaders of a slave rebellion…The goals of the rebellion…was the liberation of the city's slaves and the murder of all Spaniards" (Proctor 2009: 21).[76] To serve as a stark reminder of the consequences of challenging the color-based hierarchy, Proctor (2009) explains

> the bodies were left hanging…overnight to be drawn and quartered the following day. Only six were thus desecrated, the body parts placed on pikes throughout the city, while the remaining twenty-nine bodies were decapitated, their heads displayed on top of the gallows to serve as a…message to Afro-Mexicans (21)

Even as the slave trade declined and Blacks experienced freedom from enslavement, racial prejudice towards Blacks and dark-skinned individuals continued.

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[75] For an in-depth discussion on social mobility within the caste system refer to Robert H. Jackson, *Race, Caste, and Status: Indians in Colonial Spanish America* 1999; Bruce A. Castleman, "Social Climbers in a Colonial Mexican City: Individual Mobility within the *Sistema de Castas* in Orizaba" 2001; Ben Vinson III, *Bearing Arms for his Majesty: The Free-colored Militia in Colonial Mexico* 2001.

[76] While slavery in New Spain was different than in North American colonies the situation was dire and undesirable enough for Mexico City's slave population to plan a rebellion in part to "kill all Spaniards." Some of the differences from North American chattel slavery to New Spain's form of slavery were that Spanish slaves often represented status symbols that elites used to explicitly show their social standing, whereas in North America slaves were owned by poor and wealthy alike. Also as Proctor notes, within New Spain's urban centers slaves served important roles in the economy as master craftsmen, street vendors and shop keepers, these positions were often denied North American colonial slaves who typically worked agricultural fields or as house servants. Also slaves in New Spain had limited legal protections extended to them and could testify in courts even against their own masters, these rights were systematically denied to slaves in North American colonies.

While Vinson (2009) asserts that not all Blacks served as slaves in New Spain, this does not mean that the caste system did not affect the status of freed Blacks. Vinson writes some freed Blacks were absorbed into the middle class while most, "who occupied the lowest strata of the economy, were exposed to income volatility, squalid poverty, and exploitation by a supremely powerful elite class" (Vinson 2009: 100). Andrew Fisher (2009) contends freedom for Blacks or individuals with African heritage did not mean they were accepted in a society structured around the racial caste system. Fisher (2009) notes that the murder of mulatto Jose Rosales in 1801, who was accused of slapping Jose Carranza and violating his racially superiority as a Spaniard, serves as a specific example of how race still determined social value.[77] Fisher argues, "people of African descent faced racial prejudice and hostility well after most were no longer held in bondage…blacks like Jose Rosales faced ostracism and suspicion from those who saw them as a volatile and violent people who did not accept their 'place' in society" (Fisher 2009: 52). It is significant to note the Spanish used perceptions of African volatility to legitimize their domination of Afro-Mexicans. The purpose of highlighting a perceived violent, volatile disposition within Afro-Mexicans justified labeling these darker-skinned individuals as *gente sin razon* (irrational people) who did not accept their lowly existence in society. A society ruled by fairer-skinned Spaniards who self-identified as *gente de razon* (rational people). Even as miscegenation with indigenous populations lightened

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[77] For a detailed explanation of the circumstances that led to Rosales' murder at the hands of Carranza refer to Andrew Fisher's "Negotiating Two Worlds: The Free Black Experience in Guerrero's Tierra Caliente" 2009. Interestingly enough, Guerrero where the murder took place was an area settled by Africans along the Pacific coast of Mexico. This coastal area saw a large African population emerge as it was an area that Spaniards showed little interest in, therefore Spanish presence was minimal. To this day the state of Guerrero, Mexico, according to Andrew Fisher (2009), holds a reputation for violence and antipathy towards outsiders due to the "blackness" of its inhabitants. This reputation links its colonial status as a Black area not worth investing in to its present view as dangerous due to the skin color of most of its inhabitants.

the complexion of Africans, and Mexico fought for independence from Spain, the racial

implications from the caste system lingered.[78]

Cesareo Moreno contends that, "after independence…skin color was still a

source of discrimination and a critical factor for the determination of an individual's

socioeconomic status" (Moreno 2006: 76).[79] Even though the caste system was

introduced by the Spanish, scholars argue Mexican independence did not relieve Afro-

Mexicans of a subordinated existence.[80] Vinson argues, "after the revolution, Mexico

placed a heightened emphasis on the hybrid nature of its population…But a certain type

of hybrid phenotype was praised – the *mestizo*, or mixture of white and Indian. Blacks

were literally written out of the…narrative," one which presumed *mestizaje* and the

erasure of race (Vinson 2009: 4). The contributions of Afro-Mexicans to the Mexican

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[78] While the rigid caste system was operating without impediment well into the 17th century, Vinson (2009) argues that there was a shift during the 18th century. "With the decline of the slave trade after the 1640s, much of the expansion of the Afro-Mexican population came…through the miscegenation of existing slaves and free blacks with *mestizos*, whites, natives and other groups. By the 1790s the Revillagigedo census only identified a scant five hundred *morenos*, or 'pure blacks,'…6,100 black 'Africans'" (Vinson 2009: 99). According to Bobby Vaughn (2009) the Spanish-imposed caste system was abolished when freedom from Spain came during the 19th century in 1821. However, he continues on to argue that while the Spanish-imposed system was abolished it left traces of racism still evident today in Mexico. Jose Vasconselos (1979) developed the notion of a cosmic race as a means of highlighting the importance of the value and power that developed from Mexico's mixture of Spanish and indigenous peoples once the Mexican Revolution was carried out. However, *la raza cosmica* (cosmic race) has a flaw. It ignores the presence, influence and contributions Africans/Blacks/Afro-Mexicans provided throughout the development of New Spain, and eventually as a newly formed nation, Mexico.

[79] Cesareo Moreno goes on to argue that even though two of the most influential leaders of the War of Independence, Jose Maria Morelos y Pavon and Vicente Guerrero, were indisputably acknowledged by historians to have African ancestry it was Independence during the 19th century that was the catalyst for the disappearance of Afro-Mexicans from official history. While Morelos and Guerrero are states in the Republic of Mexico named in honor of these men, their African heritage has been downplayed and the emergence of a single Mexican national identity negated many African contributions to the formation of what is now Mexico.

[80] According to Vinson "the independence era of Latin America was supposed to represent a racial watershed, signaling a time when the lingering remnants of the caste-like hierarchies of the colonial world were eliminated…in efforts to construct a national peace. In this context, concentrating too heavily upon issues of race, discrimination, and race-based claims to citizenship could be interpreted as antithetical to the health of the body politic" (Vinson 2009: 2). Challenging the health of the body politic of Mexico is not the objective of this project. However, in order to make the assertion that the caste system still influences how Afro-Mexicans are treated and how Mexican immigrants perceive African Americans, the issue of race in Mexico must be addressed.

culture and society were absorbed under the Mexican national identity, *mestizaje*, and African existence was erased. According to Cruz-Carretero (2005) this erasure was so significant that a group of Afro-Mexican citizens from Mata Clara were jailed by Mexican police who assumed they were undocumented immigrants from Central America because they had dark-skin. Cruz-Carretero writes, "they were finally released after the…municipal president of Cuitlahuac, Veracruz…convinced the Mexico City police that there were indeed black people in this territory, and that the detainees were…not undocumented" (Cruz-Carretero 2005: 36). Even after the caste system was deinstitutionalized, evidence suggests the existence of Afro-Mexicans is either riddled with prejudices or not recognized at all because skin color continues to determine social status and value within Mexican society. To prove that race still influences value and status in Mexico, the experience of Afro-Mexicans in the states of Guerrero, Oaxaca, and Veracruz will be examined.[81] These three states will be the focal point because they are areas where there is an existing Afro-Mexican population.

