The

Sociologist

May 2017

On the Cover: Processing line for Braceros at Immigration, El Paso, Texas, 1955. Source: United States Customs and Immigration Services History Office and Library.

Contributors

Eduardo Bonilla-Silva
Emily McDonald
Briana Pocratsky
Maria Valdovinos
Louise M. Puck
Lucy Y. Twimasi
Shannon N. Davis

The Sociologist is published three times a year by the District of Columbia Sociological Society (DCSS) in partnership with the George Mason University Department of Sociology and Anthropology.

Write for *The Sociologist*.
Send us your insights.

Contact the managing editor
bpocrats@masonlive.gmu.edu
for submission guidelines and
information on advertising.

http://thesociologistdc.com/
http://www.dcsociologicalsociety.org/

CONTENTS

Racism in TrumpAmerica

Eduardo Bonilla-Silva
109th President of the
American Sociological Association

This is an abridged version of a presidential talk to the District of Columbia Sociological Society, January 27, 2017.

This article is about race in *TrumpAmerica* and is oriented around two pressing questions: (1) is Trump's victory evidence of an increase in "racism" in the nation? and (2) is the problem of racism concentrated among poor, uneducated, working class white folks? To answer these questions, I will do four things. First, emphasize the need for theoretical clarity on what racism is all about and give you a taste of what I will articulate in my ASA speech in 2018. Second, argue that systemic racism did not die in the late 1960s with the collapse of Jim Crow, but was replaced by a more formidable regime—the "new racism." Third, contend that although there are several racial ideologies at play, "color-blind racism" rules the ideological landscape of the nation. I will argue that this ideology is the connecting racial tissue of how most whites think, talk, frame, and even feel about race matters. Lastly, conclude by addressing what needs to be done to advance the cause of racial justice in America.

What is Race? What is Racism?

Following the advice of the King in *Alice in Wonderland*, I "begin at the beginning" by addressing some racial theory. We cannot continue discussing race matters by accepting the premise that race is the fulcrum of things, a premise that reifies the existence of the category. Race is absolutely nothing without racism. Racism is the engine that creates the conditions for races to exist through racialization (Omi and Winant 1986). Race then is "socially constructed," but as is the case with all social categories, it is a never-finished product—it must always be recreated through practices in the everyday. This implies that "race" has fractures, imperfections, and ambiguities which allow us to do political work to change things. If race was a finished thing, there would be no point in doing politics in the race arena as actors' views, postures, and likely actions would be preordained.

But beginning our conversations on racism rather than on race is not enough. We must still do something harder: challenge the dominant narrative regarding what racism is all about, the racism-is-prejudice perspective which focuses attention on the individual-level analysis of people's attitudes, motivations, and behaviors. This perspective, so evident in the last election cycle, does not allow us to justify the agenda and politics the moment requires. The more we focus on individual prejudice, the more we will continue advocating for education, diversity training, and racial dialogues or "beer summits" as the solutions to racism. We must find ways of advancing a structural interpretation of racism. We must explain that racism is about racial domination or racial rule. And because racism is anchored on systemic advantages for whites, whites are vested in maintaining the (racial) world as it is (Bonilla-Silva 1997).

A Taste of Feeling Race

Although I believe it is crucial that we anchor our analysis of race matters in a structural-materialist theory, we must expand our notion of the "material." Why? Because humans do not survive on bread alone! Once any social category is created, it is also charged emotionally. Simply put: one cannot create social divisions without imbuing and bonding the actors emotionally.

…although some of the practices may not be covert and subtle, they are so by virtue of being invisible to the white population.

Hence, racialized actors pursue not just "objective" race-based interests, but also subjective or emotional ones. (On this, please see the book by Paula Ionide, *The Emotional Politics of Racism*.)

I have labeled the Post-Civil Rights racial regime as the "new racism" and argued that its dominant practices, unlike those typical of the Jim Crow period, tend to be subtle, institutional, and seemingly non-racial (Bonilla-Silva 2001). For example, whereas school or residential segregation were maintained in the past through direct exclusionary strategies, today they are reproduced in a seemingly "non-racial" fashion. Neighborhood segregation, for instance, is accomplished through steering by realtors, white property owners relying on white networks to get renters or buyers or using clever strategies to exclude minority clients, and redlining by banks.

In *White Supremacy and Racism in the Post-Civil Rights Era* (2001), I added an important detail to my original argument—the idea that although some of the practices may not be covert and subtle,

they are so by virtue of being invisible to the white population. For example, Post-Civil Rights' racial control practices (police brutality, racial profiling, and community surveillance) although not "overwhelmingly covert" are part of the "new racism" because (1) they are perpetrated by state officers (actors regarded as objective and legitimate by whites), (2) the agencies in charge (police departments and criminal justice system) are deemed racially neutral, (3) whites perceive crime as black/brown, hence, whatever happens to "them," it is okay, and (4) the incidents that happen (e.g., Rodney King, A. Diallo, Trayvon, etc.) and garner public attention are treated as "isolated cases."

