

BEYOND “FIXED” AND “MIXED” RACIAL PARADIGMS:
THE DISCURSIVE PRODUCTION OF THE HISPANIC AND
THE 2000 U.S. CENSUS¹

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Abstract

This essay juxtaposes the proliferation of discourse on and about the Hispanic in the wake of the 2000 U.S. Census with performative representations of American cultural identity by Mexican-Chicano Guillermo Gómez-Peña and Native Canadian Monique Mojica. In opposition to the new multiracialism of the 2000 U.S. Census, both anti-racist critical theorists of whiteness and conservative anti-Hispanic analysts decry the loss of a binary racial paradigm that clearly defines Euro-American culture against its non-English-speaking others. These theorists mistakenly blame multiracialism—and the Hispanics who define themselves in this distinct register—as a problematic threat to a one-drop racial paradigm, based on notions of racial purity. By contrast, multilingual, trans-American representations in Gómez-Peña and Mojica look beyond the false dilemma of mixed and fixed racial paradigms in order to criticize the assimilationist legacies of European coloniality. They comparatively reconstruct the traumatic history of mestizaje in order to envision alternative representations and distinct futures for the Americas.

Keywords: Hispanic; 2000 U.S. Census; whiteness; European coloniality; multiracialism; multilingual; trans-American; memory; representation; race.

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Resumo

Este artigo justapõe a proliferação do discurso sobre hispânicos no período que segue o pós-censo 2000 dos EUA com as representações performáticas de identidade cultural americana realizadas pelo mexicano-chicano Guillermo Gómez-Peña e pela indígena-Canadense Monique Mojica. Opondo-se ao novo multiracialismo do Censo 2000 estadunidense, tanto os teóricos críticos anti-racistas da branquidade quanto os analistas anti-hispânicos conservadores denunciam a perda do paradigma racial binário capaz de definir claramente uma cultura euro-americana contra seus outros, não falantes da língua inglesa. Esses teóricos erram ao acusar o multiracialismo — e os hispânicos que adotam esse registro distintivo em sua auto-definição—como uma ameaça problemática ao paradigma racial da ‘gota única’, que se baseia em pressupostos de pureza racial. Ao contrário, as representações multilíngües e trans-americanas de Gómez-Peña e Mojica vão além do falso dilema de paradigmas raciais ‘mistos’ e ‘fixos’, com o objetivo de criticar os legados assimilacionistas do colonialismo europeu. Tais representações reconstrõem, comparativamente, a história traumática da mestizaje, visualizando futuros alternativos e distintos para as Américas.

Palavras-chaves: hispânico; Censo 2000 dos E.U.A.; branquidade; colonialismo europeu; multiracialismo; multilingüismo; trans-americano; memória; representação; raça.

‘This autograph consists of the delicate lines or corrugations with which Nature marks the insides of the hands and the soles of the feet... like those that indicate the borders of oceans in maps...’

Mark Twain, *Pudd’nhead Wilson*

In this new era, the single most immediate and most serious challenge to America’s traditional identity comes from the immense and continuing immigration from Latin America, especially from Mexico, and the fertility rates of these immigrants compared to black and white American natives.

Samuel Huntington, *Who are We? The Challenges to America’s National Identity*

To spin the 2000 U.S. Census data to mean that “Hispanics” “nosed past blacks...as the largest minority group in the United States”² paints

an image of a horserace where ancillary groups compete for the prize of largest minority status. It diverts attention from the real news: that white, or strictly European-descended, people (with the exception of Spaniards), will become a minority in the United States by the middle of the century, if not before. Moreover, Latino/as (most of whom descend from Amerindians and Africans) will constitute nearly two-thirds of the U.S. population, according to existing racial definitions, by 2050. However, the U.S.'s racial system may transform itself in order to prevent the minoritization of the group that currently reaps the wages of whiteness. As this molting takes place, the question arises as to how the United States (and its imminent Latino/a majority) will define itself. In the rush to answer these questions before the new, multicolored majority begins to squawk, a proliferation of discourse has effectively lifted "the Hispanic" from his or her typical position of near invisibility and inaudibility in the tomato fields, laundries, restaurant kitchens, meat-packing centers, salsa clubs and schools of the United States, into the center of the white-dominant U.S. culture's "terrified consciousness" (Ramchand 224). The Census Bureau's decision to foreground the question of Hispanic origin in Census 2000—a treatment not applicable to any other racial or ethnic group—reveals a key aspect of the *discursive production of the Hispanic*. In the primordial placement of the question regarding Hispanic origin, "Hispanic" functions not merely as an "ethnic" or "racial" category, but as the very ground upon which a new white-pluralist dominant comes into being in the U.S.

Caribbeanist Kenneth Ramchand's phrase—drawing on Frantz Fanon's theory of decolonization—depicts the white minority's experience of "shock and disorientation" as the formerly oppressed group gains "awareness of its power" (224-25). Ramchand's phrase aptly describes the transformation in process in the United States, where the historically marginalized migrants and annexed groups of Chicanos, Boricuas, Mexicanos and other South and Central American and Caribbean immigrants will wield increasing power. Keeping at bay the new minority's terrified consciousness of its imminent reduction in status, a new discourse on race is interpellating the old minorities as docile

multiracial Frankensteins (like *Time Magazine's* 1993 computer-generated "New Face of America") who will parrot smilingly back to their makers a desire for a WASP mainstream. But cultural impurists Guillermo Gómez-Peña and Monique Mojica, from Mexican and Canadian regions of Abya-Yala respectively, challenge or parody this version of the "Hispanic" with their own ironic performances of colonial difference and its progeny in the Americas.³ These hemispheric perspectives indispensably challenge the terms and the stakes of the discussion of multiracialism and cultural diversity in the U.S.⁴