Vaughn argues that Afro-Mexicans are still "marginalized and exploited by local…elites and ignored by national leaders" (Vaughn 2009: 214). Furthermore Minority Rights Group International links Afro-Mexican economic status during colonization to their current situation by arguing, "Afro-Mexicans still live in poverty, often in isolated rural communities with negligible sanitation, health or education services" (Minority Rights Group International 2005). This economic marginalization due to African heritage has led Afro-Mexicans to internalize perceptions of skin color and reconstruct how they identify. Impacts of racism, inherent in the caste system of

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[81] The Costa Chica is a region along Mexico's Pacific coast, occupying sections of both Guerrero and Oaxaca. This region is home to an Afro-Mexican population.

New Spain, materialize when examining Afro-Mexican residents' contemporary perceptions of blackness. Laura Lewis (2009) conducted interviews with residents of San Nicolas Tolentino, within the Mexican state of Guerrero in the Costa Chica region, and uncovered connections of present racial prejudice to historical perceptions of "black." While San Nicolas is often referred to as a "black village" of Costa Chica, San Nicoladenses do not identify as "black" (Lewis 2009: 186).[82] Lewis argues

> San Nicoladenses generally reject the label "black" as well as Afro-Mexican…Well aware of racist ideologies…that in the past have marginalized African-descent Mexicans and continue to do so, in their view Afro or black Mexican identities do nothing to help them achieve their economic goals (186)

The fact that San Nicoladenses, who based on phenotype are clearly of African heritage, deny their African heritage shows there are true impediments to individuals with dark skin in Mexico today.[83] San Nicolas residents, as Lewis (2009) argued, typically identify with their indigenous roots and shy away from associations with African heritage because it limits their chances for social mobility within Mexican society.[84] Vaughn asserts Afro-Mexicans in the Costa Chica endure racism, and social boundaries undermine Mexico's claim that everyone is equal as *mestizos*. Vaughn makes this contention by writing,

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[82] This is not an attempt to take agency from San Nicoladenses in their process of self-identification. Most simply identify as Mexican because they are born and raised in Mexico. What is interesting is some of the explanations used to deflect labels of "black" being imposed on them or associated with them. These explanations show that skin color still represents something "less than" or "other" within Mexico, therefore it is to be avoided in order to protect ones existence.

[83] While most Afro-Mexicans identify as Mexican, emphasizing their indigenous roots, in order to fit into the country's notions of *mestizaje*, this self-identification is also used to distance themselves from Africans or Blacks who did not and continue not to hold a favorable position in the eyes of Mexican society. Sagrario Cruz-Carretero (2005) also points out that academic projects such as "The Third Root: Presence of African Cultures in Mexico" deny the existence of racism and discrimination as serious issues in Mexico, making any claim of racism seem to be a challenge to the national *mestizaje* identity.

[84] By no means should San Nicolas residents or any other group of Mexicans who appear to have African heritage begin to claim their African roots if they do not feel it will benefit them. The point being brought up is that, as San Nicoladenses said, racism exists against those with dark-skin and to further marginalize themselves by identifying with something that is "other than Mexican" would push them further to the margins of society.

The racism to which Black Mexicans have been subjected, the ubiquitous stigmatization of blackness in the Costa Chica, and the strong social boundaries that separate blacks, Indians, and *mestizos* from one another suggest that although Mexican identity has important meaning for people it cannot be characterized as'…*todos somos mestizos*" (we are all *mestizos*) (211)

Even though independence brought the dismantling of the caste system, Vaughn (2009) demonstrates there is continued evidence that Afro-Mexicans are still separated and stigmatized. In the state of Veracruz, the Afro-Mexican population is exposed to similar circumstances, solidifying a connection between the colonial racial hierarchy and how skin color is perceived in Mexico today.

Cruz-Carretero (2005) emphasizes that even celebrations of African heritage in Vercaruz perpetuate racialized perceptions of Blacks which developed out of the caste system. During Carnival in Yanga, a celebration on the 10th of August is used to honor and celebrate African culture.[85] However, Cruz-Carretero notes that the carnival is hypocritical because it honors Yanga while simultaneously "mocking Afro-Mexicans" by representing them with "satirical masks" that resemble their caste labels such as wolves, mules and monkeys (Cruz-Carretero 2005: 32).[86] In addition, non-black *mestizos* in areas around Mata Clara, which is in Veracruz, hold racist, prejudicial and stigmatizing beliefs

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[85] Yanga was the most well-known *cimarron*, or runaway slave, who fought the Spaniards consistently. He carried out guerilla attacks on Spanish towns and trade routes from the Gulf Coast to Mexico City with such effectiveness that he was able to negotiate with the Spanish Crown. According to Cruz-Carretero, "after several cimarron victories, the victors demanded from the Spanish Crown the establishment of a free town inhabited exclusively by black runaway slaves who had escaped prior to 1608. The Crown finally acquiesced…and, in 1630, the African blacks officially established the free town of San Lorenzo de los Negros, located close to Cordoba, Veracruz" (Cruz-Carretero 2005: 28). For more information on runaway slaves, Yanga, or the creation of *palenques*, (runaway settlements), refer to *The African Presence in Mexico: From Yanga to the Present* 2005; *Black Mexico: Race and Society from Colonial to Modern Times* 2005.

[86] For example, the offspring of an African with an indigenous person was labeled a *lobo* or wolf, they were not even considered human. To see pictures and labels used in the caste system refer to *The African Presence in Mexico: From Yanga to the Present* 2005.

about Afro-Mexicans.[87] Cruz Carretero argues concepts and opinions expressed about the black African population "referred to their…body odor,… intellectual…abilities, a tendency to tell lies, and even association dating back to colonial times that linked black Africans with the devil in religious images" (Cruz-Carretero 2005: 36). Once again colonial notions of black equaling inferiority, evil or undesirability are still relevant in Mexican society today. More significantly, it is argued, internalized as well as assigned perceptions of Afro-Mexicans remain intact when Mexican immigrants interact with African Americans upon emigrating to the U.S.

The journey to the U.S. does not erase racial stigmatizations from the minds of Mexican and Afro-Mexican immigrants alike. Examples from De Genova and Ramos-Zayas (2003) demonstrate how racial prejudices acquired by Mexican immigrants in Mexico reveal themselves in the U.S. In Chicago's Pilsen neighborhood, a predominantly Mexican migrant enclave, De Genova observed a Mexican man accosting a Black man, who was minding his own business, for being in the neighborhood, forcing the Black man to flee hastily. When De Genova asked his reasoning the Mexican man responded that "Mexicans had become more intelligent and stable," conversely arguing that Blacks were neither (De Genova and Ramos-Zayas 2003: 100). Not only was there an existing belief that Blacks were unintelligent and unstable, an interview with "Olivia," a Mexican immigrant, provides evidence that these are not the only stereotypes held by Mexican immigrants with regards to African Americans. De Genova and Ramos-Zayas (2003) quote "Olivia" as saying, "my aunt was telling me about Black people…she was

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[87] Veracruz, on Mexico's lower Gulf Coast, is the other area in Mexico aside from Costa Chica that still has a noticeable African ancestral population. Cruz-Carretero provides examples showing how residents of this area that are non-black *mestizos* typically hold harmful perceptions of their darker-skinned, Afro-Mexican neighbors.

saying that, that they're very bad, that they're thieves, and that they rape…and that they

shoot guns, and above all that they rob you" (De Genova and Ramos-Zayas 2003: 184).[88]

When this account is combined with firmly held beliefs within Mexico that Guerrero, a

state with many Afro-Mexicans, is violent and dangerous a link develops to the distrust

and contempt for those of African descent which originated with the colonial caste

system. Furthermore, De Genova and Ramos-Zayas learned from Mexican immigrants in

Chicago that there is a prevailing notion that, "the African Americans were all lazy" (De

Genova and Ramos-Zayas 2003: 186). Significant to these demonstrations is the fact that

in Mexico, according to Cruz-Carretero (2005) and Fisher (2009), Afro-Mexicans are

viewed as lazy, unintelligent, unstable, criminally-minded and dangerous by *mestizos*.