Police brutality and shootings have been a consistent fact of life for people of color in America.

Source: pixabay.com

Cell phones and social media have made these incidents more visible, but nonetheless, this violence is regarded by most whites as legitimate and non-racist. Perhaps since the murder of Trayvon Martin, we have focused intensely on one aspect of the "new racism" control tactics: police brutality. This is expected as social mobilization always follows incidents that galvanize people's attention and we have had plenty of opportunities. Watching the news gives the impression that we are indeed in what Michelle Alexander (2010) labels in her book as the "New Jim Crow," but I want to suggest that this interpretation limits our ability to understand what is going on, and of what we should do.

First, although we think police brutality and shootings of black folks are on the rise, cause-of-death data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reveal that between 1968 and 2011, blacks were, on average, 4.2 times more likely to be killed by cops than whites, so police brutality is not a new concern (CDC 2012). Police brutality and shootings have been a consistent fact of life for people of color in America. Second, the vilification of black and brown folks by regular white folks, which allows them to be okay with the violence inflicted upon us by the police, began way back but intensified in the 1960s. This vilification has crystallized in a controlling image that Kathryn Russell-Brown labels as the "criminalblackman" (1998) as well as what historian Heather Ann Thompson calls the "criminalization of urban space" (Thompson 2010). Both images have facilitated measures, laws, and policing tactics that have produced our mass incarceration system.

Thus, Donald Trump's claim to bring back "law and order" and his endorsement of tactics such as "stop and frisk" are not new developments. Finally, and this is key, the bulk of racial practices and behaviors that keep folks of color in "their (new but still subordinated) place," are of the new racism or hegemonic variety. Although our focus on violence is understandable, we need to be analytical and political about how racial inequality is reproduced in this period. We are not in a New Jim Crow Era as racial domination in schools, jobs, stores, or in the streets is mostly, albeit certainly not exclusively, accomplished through "now you see it, now you don't" tactics.

When folk of color are asked "May I help you?" at Nordstrom, or told by a teacher that they may be good in physical education, or declined for a job or denied admission to college based on exams that do not predict much, or charged more for a loan independent of their financial profile, or steered into a different neighborhood by a smiling realtor, or told that their accomplishments on the job are due to affirmative action, we must understand that all of these things are examples of the "new racism." Although it may not seem politically sexy to organize against these slippery things, they are the core practices that maintain the racial monster we face these days.

…the nasty racial discourse of the past has been, for the most part, replaced by a more "civilized racism" that I label "color-blind racism."

Contemporary Racial Ideological Field

In my book, *Racism Without Racists* (2010), I argue that a new racial ideology dominates the landscape: color-blind racism. However, no ideology, racial or otherwise, rules any polity at any point in time a hundred percent. This means that although color-blind racism is hegemonic, there are still strong pockets of old-fashioned, Jim Crow-type prejudice out there.

All Americans are racialized subjects, hence, have racial viewpoints.

How many whites still hold old-fashioned racist beliefs? It is hard to tell with precision, but I guesstimate, based on survey results and recent political outcomes, that about between eight to ten percent of whites do not sing the color-blind song. This does not mean that 8-10 percent of whites belong to the Klu Klux Klan or are "fascist"—a term used very lightly in this last election cycle.

But it means that a non-trivial number of whites still hold outmoded racial views, so we must pay attention to this segment of the white community. "Deplorables," as Hillary Clinton referred to them during the campaign, exist, but they are not fifty percent of the white population. Not all whites spewing the old-fashioned racial poison do so in the same way as whites did in yesteryears! Variations in tone and articulations with elements of color-blindness abound.

For instance, although Donald Trump made many racially crude remarks throughout the campaign and had a record of racial discrimination in housing[1] and in dealings with black employees,[2] and has allegedly odious racist personal views (Johnston 2016), he insisted in the campaign that he was "the least racist person you'd ever met," that he loved Mexicans and that Mexicans loved him back—which he demonstrated by eating a taco salad during "Cinco de Mayo," and by insisting that, "I love the Muslims. I think they're great people." More significantly, his racialized articulation was coded by the media and by most journalists as not "really racist," which contrast with how they dealt with characters such as Donald Sterling (Clippers), the Nevada rancher Clyven Bundy, David Duke, or Richard Spencer (Alt-Right leader).