The promised end of whiteness calls for new attention to how the U.S. maps its racial demographics in order to prop up a threatened Euro-American hegemony.⁵ Facilitated by the elimination of racial quotas with the 1965 Immigration Act, and prodded by economic instability and state-sponsored terrorism in Latin American countries since the 1980s, Northward migration in the Americas has changed and is changing racial demography in the United States.⁶ These new migrants, documented and undocumented, have helped sustain a troubled post-industrial U.S. economy with low-waged labor, have renewed urban areas and are transforming America, including a historically Chicano-Riqueña Latino/a culture.⁷ By comparing responses to the prophesied future of post-whiteness from within critical whiteness studies, theorists of Hispanic and Latino/a racialization and migration, and Latino/a (broadly defined) performance art and literature, this essay counteracts the strategic elision of Euroamerican coloniality that has accompanied the high visibility of multiracialism, and in particular the prominence of the Hispanic, in the U.S. I ask: What are the implications of "checking all that apply," and of the primordial placing of a "Hispanic Origin question," where race and ethnicity tabulate separately? How do Latino/a artists Gómez-Peña and Mojica distinctly criticize Euro-American coloniality and racism without depending upon an essentialist, binary definition of racial opposition?

"There will be no majority race in America": The end of the rising tide of color in the United States?

In the mid-1990s, around the time that Bill Clinton formed a board to advise him on promoting better understanding among the races, the former President spoke publicly on the need to "lift the burden of race and redeem the promise of America," in light of the fact that, within half a century, "there will be no majority race in America."⁸ The long overdue public acknowledgement of white racism by Clinton, his expressed longing to create "the world's first truly multiracial democracy" and the subsequent institution of modes of multiracial self-identification in 2000 mark a dramatic departure from prior narratives of white racial purity under siege.

Cultural rhetoric in the United States has envisioned with panic the engulfment and contamination of Europeans and their descendents by a flood of colored people since the colonial period. Figures of aqueous flowing bodies, which Klaus Theweleit associates with proto-fascist male fantasies, dominate the metaphors of Euro-American relations with Amerindians, Asians, Africans and new immigrants. Narratives of "white captivity"—such as John Smith's *True Travels* (1624)—describe a lone European captured and yet miraculously saved by the sexualized girl who emerges from the mists of a waterfall, in Disney's popular rendition. Below I'll discuss Monique Mojica's parody of Smith's Pocahontas complex. The "slumbering volcano"—and its implications of uncontrollable flowing lava—appears repeatedly in the rhetoric of nineteenth-century American literature that addresses the possibility of African-American liberation from slavery, as Maggie Sale demonstrates. The key figure of pre-2000 racial definitions participates in this collection of liquids: "one drop of black blood" determined the legal definition of blackness of all shades since the Supreme Court legalized the segregation of public spaces in 1897. The 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act betrays the force of widespread Anti-Asian racism that fed off the rhetoric of an engulfing "yellow peril," and these images extend into the literature and film of the early 20th century (Lucas).

In the wake of massive immigration from Italy, Ireland, Germany and Eastern Europe, Lothrop Stoddard denounces *The Rising Tide of Color Against White Supremacy* (1920) and calls the installation of race-based quotas for all immigrants except so-called “Nordics” (British, French and Swedes). This book fosters supremacist sentiment by calling on whites to counteract “race suicide” in the face of massive waves of immigration by non-Nordic groups. In a parallel fashion, today Samuel Huntington uses a watery metaphor to denounce the bilingual and bi-cultural migrants from Latin America: “the persistent inflow of Hispanic immigrants threatens to divide the United States into two peoples, two cultures, and two languages” (“Hispanic Challenge” 30). Here the water flows with such strength and permeability that it literally divides the land, the culture and the very language of Americans.

While Huntington’s rhetoric demonstrates the continuing investment at the highest levels of academia in a distinct White Anglo Saxon-Protestant-derived culture to which all groups must seamlessly assimilate or be whisked downstream, the 2000 Census marks a “turning point” in this history of American racial definitions, according to former 2000 Census Bureau Director, Kenneth Prewitt (“A Turning Point” 354). Precisely at the moment when Chicanos, Puertorriqueños, Mexicanos and all the other migrants from Latin American countries constitute an undeniable political force for redefining and transforming U.S. culture, the category-defying “Hispanic” enters the floodlights.

“Mark one or More Races”: Census 2000 and the discursive production of the Hispanic

The term “Hispanic” represents the Census bureau’s imposition of a Europeanizing identity-category upon a constantly growing and dehistoricized group of colonized peoples and migrants in the U.S. The term first irrupted into the consciousness of Census-form recipients as a result of an apparently haphazard, peremptory and authoritative gesture ordered by President Nixon at the last minute possible before the 1970 census forms were printed.⁹ Previously “Mexican” appeared as a

racial category only once, in 1930—to the great outrage of the Mexican government—and never reappeared. Subsequently, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission measured access to government contracts with categories such as “Spanish-American,” and “Puerto Rican” in 1956, and “Spanish-surnamed” in 1969 (Davis Graham 291, 293). In addition to instituting Hispanic Heritage Week, in 1969, the Nixon administration’s creation of the Hispanic identity category forged a U.S.-based ethnic group, effectively severing people in what is now the United States from a long history of nationalist, anti-colonial struggle. As Suzanne Oboler insightfully argues, this government label effectively dissipated and misnamed the movements created by years of intense protest by Puerto Rican community activists and Chicano labor organizers. Splicing together two geographically, culturally and historically distinct groups and emphasizing their European origin and/or language effectively disarticulated the connections between Puerto Ricans and other countries struggling for independence around the world. The Spanish-origin identification, moreover, smooths over centuries of struggle of pre-Colombian peoples against the Spanish, just as it prevents Chicanos from counting themselves among the original inhabitants and inheritors of the American continent along with Native Americans of North America.¹⁰ The Nixonian term “Hispanic” places this group *in competition* with African Americans and Native Americans, and effectively launches a process of deracialization that has culminated with the contemporary model of “check all that apply” where Hispanic does not count as a “race”.