While Mexican immigrant's perceptions of African Americans may be partially formed

by prevailing stereotypical representations of Blacks by American media, to deny a link

to race relations in Mexico is naïve at best. The transplanting of preconceived notions

about race in Mexico become further substantiated when contact between Blacks and

Afro-Mexican immigrants are examined.

Not only do San Nicoladenses deny any association with African heritage or

blackness while living in Mexico as Lewis (2009) argued, their responses to African

Americans when they move to the United States are telling of how deeply rooted affects

of the caste system are. According to Lewis, "on any given day about one-third of San

Nicolas's residents…are in Winston-Salem or in nearby U.S. communities" (Lewis 2009:

190). Furthermore, when San Nicoladenses move to Winston-Salem they are in close

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[88] Surely some Mexican immigrants have been robbed, attacked and shot by African Americans. The reverse is also true, all one needs to do is refer to the opening of this research with the murder of Cheryl Green or Jamiel Shaw III. To generalize all Black people as gun-carrying criminals is beyond factual and must be analyzed as a racist perception of what it means to be Black.

proximity to African Americans. Lewis (2009) argues that the stereotypical views of

African American neighbors held by Afro-Mexican San Nicoladenses directly links

racists beliefs held in Mexico to interactions between the Afro-Mexican immigrants and

African Americans, who, based solely on phenotype are incredibly similar.[89] According

to Vaughn (2005) immigrants from the Costa Chica tend to self-segregate themselves

upon arrival in U.S. cities and towns. He also asserts, "*Costenos* in the United States tend

to subscribe…to…stereotypes, seeing African Americans as violent, drug-addicted, and

generally undesirable" (Vaughn 2005: 132).[90] While these immigrants are often mistaken

for African Americans, due to their similar phenotype, upon coming to America they

enact prejudice towards African Americans as undesirable – the same type of prejudice

they were faced with while living a marginalized economic and social life in Mexico. A

notion that originated, this thesis argues, from the treatment Afro-Mexicans receive in

Mexico which has been linked to the development of the caste system which identified

dark-skin as a measure of the ultimate inferiority.[91]

    In conclusion, it is the researcher's contention that four aspects, when taken

together, explain why Black and Latino conflict exists. The three conventional

arguments addressed in chapter 2 plus a historical perspective completes the argument.

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[89] While most San Nicoladenses identify as Indian or indigenous while in Mexico, the way they distinguish themselves from African Americans in the U.S. is often through the Spanish language. Holding on to this language as a mechanism of separation also creates a more rigorous language barrier because the adoption of language would bring San Nicoladenses closer to being "black," which from experience is undesirable.

[90] *Costenos* being a term used to describe Afro-Mexicans of the Costa Chica region which is home to many with African heritage.

[91] In order to distance themselves from African Americans upon migrating to the United States, Afro-Mexicans maintain their Spanish language and cultural ties to Mexican customs and religion. While they face racism within Mexico, even though they try to lessen this by denying their "blackness," Afro-Mexicans come to the United States and hold views of African Americans that are nearly identical to the racism they endured while living in Mexico. For example, to be Black means you are dangerous, criminal, undesirable, inferior and untrustworthy.

The contemporary issues of socioeconomic competition, political struggles, and the language barrier hold significance. However, presented in this chapter, the history of race in Mexico is an important factor; one which the researcher argues has been overlooked as an explanation for current Black-Mexican immigrant tensions. The legacy of dark-skinned individuals being equated with inferiority in Mexico is the foundation of prejudice Mexican immigrants hold against African Americans. Only when the origin of the prejudice is examined in tandem with the three primary contemporary explanations will a complete picture be revealed. In addition, it appears the racial caste system had implications throughout Latin America, furthering the overall argument that tensions arise between Latino immigrants and African Americans because unfavorable perceptions of blackness are brought from Latin America to the U.S.

Racial discrimination towards Afro-Latinos suggests dark-skin and African features are considered traits of inferiority in Latin nations. These prejudices are a testament to the far reaching impact of the caste system of colonial Mexico. Work by Paulo de Carvalho Neto (1978) suggests that Latin Americans with pronounced African features continue to bear the brunt of the prejudice and discrimination in their respective societies. Oboler and Dzidzienyo extend this argument by contending that there is "Black marginalization throughout the hemisphere" as a result of the subjugated position they were relegated to by colonizing groups such as the Spanish (Oboler and Dzidzienyo 2005: 12). Furthermore, Ariel Dulitzky argues that contrary to claims by Latin American representatives that racism towards Afro-Latinos does not exist, "racial discrimination permeates each and every realm of life in our region: from the social to the political, education, labor, cultural and public health sectors" (Dulitzky 2005: 41). This contention

amplifies the argument of this thesis by expanding the influence of the caste system to the entire Latin region. Thus recognizing the impact of the racial hierarchy of New Spain is imperative because it is a source of tension for all Latino immigrants and African Americans, not just Mexican immigrants.

The intention of offering this historical perspective is not to further divisiveness between Blacks and Latinos. In fact, the purpose is to reveal the true source of conflict in the hopes that uncovering and disseminating this knowledge will reduce future tension. A case study of Denver, CO, will be used to reveal the significance of the legacy of race in Mexico as the catalyst for Black-Mexican immigrant conflict as well as to emphasize how socioeconomic competition, political struggles and the language barrier compound the problem. Personal interviews with citizens of Denver will serve as comparisons to Black-Latino relations in urban areas already examined such as Los Angeles, Chicago, and Houston. Knowledge acquired from the interviews will both support conventional explanations for the conflict as well as offer new perspectives and areas of interracial commonality that can be emphasized as tools for developing a more peaceful coexistence.

CHAPTER 4

A CASE STUDY OF DENVER, CO.

Through conducting the interviews and using grounded theory to analyze and code the data, five main themes arose: 1) supporting conventional explanations, 2) media influences opinion, 3) Black is negative, 4) Black territoriality, and 5) interracial gang violence is situational. Each theme will be defined and selected quotes will demonstrate the significance of the theme.

Supporting Conventional Readings

Data revealed each participant agreed with contemporary conventional explanations. Of the three primary examples scholars and this thesis have identified, socioeconomic competition was the most commonly cited issue. The language barrier and struggles for political power held lesser importance, respectively. Regardless of ethnicity, nation of origin, gender or social status, all respondents agreed that competition for jobs existed, and that it led to tension between Blacks and Latinos. For example an African American said, "I see it…Mexican immigrants are competing for jobs, there are probably a lot of Black people who are already over here, born and raised, that would have gotten those jobs. It leaves a bitter taste." The "bitter taste" can be interpreted as resentment towards these immigrants, especially when considering the same individual said, "unemployment rates of my people are sky high here…they talkin' the economy is bad, right? You know, it's like even when jobs do open, we ain't gettin' em, they are. It pits us against them for survival really." Job competition clearly created a division by

pitting the two groups against one another for access to employment. Interestingly

enough this echoes multiple examples covered in chapter 2 that argue, "African

Americans who see conflict cite competition for jobs…as the reason" (Mindiola,

Niemann and Rodriguez 2002: 57). An immigrant from Mexico reaffirmed the

significance of job competition with Blacks by saying, "we look for same jobs as them. I

get one, means they don't." Reaffirming the argument posed by Shulman and

Johannsson that because Black "workers are especially likely to be found in the low-

wage sector…which is most affected by immigration…the result is a drop in employment

opportunities for African Americans" (Shulman and Johannsson 2004: 85). A white

participant felt, "while I am not in their shoes, I assume, especially with the economy

being tight, that competition is hurting the ability for the two groups to get along." The

significance of these quotes is that they offer tremendous support to the scholarly

argument that Black-Latino tension is a result of competition for economic resources.

Interestingly, the conventional explanation of language barrier was also cited as a source

of divisiveness.

A Chicano, who is bilingual, explained how tension festers out of the

communication barrier. He said, "I speak both you know, so I hear when Blacks or

anyone else says shit like, 'learn English,' haha. I think it pisses them off, they can't tell

what we're talkin' about." In this participant's opinion, tension arises from two

assumptions. Spanish-speakers have not adopted English, which is deemed unacceptable,

and uneasiness develops when Spanish is spoken because many English-speakers cannot

tell what or who is being spoken about. This perspective resonates with the conventional

reading that, "Hispanic immigration…introduced language change…adding to the social

distance between African Americans and Hispanics" (Mindiola, Niemann and Rodriguez 2002: 14). An El Salvadoran immigrant also explained, "first when I come here, no English. My family say learn English, Americans don't like if no English, can make problems." This woman provided significant insight to the language barrier. English, from the experience of her family members, was a ticket to acceptance; without it unpleasant situations arose. Finally, a Black woman noted, "It just feels like when they speak Spanish it is divisive, right? I mean I have a uncle who is always like, 'they plottin' something' when he hears Spanish." This woman's account of her uncle's uneasiness around Spanish speakers resonates with the academic example cited previously which argued, "when Hispanics speak their native language and Blacks can't understand, the first thing that comes out of a Black person's mind is that they are talking about them and this is where the conflict comes in" (Mindiola, Niemann and Rodriguez 2002: 52). These quotes signify that there is support to the position that the language barrier can foster tension. Fluid communication is hampered, which results in harmful assumptions and distrust. Congruent to arguments posed by scholars, the language barrier creates social distance which can lead to tension. The struggles for political tension was least significant to participants, however still worthy of attention.

While an El Salvadoran excitingly proclaimed, "Obama's election was beautiful to me. I felt proud that another minority was president" he quickly followed this proclamation by saying that he was afraid Latino immigrants were expecting monumental change, like each person being granted citizenship. "This scared me. He can't do that in his first term, some immigrants might get upset, they had false expectations" with his election. Almost all participants regardless of ethnicity, legal status and gender were

elated when Obama was elected. However, local political issues were a point of contention. A Black father argued, "I am against bilingual education, our schools are bottomed out as it is, how can they afford that?" In direct contrast to this opinion, a Mexican immigrant asserted, "The ELL [English Language Learner] program help with communication, but they say it take money from other kids. It is a problem because no one backs down." Members of the community, from their respective positions, are split over the introduction of language acquisition programs which has led to divided political agendas and friction. A white participant provided her opinion by saying, "I have read there is considerable contention around that issue. I don't have any kids, so it's not that important personally, you know…but within the community it's a struggle." All of these particular examples demonstrate an adherence to mainstream explanations. The experience of participants tended to agree with conventional reasoning because individuals noted socioeconomic competition, the language barrier, and struggles for political power as sources of tension. However, many participants who reiterated conventional explanations simultaneously felt national media sensationalism impacted Black-Latino conflict.

Media Influences Opinion

Congruent to Chavez's contention that "media spectacles, generating extensive coverage on TV, radio, and the Internet" shape how Latinos are viewed by Americans, research participants felt the media can and does influence the opinion of Denver residents (Chavez 2008: 178). Jeremy Gutsche (2007) explains that the media has a responsibility, as a for-profit business, to increase viewership and elicit emotional responses. Participants seemed to be extremely media savvy because, after analyzing

data, most were aware that media coverage can influence how they and others view issues within their community. A Black participant noted, "Hey, I know Mexican immigrants are coming, the media doesn't have to tell me, I see it with my own eyes. Thing is, a blind person knows it by hearing it, the media has really made it big." Not only is it possible to internalize Mexican immigrants as the only numerically significant group entering the U.S., one participant felt the media was perpetuating links between Mexican immigration and increased Black-Latino tension. A white man argued "most groups have, at least, you know, to an extent, problems. But turn on a shock-jock news stuff…you know, you would think Mexican immigrants have come and sparked a war with Blacks." This sensationalism supports Chavez's "Latino threat narrative" in that, "the objects of this discourse are represented as other and a 'threat' and 'danger' to the nation" (Chavez 2008: 41). In an effort to elicit emotional responses and increase viewership, stories such as the murder of Jamiel Shaw III or Cheryl Green become sensationalized as representative of a nationwide dilemma. A Chicano participant argued, "ya, Blacks and Mexicans can have problems. I forget, you know, Chicanos can have issues with Mexicans coming, but I don't forget…*Mexicano* against Black…they don't let me." "They" was a reference to media outlets that cover the tension nationwide to the point where this man could not forget about it. While most respondents agreed instances arise in which Black-Latino tensions flare up, even to the point of violence, many also noted the role media has in perpetuating the perception of the conflict. A white woman said, "I can't blame the media, it's a worthy story, the immigration debate is big. It impacts the nation…Whites, Blacks…just at times it's like overkill." Sensationalized media coverage has consequences, especially for those unfamiliar with

the extensive coverage U.S. media dedicates to contentious issues. One Mexican immigrant said, "I try to like all people, I see on television not everyone feel like that back to me, I worry." An individual who is relatively new to U.S. culture and the intensity of media coverage and power highlighted the impact stories had on her mindset. In an effort to maintain the business of reporting newsworthy stories, participants argued the exposure to these stories was capable of influencing communal opinion. Furthermore, this inundation provides support for Chavez's theory that media spectacles are, in part, responsible for shaping how Mexican immigrants are perceived by Americans. Chavez argues that mainstream media has helped construct the image of Latino immigrants, especially ones from Mexico, as "an invading force from south of the border…bent on reconquering land that was formerly theirs…and destroying the American way of life" (Chavez 2008: 2). Personal experiences of interviewees mirror this perception, directly tying media influences to internalized beliefs.

While not all Latinos are Mexicans or immigrants, participants disclosed they felt the source of the growing Latino demographic was Mexican immigrants.[92] A Black man explained, "the first thing that pops into mind when I hear Latino is that trip they made, you know, coming from somewhere in Mexico, probably without a lot of water, dangerous, you know, coming here." A connection between Latino and Mexican immigrant revealed itself when his first association of Latino was an arduous journey from Mexico, one that is typically endured by individuals entering the U.S. without

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[92] Identity is a huge issue in this project. First, not all individuals from Latin America or people with Latin heritage even identify as Latino. Hispanic, Chicano and using nation of origin are all legitimate identifiers. This project is not trying to simplify the intricacies of identity for any group of people. Latino was chosen because it is a general term used to denote Latin heritage without defining citizenship status or country of origin.

proper documentation.[93] Significantly, this opinion resonates with the "Latino threat narrative" and the perception that Latinos are Mexican immigrants coming to the U.S. without documentation and posing a threat. The experience of Salvadoran immigrants furthers the claim that media attention has aroused a perception that Mexican immigrants are the source of the growing Latino population.

A Salvadoran immigrant explained, "I get called a Mexican immigrant all the time…it's like association right? If you have brown-skin, if you are speakin' Spanish, well you are a Mexican immigrant." This Central American noticed the correlation between skin color, and language and being labeled a Mexican immigrant quickly upon his arrival to Denver. Startlingly this man noticed that when he is called a Mexican immigrant it is done in a condescending manner, suggesting the media has not only reduced all Latinos to Mexican immigrants, but that the portrayal of Mexican immigrants as a threat has also been internalized. To solidify this connection the experience of the other Salvadoran interviewed must be included. This man said, "the U.S./Mexico border is focus, when people call me the Mexican immigrant I want to show a map…maybe tell them 'close.'" The consistent labeling of this man as a Mexican has led him to want to carry a map to point out his country of origin as a means of claiming not all brown-skinned Spanish-speakers are Mexican immigrants.