In its capacity as an ideological state apparatus, the Census facilitates the redefinition of whiteness and interpellates Latino/as into self-selected racial/ethnic groups, beginning in 1970. In 1980 and 1990 Censuses when Hispanic appeared as an “origin” rather than as a race, nearly half of all Mexicans and Puerto Ricans opted out of the state-imposed racial categories by marking “other race” (Almaguer 212). The “Race and Ethnic Target Test (RAETT)” conducted by demographers for the U.S. government, attempted to clarify the difficult variable of the “other race” option.¹¹ The official publication of the

government's fact-finding efforts reveals the effects of placing the Hispanic question before a multiple-race self-identification: the "Hispanic origin" category splinters and ultimately bolsters the numbers of whites; Hispanics cease to register in the demographic table as a distinct racial group.¹²

Data sources that rely on the Census foreground this issue: "Hispanic ethnicity is a separate data category from race. This number should not be added to race totals," reads Epodunk's characterization of Newark, New Jersey's Hispanic demographic in a city where people of color make up over 80% of the inhabitants.¹³ The new definition of Hispanic as a non-racial term transforms the majority into nominally white, and the "white alones" (a term that figures for the first time in the 2000 U.S. Census Bureau's report, and refers to the group that used to be simply "whites") become a minority. This new box-checking option, moreover, permits the Census to report whiteness in any percentage: the Census now gives figures for a group entitled "White alone or in combination." No longer does "one drop" alter the alchemy of whiteness and send the mixed race person into a segregated public space or category; racial mixture no longer justifies a despised separate status with a name all its own, such as "mulatto," "half-breed," etc.¹⁴ The Spanish term, *mestizaje*, derives from the Latin verb *miscere*, which in turn derives from the Sanskrit *micra*, literally refers to an adulterous mixing. In societies marked by the legacies of Iberian empire, light-skinned people have enjoyed arbitrary privileges and racial borders have been more fluid than in the United States. Now transmogrified into multiracialism in the U.S., a version of Latin American *mestizaje* has appeared in the north, with wide endorsements from right-wing politicians.¹⁵

Due to the combined disciplinary effects of the Census, racial profiling by Homeland Security and other police, and educational ideological state apparatuses, more and more Latino/as find it increasingly difficult to refuse white identification. Census documents' rhetoric indicate that this effect may be a goal, rather than a problematic abuse of

governmental power. The findings of Census demographers explain how placing the Hispanic origin question *before* the race question "increased reporting by Hispanics in the White category of the race question" (U.S. Census Bureau, *Findings* 18). Census-takers who previously refused to identify within the U.S. racial scheme (many of whom were Latino/a) identified as white in the new format. In the case of those who marked themselves as mixed-race, the Census reassures the reader, such mixing augments an overall quotient of whiteness: "the vast majority (over 80 percent) of the multiple write-ins to the multiracial category included White" (*Findings* 14). Moreover, "nearly half (48%) of Hispanics reported only White" (U.S. Census Bureau, *Overview* 10). This identification transforms the prospect of a new Latino/a majority. As the Chairman of the Democratic National Committee's Hispanic Caucus in 2004, Alvaro C. Cifuentes tells reporters, he "believes that talk of black and brown alliances only serves to discomfit whites."¹⁶ To deny or make it impossible to measure discrimination against Latino/as placates such fear.¹⁷ With the gradual dissolution of Latino/as as a quantifiable group alongside others targets of discrimination, Hispanics might replenish the caucasian vampire's lifeblood before he turns to dust.

After whiteness, a new face: mestizaje and multiracialism American style

Because the new multiracialism echoes Eurocentric imperial modes of racialization, in which annexed and immigrant Chicanos, Antilleans, Filipina/os, Brazilians have long been interpellated, criticism of the U.S.'s new "mixed" paradigm must take into consideration the legacy of Iberian coloniality in the Americas.¹⁸ Throughout the nineteenth century, Iberoamerican white elites' predicted the disappearance of African- and Amerindian-descended people through incorporative processes of *embrancamento*, *blanqueamiento* or whitening.¹⁹ Frances Negrón-Muntaner eloquently summarizes:

Whereas one drop of 'black blood' makes you African-American in the United States, one of 'white' can have the opposite effect on the Island [of Puerto Rico], where a person does not need to claim exclusively European lineage to access the benefits of whiteness. The greater value attributed to white blood in the Puerto Rican scheme allows for a larger number of mixed-race people to qualify as *blancos*, yet this does not diminish the fact that Puerto Ricans of African descent are socially encouraged to seek upward mobility by flushing out the inauspicious "black" blood in each subsequent generation, as the infamous 'mejorar la raza' mantra implies (43-44).

Because more fluid, the Iberian-derived racial stratification and hierarchy of categories that map onto increasing levels of miscegenation or *mestizaje* foster anti-Africanism, anti-indigenism and a belief in the possibility of assimilating to a white norm.²⁰ The new feathers of the U.S. racial bird have the potential to further divide the tenuous cohesiveness of peoples of African, Asian and Native American descent who are already balkanized by distinct colonial regimes and languages. Moreover, the implicit but unquantifiable forms of Eurocentric racism that usually are coterminous with a "mixed" paradigm tend to concentrate cultural capital in lighter-skinned hands. This process may therefore increasingly limit hemispheric dialogue between intellectuals of color while ironically facilitating light-skinned constructions of the darker shades as an intellectual object.