Being reduced to a Mexican immigrant becomes sinister and harmful when considering a prevailing notion that Mexicans are an invading force. Samuel Huntington

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[93] Chavez argues that once "people are dehumanized…it is easier to lack empathy for those objects" (Chavez 2008: 6). Even U.S. citizens who are Latinos get caught up in this harmful connation, being reduced to "'alien citizens' – persons who are American citizens by virtue of birth…but who are presumed to be foreign by the mainstream of American culture" (Ngai 2004: 2). Latino citizens become second-class members of society because they are "presumed to be foreign" or outsiders based on race and language traits.

sums up the claim by arguing, "the invasion of over 1 million Mexican civilians is a…threat…to American societal security…Mexican immigration looms as a…disturbing challenge to our cultural integrity" (Huntington 2000: 22). What is so significant about this theme is that the "Latino threat narrative" has been internalized by Black participants, increasing Black-Latino tension. A Black woman argued, "I know a lot of Black people here who believe what they read and see. You can tell because you will hear people say, 'Them Mexicans tryin' ta take over.' That stuff is on the news lots." Overhearing conversations that resonate with Huntington's claim that an "invasion" or takeover is being carried out by Mexicans reaffirmed for this woman that media coverage has been internalized with horrendous consequences. This is significant because it reveals media sensationalism has affected Black opinion of Latinos and has become a catalyst for tension. However, the influence of media was not the only factor agitating conflict. In fact, negative perceptions of Black people that were internalized by Latinos furthered division between the two groups.

Black is Negative

The fourth theme provides a clear connection between the existence of racism in Mexico and El Salvador and its contribution to Black-Latino tension. Data revealed that immigrant participants were not only exposed to beliefs that Blacks were undesirable while living in their respective countries, but that these social constructions remained intact upon their arrival to the U.S. This thesis contends that the impact of the racial caste system in colonial Mexico has increased tension by affecting how Blacks are perceived. This was demonstrated by highlighting the marginalized existence of Afro-Mexicans in present day Mexico, presenting stereotypical views of African Americans

that Mexican immigrants admitted to holding, and pointing out the existence of racial prejudice throughout Latin America. Experiences of both Salvadoran participants share a striking resemblance to perceptions of Black people Mexicans were described as holding in Chapter 3.

For example, when a Chicano was asked if he perceived tension between Latinos and Blacks he responded "it's like this, when I was little I even had Black friends, it's just my mom is from Mexico, wherever she got the shit from, well she didn't like me kickin' it with them." When asked if this individual ever heard his mother articulate why she did not like him associating with his Black friends he answered, "she don't trust Black people, she said in Mexico they are poor and do crimes you know, they do crimes to survive." Interestingly enough this individual said his mother came from rural northern Mexico where the Afro-Mexican population is essentially non-existent. Therefore, her prejudice is a testament to prevailing national perceptions about Afro-Mexicans in southern regions and imported U.S. popular culture which often posits Blacks as negative. A Mexican immigrant acknowledged familial influences impacted her perception of African Americans when saying, "coming, I don't know what to think…in Mexico my family say 'be careful, they attack Mexicans.'" Even though this particular interviewee exhibited personal growth, declaring "now I live around them and see anyone can attack or anyone can be my friend" the racial prejudice held by her family in Mexico affected her perception of African Americans. The most pernicious example that arose during the research process came from a Chicano who articulated, "straight up I can't stand 'em, I see 'em as less than me…I mean look how they act, just loud, ignorant, hot-tempered." An unequivocal dislike of African Americans led this

individual to state he viewed Blacks as inferior to him. Even though the individual would not divulge personal experiences that fostered his belief, generalizations that Blacks came across as "loud, ignorant and hot-tempered" followed the statement "I see 'em as less than me." Whether or not these judgments of Black people justify a belief that they are racially inferior, this individual shared his thoughts unabashedly. While Salvadoran immigrants were not as blatantly hateful towards African Americans as this Chicano, their perceptions were similar to those of Mexican immigrants.

When asked about personal perceptions of Black people, a Salvadoran immigrant argued, "oh you know how those *negros* are, you know, they are mean and they hate us and they're out to get us." This acquired notion, he explained, was commonly expressed during his childhood in El Salvador. He continued to say, "I never really knew why…but I do remember when I came to America I was very cautious around African Americans, I thought they were dangerous." While this man could not think of a specific experience that justified his perception, he was fearful of the danger African Americans represented. The sense this man had that African Americans were dangerous was acquired through socialization in El Salvador. The construction of Blacks as negative was prominent during his upbringing and led to him viewing African Americans negatively. The socialization process was so influential that this man, who had no negative personal experiences with Blacks while in El Salvador, considered them as a threat to his well being. Similarly, the other Salvadoran interviewee expressed, "from my home, I learn Black not good, dark-skin maybe slave, maybe ugly, maybe hurt you. Come to America, I stay away from that people so no hurt." This demonstration links the acquisition of racial prejudice in El Salvador to the maintenance of negative attitudes towards African

Americans. Thus providing an example of how injurious the spread of racism throughout Latin America is when determining Black-Latino relations in the U.S. While this experience does not define how race is perceived by all Salvadorans, it authenticates the argument of this thesis – the racial caste system that operated in colonial Mexico brought about a malignant perception of individuals with African heritage throughout the region which now has a damaging effect on Black-Latino relations in the U.S. Furthermore, the above examples of Blacks being equated with inferiority do not hinge upon competition for socioeconomic resources, language barriers or politics. The fact that prejudicial representations of Blacks were woven into the fabric of the individuals' families forces a need to address where these prejudices come from. The inferior status prescribed to African slaves during colonial efforts in New Spain was so deeply ingrained that it continues to shape perceptions of blackness in Latin America and cause tension between Blacks and Latino immigrants in the U.S. As Latino immigrants continue to shift demographics and increase contact with African Americans, tensions aggravate as Blacks become territorial.

Black Territoriality

The influx of Latino immigrants has created visible shifts in Denver's demographics. These demographic shifts have led to tension surrounding space. In particular, Black respondent's reactions drew parallels to American nativism in the form of territoriality or the desire to protect historically Black neighborhoods from significant shifts in demographics.[94] In order to understand how this intensifies Black-Latino tension an understanding of nativism must be given.

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[94] First, it must be noted that only four African Americans participated in this project. Therefore, their experiences and opinions do not speak for other members of the Black community in Denver or any other

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According to John Higham "nativism is an ideology: a rigid system of ideas…irrationally blaming some external group for the major ills of society" (Higham 1958: 149). This ideology allows for prejudicial thought to manifest into the blaming of a group for negative situations within a specific society. Colman Barry contends that nativism operates in America as "an attitude against ethnic immigrants…who are of national backgrounds other than the core culture nationality" (Barry 1958: 140). Historically within the United States, nativist ideology has been used to justify political mobilization against immigrant groups deemed undesirable. American nativists viewed ethnically diverse immigrants as a threat to the homeostasis of the nation and sought to exclude members of these groups by garnering support for anti-immigration policy. Mae Ngai argues nativists used census data to bolster their claim "that immigration threatened to overwhelm the American nation," and that anti-immigration policy should be implemented to curb this threat (Ngai 2004: 31). Initially American nativists rallied against "Catholic immigrants…Asiatic Americans, Negroes, Jews" and the cultural, racial and ethnic shifts they embodied (Barry 1958: 140). The nativists' desire to defend soil and their society created tension between the shunned immigrant groups and Americans. While African Americans are uniquely situated in the U.S. polity and "can be ambiguous in their views on immigration," experiences demonstrate aspects of nativism have surfaced in the Black community as Latino immigrants continue to shift demographics and spatial structures (Shulman and Johannsson 2004: 108).

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person for that matter. These are lived experiences, significant to participants, therefore they were included. By no means is this theme or any other theme trying to define human behavior or thought for a certain group. Also, there is debate about Black people's desire to even be included in U.S. society in the first place. Some African Americans still adhere to Black Nationalism or Black separatist thought. Hence, this theme is not arguing that Blacks feel fully accepted into the core of this nation's culture or that they even desire this. From the given responses there was a parallel to nativism in the form of Black territoriality, this parallel was worthy of discussion.