Literary-historical theories of "after whiteness" waver between optimistic longing for a world without white-supremacy and skeptical disbelief in a new multiracial dominant's ability to contribute to better prospects for the poor, disenfranchised, and darker-skinned, especially when we live in the era of the most diverse Presidential cabinet in U.S. history, yet 48 per cent of African-American men in New York City are unemployed.²¹ These theories rightly criticize multiculturalist ideology that merely provides a lambskin glove to cover transnational

capitalism's all-powerful fist. For indeed, the accommodating, not-quite-but-almost-white multicolored face staring out from the cover of *Time* presents little challenge to persistent structures of economic exclusion that closely follow racial lines.

In the mid-1990s, Latinos/as figured as devious culprits who unfairly accused whites of discrimination while receiving preferential treatment.²² By 2001, Latinos/as now also simultaneously figure as the key to reinvigorate the economy, salvage depressed inner cities and decide future elections, so Latino/as represent a market to be seduced and a human resource for corporations to consume. For example, in 2002, the *New York Times Magazine* features a pro-diversity advertising supplement with large ads by Kodak, the CIA, Delta Airlines, Coors, New York Life and Merrill Lynch.²³ Accompanying text describes "minorities" as a new market to be conquered as their purchasing power increases. The text calls for "cultural awareness training" for corporate employees, and corporate ads invite diverse applicants to apply to join their ranks. The rhetoric of the advertisements presents a seamless integration of new multicultural populations into existing corporate capitalist structures and the CIA, which here inserts itself into the company of transnational corporations. Merrill Lynch's ad promotes multiculturalist individualist investors: "Be yourself. Race. Ethnicity. Religion. Nationality. Gender. Sexual orientation. In the end, there's just variety of human being. The individual. All six billion of us. Be bullish" (101, see Figure 1). In choppy, isolated sentences, this ad suggests that multiculturalism will invigorate rather than challenge economic stratification so long as individualism overrides collective identity and memories of exclusion. Strategically forgetting histories of oppression, inheritors of the American history of imperialism, slavery, discriminatory immigration statutes and displacement onto reservations can imagine the past in terms of Merrill Lynch's quaint rainbows of multicolored fingerprints.

A harbinger of this trend toward incorporation and amnesia, the image of a futuristic multiracial (but white-looking) "Eve," silently

proffers a seductive smile on the cover of *Time Magazine's* much discussed 1993 Special Issue on "the New Face of America." Lauren Berlant's eloquent explication of the Special Issue's cultural work in the early 1990s merits citation at length because it illustrates a key distinction from our contemporary moment:

[The defensive racialization of national culture in this issue] sacrifices the centrality of African American history to American culture by predicting its demise; it sacrifices attention to the concrete lives of exploited immigrant and native people of color by fantasizing the future as what will happen when white people intermarry, thus linking racial mixing to the continued, but masked, hegemony of whiteness; it tacitly justifies the continued ejection of gays and lesbians and women from full citizenship, and deploys national heterosexuality to suppress the complex racial and class relations of exploitation and violence that have taken on the status of mere clichés.... After all, the entire project of this issue is to teach citizens at the core culture to remain optimistic about the U.S. future, and this requires the 'new face' the nation is already becoming not to have a memory. (207)

Berlant's stunning reading of the virtual mestiza Eve in shoring up a hegemony of whiteness through amnesia and ignorance of African American history, of native expropriation and of immigrant exploitation oddly fails to mention the now ubiquitous "Hispanic." Where exactly does s/he fit into this history? Where do centuries of Latino/a presence on this continent figure?

Critics of the new multiracial paradigm, such as Peter Skerry, have responded by condemning the multiracial option as the "silver bullet that finishes off the affirmative action regime...[but that] will not bring the nation to a state of colorblind innocence" (338). Skerry and others rightly sympathize with concerns of African American civil rights groups and expose the Multiracial Movement's lack of grassroots support.²⁴

But these criticisms betray a nostalgic longing for a more measurable, calculable concept of race, which implicitly renders problematic or invisible the nearly ubiquitous phenomena of mixing across historically constructed racial lines.²⁵ For example, Nathan Glazier, who proposes a return to a Plessy-style black vs. non-black binary in future census-taking, describes "Hispanicity," as "ever murkier and indeterminate," a "mishmash" identity, which is destined to become obsolete (326, 320). Although distinct from Huntington, whom I discuss further below, Glazier's retro-language reiterates the longstanding Stoddardian fear of a muddy, incalculable and contaminating Hispanic inflow that should eventually disappear. Unfortunately, multiracialism's critics rarely imagine ways to think about race that move beyond the false dilemma of the "mixed" or "fixed" paradigm.

The multiracialists embrace a contemporary critique of racial binaries and, at the same time, articulate a hoary version of race-free liberal individualism and freedom of multicultural expression. Mike Hill makes a trenchant critique of the double-bind and strange bedfellows created by current academic theories of post-ethnicity in the United States. He views the multiracial multitude as currently working toward the collapse of racial classification, and in service of the current right-wing attack on affirmative action: "The identity 'politics' of a post-ethnic academic left and the 'policies' of the multicultural right work in their unique capacities to rejuvenate the idea of 'America' as the exceptional and universal nation" (56). Hill astutely notes repeatedly the bitter irony of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People's defense of the "one drop of African blood" rule, or hypodescent, as the most appropriate definition of race (44,51). Hill traces a shift from critiques of racial fixity to a bureaucratic embrace of mixture: "fluidity, not discipline, is the governmental order of the day" (51). In the paradigm shift from "fixed" to "mixed," theories of mixture unto oblivion curry favor with government bodies, insofar as they offer no more effective epistemological grounds than biological theories of race for guaranteeing more equitable distribution.

While Hill's critique offers tools for appraising U.S. multiracialist complicity with right-wing and heterosexist agendas, his own rhetoric betrays a North American bias against racial mingling and mixing. Hill's rhetoric misplaces blame for ongoing racism by associating the act of *mestizaje* itself with a will to empty out the racial category: "The proliferation of complexity, difference and fluidity according to the state's (and the university's) increasingly promiscuous interest in identity politics effectively empties out the content of culture, or in the case of the census, of race" (162). Hill's useful Foucaultian critique of academia's role in the discursive production of the Hispanic, as a means by which power envelopes and constrains resistance to the regime of race, should be distinguished from the policing and education of sex. Hill's pejorative adjective "promiscuous" implies that a more monogamous, restrained form of desiring itself might bear less confusingly hybrid fruit. Rather than pinpointing the racism that relies on notions of racial purity, the rhetoric suggests that *mixture* itself undermines anti-racist organizing.

A hyperbolic example of the North American rejection of mixture, Samuel Huntington's xenophobic tirade against deconstruction, post-nationalist corporate elites, and "Hispanics" singles out this last group's promiscuous reproductive and linguistic ability as negative inherent qualities that contribute to the destruction of WASP American civilization. In answer to his titular question, *Who are We? The Challenges to American Identity* (2004), Huntington's "we" shuns a culturally hybrid future insofar as immigrants—with the exception, of course, of his prized Anglo-Saxon Protestant group—problematically retain their culture and thus give the U.S. more than merely a "new face." Huntington: "There is no Americano dream. There is only the American Dream created by Anglo-Protestant society Mexican-Americans will share in the Anglo-Protestant dream and in that society only if they dream in English" (256). For Huntington, English speaking forges blacks and whites into a new "native" unity. Willfully ignoring a long history of racial terror visited upon blacks by whites, Huntington stipulates

total assimilation to a fantastic WASP norm, to which, he insinuates, both blacks and whites already harmoniously belong. Targeting Latino/as' bilingualism as a cultural liability and, most egregiously, blaming Hispanics for a rise in white-supremacist "nativism," he makes standard English monolingualism (and the eradication of bilingual education and affirmative action) the condition for successful national economic and cultural policy. As punishment for Latino/as' outrageous spicing of the bland tomato soup of U.S. culture (according to Huntington's homely metaphor), Huntington proposes retaliation in the form of immigration restrictions by origin (as in 1924). Moreover, he advocates exploitative guest-worker or Bracero programs, whereby workers might be brought in temporarily without granting labor and civil rights. Huntington decidedly fails to challenge a white racist logic of purity as itself the problem.

What are the alternatives to "fixed" or "mixed" racial paradigms, that is, to two historic methods by which Europeans have consolidated their supremacy in a racial hierarchy in the Americas? The closing section of the essay briefly considers how Monique Mojica and Guillermo Gómez-Peña's pieces prophetically predict, early in the 1990s, the accusations of contamination and betrayal, the problem of disconnection from the past, and the current American identity crisis. As a soulful remedy and cathartic ritual, these texts perform an alternative to both obsolete notions of racial exclusivity, and to an amnesic, triumphalist multiracialism.

Surviving multicultural u/dystopias: memory, representation and transamericanidad

Representing the northern and southern ends of North America, Chilango-Chicano performer Gómez-Peña's *The New World Border: Prophecies, Poems and Loqueras for the End of the Century* (1996) and Native Canadian director/actress Monique Mojica's *Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots* (1991) prophetically re-member, revise

and remap the cultures and peoples ravaged by the European invasion of Abya-Yala.²⁶ Incorporating standup comedy, improvisation, guerrilla theater, performance art and popular culture drawn from advertising, Hollywood, Mexican *retablos* and Abya-Yalan ceremony, Mojica and Gómez-Peña usefully supplement American after-whiteness theory. Their productions (in which each acts, as well as helps write and stage) respond with wit, irony and long-headed memory to sometimes puritanical, sometimes malevolent, sometimes solipsistic aspects of U.S. theory about the Latino/a “sleeping dragon,” a portion of which we have briefly examined above.²⁷ Predating much after-whiteness theory and anti-Hispanic Huntington hype, these performers have been working their magic across the Americas and elsewhere without exoticizing the complex communities to which they belong and to which they direct their art. Restricting myself to a few examples from two plays from the end of the last millennium, I will briefly show how these artists’ treatment of memory and representation challenge the divisive, Eurocentric and dehistoricizing categorizations of Latino/as in the United States in the era of multiracialism.

Toronto-based playwright, actress, television personality and essayist of Kuna and Rappahannock ancestry, Monique Mojica interrogates the dominant version of Euro-American conquest and Hispanic identity by opening up colonial stereotypes of Native American women such as Powhatan Princess Pocahontas (made massively popular by Disney’s Central Park projection of Pocahontas in 1994) and Hernán Cortez’s mistress and translator, La Malinche or in Mexican slang, *la Chingada* (the fucked woman). By placing an actress who plays a Chilean-born refugee of twentieth-century state-terror and sexualized torture (“Contemporary Woman #2”) on stage with an actress who plays a contemporary Native Woman, and with 16th- and 17th-century figures like Pocahontas and La Malinche, Mojica’s play calls into question the common falsehood that Native Americans as a people vanished as Europeans “discovered” Eastern colonies and “expanded” westward. Mojica remedies the contemporary mestiza’s confusion by exploding cartoonish versions of her indigenous forebears.