African Americans, who continue to fight for equality in all realms of American society, may not uniformly agree on immigration restriction policies. However, the entrance of Latino immigrants into Black neighborhoods has caused a backlash, creating tension as specific neighborhoods become embattled. Participant experiences provide testament to the existence of Black territoriality as a mechanism for protecting spatial structure. This study's data revealed on several occasions that Black interviewees described a perception that Latino immigrants were overrunning or altering certain neighborhoods that are primarily African American. This ideology, which resembles nativist claims that immigration posed a threat to American society, materialized into a desire to defend predominantly Black neighborhoods from the influx of Latino immigrants. Personal narratives will demonstrate Black territoriality.

According to a Black gang member, "this used to be all Black, if you came north of 'A' street that was our turf. Them Mexicans blurrin' lines ya dig?...I'm prepared to maintain what's been mine." Significantly, a claim was made that a Black area was being blurred or encroached upon. While Mexicans may not be the only group of Latinos threatening the racial integrity of the turf, this example demonstrates territoriality generates Black-Latino tension. This young man is prepared to defend his stake of territory as it is threatened by the integration of a Latino population. Furthermore, a former African American gang member who has reflected on claiming an entire neighborhood as "his" said, "it's unfortunate, these little guys don't own a brick in this shit…but ask 'em how they feel about the immigrants…'They ain't takin' mine, I'm a soldier for the turf.'" Turf or territory becomes the battleground and Latino immigrants and Black defenders develop an adversarial relationship as the space is contested. Even

though this former gang member is disappointed that there is a prevailing perception that the specific neighborhood is a possession of the gang, he noted adherence to this notion can develop violent consequences. A retired Black police officer reflected on his career patrolling Northeast Denver, including some areas which have seen Latino immigration alter the composition of previously predominantly Black neighborhoods. He stated, "I can remember responding to several calls in which a Mexican immigrant had been attacked. People can be opposed to change, I mean parts that were all Black, you got Mexicans dispersed throughout now…some real problems." The attacks were in response to the growing presence of Latinos in the specific neighborhood. In accordance with Chavez's "Latino threat narrative," immigrants are framed as an invading force; their presence alone embodies a threat. Space itself becomes a source of Black-Latino tension as data suggests a willingness of Blacks to defend certain Black enclaves from the change Latino immigrants represent. Experiences of Latino interviewees support the argument that nativist ideology has morphed into Black territoriality.

A Chicano gang member observed that "when I go to the 'A' hood, I'm on my toes. Never know when that heat might pop just for bein' there. Them cats don't like me…you know…brown-skin, stranger, that equals threat to they hood." The chance that "heat might pop" due to his outsider status racially was an ever-present reality.[95] His mere presence in the "'A' hood" could be interpreted as a threat by Blacks, who in his estimation are prepared to defend their neighborhood with violence. A former Chicano gang member claimed, "them '17's' pretty vicious too, they been turf warrin' with them

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[95] The phrase "heat might pop" is an *in vivo* code for the potential of gun fire. According to Charmaz, "grounded theorists generally refer to codes of participants' special terms as *in vivo* codes…*in vivo* codes help us to preserve participants' meanings of their views and actions in the coding itself" (Charmaz 2006: 55).

'CE's.' I mean there have been deaths over whose block is whose."[96] This Chicano went on to say that the Mexican gang has had multiple members attacked, sometimes killed, for transgressing the Black gang's boundaries. A nativist ideology that posits Latino immigrants as a threat foments Black territoriality creating interracial tension, which can erupt into violence at times. According to Allen Feldman "the recodification of mixed areas into confrontational zones transformed them into interfaces," or "topographic-ideological boundaries that physically and symbolically demarcated ethnic communities" (Feldman 1991: 28). Thus space becomes a source of Black-Latino tension because Black territoriality as a response to the entrance of Latinos created divisions or "interfaces." While data thus far would suggest Black territoriality is a theme pertinent only to the gang underworld, experiences of Latino immigrants reinforce its significance as a divisive force for Black-Latino civilian relations as well.

A Mexican immigrant said, "when I first come, and need a place, I look in Black neighborhood. Friends told me, 'you will have the problem, Black is Black they no want to live with you." This interviewee was discouraged by friends, who were also Mexican immigrants, from settling in a Black area because they perceived Blacks to be unreceptive. Moving into, what the "Latino threat narrative" would describe as invading, a predominantly Black neighborhood could create problems because his presence symbolized a threat. Thus even a Latino immigrant who is not a gang member represents a challenge that would result in Black-Latino problems from the experience of his friends. A Salvadoran immigrant interviewee gave evidence that Black territoriality is not an entity unique to Black gangs but palpable from Black civilians as well. He

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[96] In order to protect the confidentiality of interviewees, pseudonyms replaced the rival gangs named during this interview.

explained the location of his first residence was an established Black neighborhood and that "I have felt that animosity, that hostility from an African American…where I lived…made me a target for venting that feeling of defending turf." Malicious looks, aggressive comments and threatening body language were examples of the animosity this individual was referring to. While violence did not erupt out of animosity, this man felt hostility coming from his Black neighbors who were not gang members. Thus data suggests Black territoriality is source of Black-Latino tension, not simply interracial gang conflict.

All of these experiences, when taken together, reveal a new source of antagonism. As Feldman (1991) argues, space itself becomes an area of contention. Because data reveals Black territoriality as a reaction to the entrance of Latinos, credibility is given to the argument that nativist ideology is the foundation of the logic. While Black territoriality differs from nativism because it serves to defend specific areas as opposed to American society as a whole, there is a mirroring of nativism. The threat Latinos pose to certain Black communities results in a desire among Blacks to defend spatial integrity, thus exacerbating Black-Latino tensions. The final theme revealed a unique trend within territorial disputes.

Interracial Gang Violence is Situational

Black territoriality may be interpreted as the overall desire of Black participants to maintain traditional community boundaries. However, only in certain situations did interracial gang violence serve the purpose of preserving the neighborhood status quo. The following theme is significant because it highlights the situations in which interracial gang violence was used as a mechanism to defend Black territory.

Data revealed the key variables for interracial gang violence were location and situation. Thus, being a Latino in a predominantly Black neighborhood does not necessarily make you a target of violence for Black gang members.[97] In fact, there is a gang that is comprised of both Blacks and Latinos; specifically because only one gang controls the neighborhood and membership is not determined by ethnicity.[98] Examples will demonstrate how situation dictates whether violence is enacted to defend the racial exclusivity of a particular neighborhood or not.

A former Black gang member argued, "I still know all the players in 'K' hood. They don't tolerate that non-sense, if you from the hood you from the hood, regardless of race, ethnicity whatever." He explained the reason there is an intolerance towards racial divisions is because the 'K' neighborhood has only one gang operating within its boundaries. Therefore, the gang recruits both Black and Latino youth. A Chicano gang member who is active in the predominantly Black 'K' neighborhood said, "we brothers…bangin' 'K' it's like unity, you know…I got Black and Chicano homies down for whatever."[99] However, the same individual argued, "but right across 'C' boulevard you got major conflict. Mexicans moved there, reppin' they own thing…it used to be all Black turf, several cliques been at each other's throats for 'R' hood, race means which side you on." In "'R' hood" violence erupted because Mexican gang members who moved there claimed a different gang than the Black gang. Violent acts then served as "an important factor in shaping spatial structure" and tools for staking claim to the disputed neighborhood (Feldman 1991: 26). Therefore, access to territory became a

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[97] Instances of interracial gang violence were dependent on which gang operated in the area.

[98] How this phenomenon developed, and whether it is specific to Denver requires further research.

[99] "Bangin'" is an *in vivo* code which means gang-banging. A term used by gang members to describe being active in a gang and carrying out duties on behalf of their respective gang. Often times their responsibilities involve clashing, or banging, with rivals.

divisive factor for Black-Latino relations in the 'R' neighborhood. This situation

resonates with the argument that "as outside forces (e.g. other ethnic/racial groups) begin

to compete for…territory," existing gangs use violence to protect what they have claimed

(Melde, Taylor and Esbensen 2009: 565-94). A retired police officer provided further

insight to the situational implementation of violence as a tool for establishing boundaries.