Mojica's "Princess Pocahontas" questions the romance narrative that the white-dominant culture tells itself about the history of white-native relations. Drawing on perspectives of the colonized from throughout the Americas, "Princess Buttered On Both Sides" in the opening scene parodies John Smith's "Pocahontas complex," where Smith imagines the Indian maiden falls so desperately in love with him that she would betray her people and abandon her life in order to save his. In Mojica's opening scene, a campy bimbo Mazola Corn Oil label model longs to be judged beautiful in the Miss North American Indian Beauty contest. In contrast to this ridiculous character, the usually abhorred and denigrated Malinche/Malintzin commands a sympathetic view of her rage at being betrayed by her family, victimized by Europeans and then blamed by her people. The Nahuatl translator-turned-volcano responds to the traditional Mexican jibes of "puta, cabrona, India de mierda, hija de tu mala madre": "I spit, burn and char the earth. A net of veins binding me to you as I am bound to this piece of earth....Born from the earth, fed with my blood, anything alive here is alive because I stayed alive!" (24-25). The mestiza here represents survival rather than contamination and betrayal. Malinche denounces the Mexican response to mestizaje's interweaving of colonizer and colonized. To depict her as the source of contamination reiterates a European-derived (and patriarchal) conception of race.

Like La Malinche and Pocahontas, the 20th-century Chilean woman survives the unspeakable acts of violence that have shored up the invaders' hegemony for centuries. She recounts the military's insertion of rats into her vagina as part of U.S.-supported counterinsurgency tactics, and thus makes the connection between the contemporary and the colonial periods. By denouncing the treatment of indigenous women across the Americas, Mojica posits a distinct, self-determined future for the youthful Matoaka, which is the Powhatan name of Pocahontas. These transamerican examples revise the saccharine and balkanized version of conquest and its multiracial legacy, and move the contemporary women to declare in the closing lines of the play, in Spanish and English, that "a nation is not conquered until the hearts of its women

are on the ground" (60). The play represents women across the centuries, who have survived with their hearts intact.

If Mojica proposes to remember colonial history from a subaltern perspective so as to upset a Eurocentric, assimilationist model for post-colonial survivors, immigrants and refugees, Guillermo Gómez-Peña depicts a future without borders, where race-mixture and border-crossing defines the dominant. In the utopian/dystopian border region, the emergent leaders make this policy official: "No nation, community or individual can claim racial, sexual or aesthetic purity" (*New World Border* 32). Thus, the marginal perspective ceases to represent an alternative to the dominant and the only "others" are those who resist hybridity. The zany, schizophrenic characters in Gómez-Peña's post-1989 "proscenium" piece, "The New World Border," grapple with the complexities of difference beyond black and white without synthesizing a "brown" or "mixed" alternative. The ascendance of the "borderígena, meaning a native of the great border region" (33) provokes a massive identity crisis that productively unsettles a too easy embrace of hybridity.

Unlike the head of the Democratic Party's Hispanic Caucus, Guillermo Gómez-Peña strives to make all of the members of his culturally elite audience uncomfortable, regardless of background. Neither the "Thin and Gorgeous Artists of Color (TGAC)," "The White Women Experts of Otherness (WWEO)," the "Born Again Latinos (BAL)" nor the "Real African (or Aztec) Nation (RAN)" escape this trickster's jabs. Painting a multicultural utopia/dystopia that plays on the acronyms of a liberal government apparatus that has blatantly failed to guarantee equal opportunity, Gómez-Peña ridicules both the meretricious fascination with interracial love and the puritanical fear of mestizaje.

The performance portrays the new "white alone" group as a despised minority. Broadcasting in the wake of "gringostroika," Roberto Sifuentes, a.k.a. "Super-Pocho," describes whites becoming subject to the very violence which Europeans and their descendants in the Americas have long doled out or condoned, a fear that plagues whites' terrified consciousness:

They get paid less than 200 pesos an hour. They are derogatively referred to as waspanos, waspitos, wasperos or waspbacks. The basic rights of these downtrodden people are constantly violated, and there is no embassy to defend them. This alarming 'Anglophobia' is based on an absolute fallacy—that 'they' have come to take 'our' jobs. But the truth is that no hybrid in his or her right mind, including me, would work for such lousy wages. (34)

Whereas the U.S. Census 2000's racial categories pit white-alone and in combination against fragmented and fading people of color, Gómez-Peña assumes widespread impurity in opposition to the small group of white-alone "waspitos". Gómez-Peña's view from the "New World Border" inverts the world outside the performance by inserting the dominant WASP into the position of the exploited maquila and fast-food worker. A border perspective brings into focus the plight of transamerica and the end of empire, whence the real power lies with "the 'other America' that belongs to the homeless, and to nomads, migrants, and exiles," with "no embassy to defend them" (6).²⁸ But the arrival of a new borderless unity where Hispanics and WASPS merely switch places will not undo historical stratifications that continue to shape relations of power in the multiracial era. The utopia of multiculturalism proves meaningless if it fails to critique and change the legacy of economic exploitation.