He explained,

I was close with guys in the gang unit, even they were surprised by the close-knit 'K' hood 'cause there was two groups who formed one clique. Next door, multiple cliques, multiple problems…there, if you see Blacks and Mexicans together, they probably gettin' ready to fight or shoot.

Once again, because 'K' neighborhood had only one gang, cohesion developed between

Chicanos, Mexican immigrants, and Blacks. In turn, a harmonious relationship

developed because the spatial structure itself was not being disputed. The case was not,

and still is not, cohesive in the adjacent neighborhood because several racially

homogenous gangs fight to define turf boundaries. According to the retired police officer

the reason for the racial split and subsequent violence was "because the Mexicans did not

want to be incorporated into the Black gang over there. Efforts by the Blacks to absorb

them as the immigrant population grew created clashes." The reason the Mexicans

entering 'R' decided to remain separate was not determined. However, it is certain that

Black-Latino tension intensified once it became apparent interracial gang unification

would be unsuccessful.[100] This intensification manifested into gang violence as both

groups jockeyed for spatial dominance in the disputed area. Data suggested situation and

location were the primary factors contributing to interracial gang violence as a

mechanism to enforce boundaries. The interracial alliance in 'K' embodies uniqueness,

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[100] It is not known if the Black gang's efforts to incorporate the influx of Latino immigrants were genuine. There may have been a sense of territoriality from the beginning.

whereas racial division in 'R' shares similarities to territorial disputes described in Los Angeles, Chicago and Houston. It is significant that situation and location determine when interracial gang violence is implemented for several reasons.

Situational violence demonstrates the complexities of Black-Latino tension. The cohesion present in 'K' argues common explanations and media coverage do not apply consistently nationwide. Not always, as reports from Los Angeles suggest, does the sharing of space between Blacks and Latino immigrants lead to tension and interracial violence. While it is understood that gangs, culture and demographics in Denver are unique entities when compared to other cities, the formation of interracial gangs does challenge reports that territorial disputes are consistently at the bottom of Black-Latino tension. However, in direct contrast, data suggests Black-Latino tension in 'R' is the direct result of a territorial feud. Gang members employ violence to define spatial boundaries, simultaneously furthering racial divisiveness.[101] When taken together it becomes clear that generalizations about Black-Latino relations exist and are harmful to the development of a peaceful coexistence.

In conclusion the data offered similarities to mainstream reasoning on the origins of Black-Latino tension. According to interviewees, socioeconomic competition was an integral factor. The division created by the language barrier was noticeable and struggles for political access and gains also seem to be a growing concern. Furthermore, congruencies with Chavez's Latino threat developed because Latino immigrants represented an invasive presence that threatened the cultural and demographical status quo. However, not all data supported conventional explanations. Several unique

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[101] More attention needs to be given to how gang formation contributes to the separation of community at-large.

additions to the phenomenon of Black-Latino tension arose during data analysis. Black

territoriality as a derivative of nativism, the caste system's influence on perceptions of

blackness, and media sensationalism are fundamental to understanding the relationship.

The fresh angle developed from these themes challenges conventional readings as

complete explanations. Furthermore, their presence strengthens the argument that the

legacy of the caste system and media spectacles must be understood as influential forces

in shaping present day Black-Latino relations.

Territoriality among Blacks in established African American neighborhoods is a

result of "othering" Latinos. Mary Canales argues that when "we engage with others,

those perceived as different from self," exclusionary ideology may lead to tension

(Canales 2000: 16). Therefore, Latinos as "others" represented a challenge to spatial

integrity and data provides testament that Black territoriality became the mechanism for

maintaining boundaries. Thus access to and control over space surfaced as points of

contention. Additionally, several interviewees brought to attention the influence media

has in shaping community sensitivity towards an issue. Sensationalized media coverage,

whether to further business agendas, elicit emotional responses, or both, was cited as a

significant factor in furthering a Black-Latino divide. The media garners "anti-immigrant

sentiment…in response to what we think we know about the Latino threat based on the

virtual lives" or "generalized, iconic" representations of Latinos as invaders (Chavez

2008: 43). This anti-immigrant sentiment damages how Latinos, not just Latino

immigrants, are viewed and when these sentiments are internalized they damage potential

for cohesion. Lastly, and most importantly, personal experiences of both Salvadoran and

Mexican immigrants bolstered the argument of this project. Prejudicial notions about

Black people, obtained prior to immigration, have an impact on attitudes towards African Americans. Because an injurious perception of Black people was developed in their respective nations of origin and manifested into harmful impressions of African Americans there is credibility to the contention that an inherited racism via the caste system is a primary source of Black-Latino tension. Since Mexican and Salvadoran immigrants shared familial experiences that marginalized Black existence it is argued the caste system's influence was not limited to New Spain. Salvadoran interviewees demonstrated prevailing notions that African heritage is frowned upon in El Salvador, therefore connecting racial constructions in Mexico and El Salvador which was also a Spanish colonial subject.[102] These perceptions hamper Black-Latino relations before the two even come into contact.

When taken together these unique trends solidify the argument of this thesis. Conventional explanations, while worthy, are incomplete. Personal experiences advance the position that the caste system was the impetus for current prejudicial thought because even after the system was abandoned Blacks continued to face marginalization. Furthermore, because the media portrays Latinos as a threat, African Americans respond with a lack of acceptance for Latinos moving into their space. Thus historical impacts on culture and the media obstruct a peaceful coexistence before tensions surrounding socioeconomics, language and politics amplify the divisiveness.

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[102] Research on the experience of Afro-Salvadorans would create a unique comparison to Afro-Mexicans and the role race played in both Spanish colonies. While there was no official racial categorization system in El Salvador, data suggests Black marginalization is a reality in both Mexico and El Salvador.

CHAPTER 5

SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There are no signs that immigration from Mexico or other Latin American countries will slow down any time soon. As previously argued, the destruction wrought by the introduction of NAFTA in 1994 has altered the lives of subsistent farmers throughout Mexico and Central America to the extreme that they are being pushed to the U.S. in order to survive. As long as the economic imbalance remains unaddressed and conditions remain dismal in Mexico and other Latin American countries, the United States will continue to be a primary destination for Latino immigrants.[103] Also, a lackluster approach to immigration reform by politicians ensures immigration rates will remain undeterred.[104] Therefore, this project is extremely important because the influx of Latino immigrants and the generations of Latino U.S. citizens that follow will, without a doubt, continue to shift national demographics, increase Black-Latino contact, and possibly amplify conflict over space and resources. Identifying all issues, present as well as historical, that can agitate clashes must be done in order to reduce the potential for conflict.

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[103] Furthermore, because the insatiable appetite for drugs in America is not given proper attention, Mexican nationals will be forced to flee their homes as drug cartels slug it out for access to the U.S. market.

[104] While some politicians have founded their career on being staunch supports of anti-immigration policies, the laws they have advocated for do not address the true issue of immigration. For example, Arizona's SB1070 does little to curb the entrance of undocumented immigrants but has made it easier for law enforcement to profile and deport individuals who are found to be residing here without documentation. Thus, the law has dodged the true issue of how to fairly regulate the flow of immigration, and subjugated all Latinos to the position of second-class citizens.

While a media spectacle has perpetuated the idea that tensions are unavoidable and interracial violence will continue, this sensationalism does not define the relationship. This is not to minimize the tragic murders of Cheryl Green or any other victims of violent, racially-motivated hate crimes. But, as a nation we need to understand that when Cheryl pondered, "I wonder how I will be living in the future," before she was killed, her innocence did not allow her to see race as a dividing factor. She did not ascribe to the belief that Latinos and Blacks in her community were intrinsically enemies. Therefore there is hope for reducing conflict where it exists. In fact there is a potential for powerful cohesion if the two can mobilize around their shared oppression.