While Gómez-Peña criticizes implicitly the lousy wages allotted to the despised white minority in this new border nation, the performance never moves from the playful sardonic tone into an overt critique. The "New World Border" only addresses the tragic dehistoricizing effect of border crossing through the silent symbol of lynching. The chickens' lynched, headless bodies suspended over the stage evoke the countless dead who do not survive the border crossing. In this stage set, the past presides over, haunts and provides a lonely margin to the world as border zone. These dead forms evoke the impoverished and unheard subaltern groups that will continue to

struggle when whiteness dilates to include the Hispanic, and especially as NAFTA expands into a Free Trade Agreement of the Americas. The hung chickens on the set of "The New World Border" also represent the soon-to-be past Mexican-ness of Gómez-Peña's character—el Aztec High Tech—a subject-position that miraculously survives the crossing, but only on the condition that he abandon a Chicano-specific history of struggle and suffering: "(addresses the chicken): Ay, your past is gone for good; my past is gone for good" (34). Stage directions indicate that Gómez-Peña "boxes with hanging chicken while repeating compulsively, 'I'm beating the Mexican out of myself'" (42). While still hyperbolic, and tragicomic in tone, his futuristic post-colonial character produces discomfort in the audience as he nearly comes undone as he faces this past. The silent hanging props shadow the all too common celebration of border crossing from comfortable academic chairs in the north.

The sorry pun (Chicano/chicken) pokes fun at the "Chicano Aristocracy from East LA), which holds that "Adam and Eve were the first *pochos* and that Chicanos are the chosen race" (46) and at the problematic tokenization where a Gómez-Peña is misread as spokesperson for an entire group or community. Refusing to preserve any racial/ethnic position as pure or untainted by the disaster of colonialism, Gómez-Peña asserts the ongoing articulation of transamerica as the border artist and critic's peculiar task: "We must rediscover our communities in turmoil, redefine our problematic relationship to them, and find new ways to serve them" (17).

Conclusion: undulating boundaries and the mapping of American culture

In step with the migrants who move in pursuit of a chance at survival and live as part of transnational networks after crossing the U.S. border, American cultural identity rushes, flows, seeps, oozes and glides past the boundaries and borders that the U.S. government has attempted to militarize, wall off and hermetically seal. Twain's simile evokes the

absurd prospect of drawing and policing a fixed boundary on the sea, "like the borders of oceans on maps." Likewise, new categories for conceiving, controlling and producing American identity will prove insufficient to either fix or mix American culture. The transamerican *latinidad* that figures in Gómez-Peña and Mojica's texts is marked by a critique of colonial representations of American history and culture. From the perspective of the colonized, displaced and the exiled, Gómez-Peña and Mojica perform *transamericanidad*, rather than a subjectivity defined by a single race, ethnicity, language, Hispanic surname, European region or nationality. Moreover, this culturally, racially, and aesthetically impure perspective defines itself against Eurocentric assimilation to "white-alone or in combination," and thus thwarts the U.S. Census' division of Latino/as into simplistic, U.S.-derived white/black/asian/native categories. By rejecting a system of multiracial whitening, the transamerican and drawing on the memory of transamerican connections, the displaced inhabitants of Abya-Yala critically perform not just the end of whiteness, but the end of white supremacy.

Notes

- 1 I am grateful to Tim Raphael, Barbara Foley and Eliana Ávila for comments on earlier drafts of this essay.
- 2 Felicia Lee, "New Topic in Black Studies Debate: Latinos," *New York Times* (February 1, 2003): 1.
- 3 "Abya-Yala" is a Cuna (Panama indigenous group) word that refers to the entire American continent and means "mature land." Aymara leader, Takir Mamani, has promoted the use of this term in lieu of the European name. See the Quito-based Cultural Center Abya-Yala's website, www.abya-yala.org.
- 4 Peter Skerry offers a useful analysis and critique of the multiracialist movement in "Multiracialism and the Administrative State," in Waters and Perlmann, eds. pp. 327-339.

- 5 Theodore Allen answers this question as to why the Census implemented this change at this time: "The fundamental answer, I would venture, lies in the problem of maintaining ruling-class social control, 'insuring domestic tranquility,' by manipulation of 'race/ethnicity,' in the face of this latest non-European immigrant wave that arrives in a country transformed by the African-American civil rights struggle of the 1960s" (paragraph 19). Beyond insuring domestic tranquility through a division between race and ethnicity, the shift reinforces a wedge between the two groups who would constitute a new majority of the historically oppressed by practices of white racism.
- 6 Frances Aparicio's point, that "Puerto Ricans are in the United States because the U.S. is in Puerto Rico" (14), applies to the displacement of Latin Americans toward the United States more generally.
- 7 Juan Flores discusses the heterogeneous and sometimes contradictory tensions within Latino/a culture in "Pan-Latino/Trans-Latino". Interpretations of the U.S. Census' projections of a new Latino/a majority can be found in Mike Davis' enthusiastic appraisal of Latino/a migrants' presence in urban spaces and the labor movement.
- 8 "Excerpts from Clinton's Speech on Race in America," *New York Times* (June 15, 1997). Derrick Bell, "A Commission on Race? Wow." *New York Times* (June 14, 1997).
- 9 Peter Skerry quotes this anecdote from a Census bureau official's oral history in *Counting on the Census?* (37-38; qtd. in Nathan Glazier, "Race, Hispanicity and Ancestry," in Perlmann and Waters, 322-333).
- 10 Oboler, 83.
- 11 Clara Rodriguez offers further statistics on the "other race" option in *Changing race: Latinos, the census, and the history of ethnicity in the United States* (New York: New York University Press, 2000).
- 12 José Itzigsohn explains that when the category "Hispanic" was an option in the racial identity question (as in 1980), over half of the respondents selected it and fewer than 1 percent chose the 'other' category. But because of divergent class and political interests, including concern over the undercounting and denationalizing of immigrant groups, the inclusion of "Hispanic" as a category in the Census lost its support and it became a separate question altogether in 1990.