Historically Africans and indigenous groups of Latin America were both marginalized by Europeans. Today, the systems of oppression have shifted; however "commonalities associated with their minority condition (vis-à-vis opportunity and access) provide the grounds and potential for cooperation" (Betancur 2005: 164). These commonalities can be used to challenge the "white power structure" which has emphasized differences and conflicts in order to prevent "Black and Latina/o…alliances" (Sawyer 2005: 268). In order to reduce Black-Latino tension with the ultimate goal of helping to build lasting coalitions and cohesion, the knowledge obtained by the researcher will be taken back to Denver in an effort to continue progressive dialogue.[105]

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[105] It is not assumed this will be an easy or quick process. However, because the researcher has established ties to community activists in Denver, the dissemination of this information will not be impossible. Also, it is understood Denver is unique; the Black-Latino relationship there is completely different than in Chicago for example. Yet it is important to begin somewhere. It is hoped that potential suggestions for larger urban communities may develop from progressive conversations started in Denver.

Community leaders, some of whom are close friends, have direct access to Denver's Latino and Black communities as well as politicians.[106] Thus, bringing these influential members together and reporting the results can facilitate the dissemination of knowledge to their respective communities – knowledge which may help resolve tensions or unite the two around their shared oppression. The research and data that developed Black territoriality and the impact of the caste system offer new perspectives. By combining these fresh approaches with conventional explanations it is hoped a complete picture will strengthen solutions.

Black territoriality is a reaction to perceptions that Latino immigrants represent a threat to community demographics and culture. The logic draws parallels to nativism in that immigrants are shunned from entering certain communities because they embody undesired change. The protection of communal boundaries supports Shulman and Johannsson's contention that "worries about immigration go beyond concerns about the sheer number of people…in the U.S. There is a palpable fear that immigration is eroding cultural commonalities…that give Americans a needed sense of identity and purpose" (Shulman and Johannsson 2004: ix). While Black territoriality may have to do with cultural changes brought by Latinos, competition for spatial access is at the heart of tension and there are steps to be taken considering the Latino demographic will continue to increase.

First, Robert E. Park's theory of race relations argues there is bound to be conflict between immigrants and the community which receives them, regardless of the race of both groups. Therefore, Black-Latino tension is less an innately divisive relationship

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[106] Some of these individuals participated in the research project as interviewees; therefore they will not be named to protect confidentiality.

than it is a natural process of separate people coming into contact and initially experiencing conflict because of differences and competition for resources. As each side adapts to the new circumstances socially, linguistically and culturally, cohesion will develop. However, the accommodation period will take generations and does little to address present day issues. Thus active solutions must be provided.

The unique position of several community leaders allows them access to local government officials as well as community members. To make full use of the leverage these individuals have, several suggestions will be given. First, awareness of the extent of Black territoriality must be made. Not to single African Americans out as culprits, but to establish the fact that space is an integral factor leading to tension. Because conventional explanations argue conflicts are most prominent among "the lower socioeconomic classes in both racial-ethnic groups" this suggests a lack of access to affordable housing may be the validation for Black territoriality (Mindiola, Niemann and Rodriguez 2002: 84). Interviewees that described territoriality resided in areas of Denver that are impoverished. Therefore, the ability to move out may not be a plausible option. Perhaps responding negatively to the entrance of Latino immigrants, who increased pressure on access to housing, was the only feasible defense mechanism. As Denver continues to grow, this knowledge must be taken directly to district, county and state representatives, by community leaders who have access, to stress the need for increased forms of public housing. If the message is successfully conveyed, the Denver Housing Authority (DHA) can stress to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) that a shortage of affordable and low-income housing has severe consequences,

including heightened tension between Blacks and Latinos. According to a housing report

on the Denver metro area published in September 2010,

> during the past 12 months, the market has tightened…population growth and more stringent financing standards…have directed potential homebuyers to the apartment market. With few apartments starting construction in 2009 and 2010, rental market conditions are expected to continue to tighten during the next 12 months.[107]

Thus the rental market is under pressure, suggesting increased levels of territoriality. To

curb this trend it will be stressed to community leaders that their access to decision-

makers in the DHA must be used to address the shortage of affordable and low-income

housing because this project's data suggest spatial tension is a problem. Increased

housing projects may reduce perceptions that Latinos pose a threat because tension

surrounding space will be mitigated by increased access. In the larger scheme it appears

Black territoriality is not a result of a dislike of Latino immigrants but a response to

spatial competition. Therefore, the solution lies in challenging the system which is

structured to meet the needs of a select few.

Since "the white dominant establishment produces a context of race relations that

generates contention among minorities" a challenge of the dominant system is the true

solution (Betancur 2005: 166). Black territoriality enacted against Latinos is the

manifestation of two subjugated people struggling for recognition within a larger system

of oppression. Thus, while advocating for increased affordable housing developments is

the correct move to assuage current tension, there is a larger more pressing issue. As

long as the two groups are divided, the "larger racist hegemony" will go unchallenged.

Creating a powerful coalition that is dedicated to challenging the current power structure

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[107] To view this report refer to URL: http://www.hud.gov/local/co/library/research.cfm and click on the Denver-Aurora link.

is the true solution. Unification around a shared oppression within the dominant power structure could allow for the formation of this coalition. Informing community leaders on both sides of their similarities may help the message reach the grassroots level, bringing the two together through a single purpose. Addressing the implications of the caste system requires a separate approach.

To begin, most interviewees' first impression when asked about the caste system was that of the "untouchables" within India's caste system. Latino as well as African American participants did not know there was a racial hierarchy institutionalized in what is now Mexico. Therefore, developing an understanding of the system, its purpose, and the stereotypes it promoted are essential. The system was created by Spaniards with the intent of maintaining their elite social and economic status. Prejudicial constructions of dark-skinned people were developed to justify the superior position of lighter-skinned individuals. Acknowledging the true origin of racial biases is important, because in order to debunk stereotypes they must be understood as gross misrepresentations or fallacies. To accomplish this, the purpose of stereotypes has to be known. Then it will become clear that African heritage is not inferior. This image was constructed to justify their enslavement and horrendous mistreatment by Europeans unwilling to treat them as equal. Since data gave testament to the existence of a prevailing notion in Mexico and El Salvador that Blacks are negative this means no effort is being made to address this perception as false. The first step in correcting this wrong is to relay this information to significant community figures.

Many of the community leaders who will receive this information work directly with young people and newly arrived Latino immigrants within their respective

communities. By working closely these leaders can bring Blacks and Latinos together so that personal experiences replace socially constructed stereotypes of one another. No longer will a cultural perception of dark-skin as inferior define Blacks, because positive interactions will erase these. Carl Jean Uhlander (2002) links coalition to the actions of leaders – their ability and interest in collaboration. Thus it is important for the researcher to bring as many community leaders together as possible. Once the history of the caste system is understood, attempts to destroy the implications can truly begin. According to Betancur (2005) awareness about the actual condition of the "other" will allow for a convergence of common interest and perceived discrimination as a strong basis for coalitions. This awareness includes addressing the history of the caste system as a force for shaping negative perceptions of Blacks.

The future work of community leaders will ease tensions; according to some interviewees they are ready to move together, Blacks and Latinos. As a Black participant argued, "it doesn't matter who is moving in, there is going to be tension initially. In my opinion, things will calm down as we get to learn one another." To facilitate this learning process continued support of community activists and organizations is essential. These groups and individuals cannot singlehandedly address issues such as poverty and the prevalence of drugs, which Vigil (2002) argues are factors which contribute to communal divisiveness. However, the work they are committed to is shaping future community leaders, young men and women who may have the tools to address class and racial divides in this society. Hence these leaders and their foundations require greater funding, greater publicity and increased community involvement. To start the process, the researcher will continue to dedicate volunteer time to community efforts organized by the

Prodigal Son Initiative, a gang prevention and community activity center that he has been a part of for several years. He will take these opportunities to teach about the implications of the caste system, media sensationalism and territorial disputes to young people of all races in hopes that this knowledge will destroy prejudices and bring new generations together.

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