- 13 Cf. <http://www.epodunk.com>.
- 14 Barbara Foley suggests that the elimination of the category "mulatto" from the U.S. Census in 1920 (having been included since 1850) may be due to "fears aroused among ruling elites by the revolutionary upsurge of 1919," in which light-skinned blacks played a prominent role. See her *Spectres of 1919: Class and Nation in the Making of the New Negro* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003): 123.
- 15 Mike Hill's research shows that "Newt Gingrich, Dinesh D'Souza, and George Will are all on public record in support of the multiracial movement" (51). The designer and promoter of the anti-Latino/a, anti-immigrant Proposition 187, Ward Connelly, also embraces the multiracial movement. While mere guilt by association should not damn the movement, the white male Nathan Douglas, in "The Multiracial Movement: An Uncomfortable Political Fit" *The Multiracial Activist* (<http://www.multiracial.com/>) betrays the conservative bent of his multiraciality when he characterizes questions about racial definition as apolitical: "I never perceived the [interracial] movement to be about political identity anyway, internally or externally. It was an individual identity movement. That's idealistic, perhaps, but to me it was always about something much grander than the crass nature of politics." This separation of "individual" and "political" identity becomes possible when the brutal effects of racism do not rain the baton blows of racial profiling and statistically higher rates of criminalization on the whiteskinned body.
- 16 Ironically, however, 80% of Hispanics report that discrimination is still a problem, according to La Raza's 2004 poll. Jonathan Tilove, "Democrats Woo Hispanic Votes: Caucus Chief tries new direction," (*Star Ledger* August 9, 2004): 1, 8.
- 17 Hugh Davis Graham notes that for the purpose of monitoring civil rights, "minority" status still includes all individuals who claimed both white and minority ancestry, according to a 2000 directive published by the Office of Management and Budget (298, qtd. in Steven A. Holmes, "New Policy on Census Says Those Listed as White and Minority Will be Counted as Minority," *New York Times* March 11, 2000, A 9). Graham describes this policy negatively, as Clinton caving into ethnic pressure groups and reaffirming the one-drop rule, a relic of slave codes and Jim Crow laws. I read this decision as the government postponing the gutting of affirmative action, while leaving in place the bureaucratic conditions that will eventually make such a gutting possible.
- 18 Walter Mignolo rightly notes that the very term "Hispanic or Latino" betrays Eurocentrism: "among the thirty million 'Hispanics/Latinos' in this country [the U.S.], there are already a significant number of Amerindians (Mixtec, Zapotec,

Quechua, Mam, Ixil, Kanjobale, and so on) who are neither 'Hispanic' nor 'Latino'. Furthermore, the designation 'Hispanic/Latino' also hides from view the large number of Afro-Latin Americans in Brazil, Colombia, Cuba, Haiti, Guadeloupe, and Martinique. Clearly, then, the 'Hispanic/Latino' label responds to and is a legacy of imperial conflicts and other legacies resulting from the making and classification of the non-imperial world" (101-2).

- 19 On "embrancamento" in Brazil see Skidmore. On blacks as "indios" see Torres-Saillant.
- 20 In "The Making of New Peoples: Hispanizing Race," Eduardo Mendieta offers a list of the various forms of miscegenation from Santamaria's *Diccionario de Mejicanismos* (53). These charts naming the offspring of distinct race-pairings offers a centuries old antecedent to *Time Magazine's* background chart in its 1993 Special Issue on "the New Face of America." Insisting on a sharp distinction between Anglo and Latin systems of racialization, Mendieta associates "race" with Anglo-America's "ideology of conquest, subjugation, and subalternization, of destruction and decimation" (55), and implicitly offers Latin America as a hypothetically racism-free alternative. Claiming that race "self-destructed in the Latin American context," he associates African enslavement solely with Anglo-American colonization where race "was a means to dispossessing others of their humanity so that they then could become beasts of labor under the 'peculiar institution'" (55). Rightly distinguishing between Northern and Southern cultures of race, this conclusion about race canceling itself out falsely props up the myth of racial democracy in South, Central and Caribbean America, where racism surely has not loosed its grip. American cultures also engage in anti-Asian discrimination by condemning Asian-descended persons to the limbo of honorary whiteness as the model minority, perpetually excluded and exoticized.
- 21 See "A Crisis in Black Male Employment: Unemployment and Joblessness in New York City, 2003," published by the Community Service Society (CSS) of New York.
- 22 See, for example, Peter Brimelow, *Alien Nation: Common Sense About America's Immigration Disaster* (New York: Random House, 1995).
- 23 *New York Times Magazine* (September 15, 2002): 101-105.
- 24 However, only 200 people attended its July 1996 Multiracial Solidarity March on Washington (Nobles 143; qtd in Skerry 329).

- 25 Matthey Frye Jacobsen usefully notes: "to posit a 'multiracial' category posits 'mixture' as only an occasional phenomenon in a setting otherwise characterized by racial purity. At stake is how to define and understand not only the 'we' who are being counted but also the 'we' who are doing the counting" (260).
- 26 I am grateful to Liza Ann Acosta for bringing Monique Mojica's play to my attention while jointly participating at a panel of the American Comparative Literature Association.
- 27 Davis uses this metaphor to describe the powerful and unpredictable Latino/a voting block (*Magical Urbanism* 151-158).
- 28 In many ways, discussions of race that focus on U.S. Census categories structurally obscure a large and most vulnerable group in the United States, the 9.3 – 11 million undocumented migrants, some 80% of whom are from Latin America. Economists at Northeastern University found 11 million undocumented workers in the new economy, according to Cindy Rodriguez, "11 million illegals in the United States: Impact of the Undocumented," *Globe* (Feb 6, 2001), whereas the Census cites 8.7 million and the Migration Policy Institute and the Urban Institute Immigration Studies Program cite 8.7 and 9.3 respectively. If these figures were fully included in the U.S.'s racial demographics, they would further and sooner tip the balance toward a Latino/a and people of color majority in the U.S.

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