The White Color of Color-Blind Racism

My main claim in *Racism Without Racists* is that the nasty racial discourse of the past has been, for the most part, replaced by a more "civilized racism" that I label "color-blind racism." By this I mean the new dominant racial ideology anchored in the abstract extension of the principles of liberalism to racial matters.

This ideology is comprised of frames, style, and racial stories (for definitions, see chapters 3, 4, and 5 in the book). The central frames of this ideology are "minimization of racism," "cultural racism," "naturalization," and "abstract liberalism." Combined, these frames amount to this: whites believe that racism is gone, that people of color do not do well because of cultural deficiencies, and that programs assisting people of color represent reverse racism. In this section I will focus on the minimization of racism frame.

Despite the hoopla in the media and by sociologically-inclined pundits, the core racial views of poor, working, and middle class whites are actually quite similar.

Whites do not believe that discrimination is why nonwhites fare worse than whites in America. Instead, they believe that "it's because of their culture," "class," "legacies from slavery," "Mexican/Puerto Rican backward culture," "culture of segregation," "lack of social capital," welfare dependency, or plain laziness. For whites, the plight of people of color is due to "Anything but racism!" An example of this is Sandra, a retail salesperson in her early forties, who explained her view on discrimination as follows:

I think if you are looking for discrimination, I think it's there to be *found*. But if you make the best of any situation, and if *you don't use it as an excuse*… I think sometimes it's an excuse because people felt they deserved a job, whatever! I think if things didn't go their way I know a lot of people have a tendency to use prejudice or racism or whatever as an *excuse.* I think in some ways, y*es* there is (sic) people who are prejudiced. It's not only blacks, it's about Spanish, or women. In a lot of ways there [is] a lot of *reverse* discrimination. It's just what you wanna make of it (Bonilla-Silva 2010: 46).

This needs very little comment. Since most whites, like Sandra, believe discrimination has all but

disappeared, they regard minorities' claims of discrimination as excuses or as minorities playing the infamous "race card."

I could say more about the style, particularly semantic moves such as "I am not a racist, but…" or "Some of my best friends are black…" and racial stories of color-blind racism such as "I didn't own any slave" and "The past is the past," but I must move on and address the race/class question. Despite the hoopla in the media and by sociologically-inclined pundits, the core racial views of poor, working, and middle class whites are actually quite similar. This in part explains why most whites voted for Trump, including the millennials. (As an aside, I must point out that analytically, voting for Hilary or for Obama, cannot be read, as so many have done, as evidence of people not subscribing to a particular racial ideology. All Americans are racialized subjects, hence, have racial viewpoints. It is my belief that the majority of whites, whether Democrat or Republican, subscribe to color-blind racism, although most likely, Republicans do so with more intensity and nastiness.)

Trump's victory denotes the ebb and flow of the race-class question under the new racism regime.

The following examples illustrate the similarities in the racial views of working and middle-class whites. First is Bob Hardey, Mayor of the City of Westlake in Louisiana, in Arlie Hochschild's book *Strangers in their Own Land*:

I have had enough of *poor me*. I don't like the government paying unwed mothers to have a lot of kids, and I don't go for affirmative action. I met this one black guy who complained he couldn't get a job. Come to find out he'd been to *private* school. I went to public school like everyone else I know. No one should be getting a job to fill some mandated racial quota or getting state money not to work (Hochschild 2016: 92).

How different is the Mayor's view from that of John Avery, a worker in Youngstown, OH, interviewed in Joel Gest's book, *The New Minority*?

There are a lot of people who abuse [welfare]. I am running around busting my hump, while another guy sits on his porch. That's not right. I get food assistance and medical from the government because of my daughter. But I go to work every day, even after I broke my leg. You have to earn it [People on welfare] are driving around in new cars and I can't even afford a vehicle. The government pays their rent and utilities, and so they spend the cash on gold chains and a Cadillac, when I can barely afford my Cavalier…People will take advantage of things any way they can (Gest 2016: 95).

Source: pixabay.com

And these views are not new as we have had the data on the racial views of white workers and middle-class folks for years. For instance, Al Ricardi, a taxi driver quoted in Lillian Rubin's *Families on the Fault Line* (1994), stated:

Those people, they are hollering all the time about discrimination. Maybe once a long time ago that was true, but not now. The problem is that a lot of those people are lazy. Theirs is plenty of opportunities, but you've got to be willing to work hard.

When pressed to define who "those people" are, he said:

Aw, c'mon, you know who I am talking about. It's mostly the black people, but the Spanish ones, too.

My point on the similarities in the racial views of poor and middle-class whites is not new. Barbara Ehrenreich said the same thing in her 1990 book, *Fear of Falling: The Inner Life of the Middle Class*: "On most of the key "backlash" issues, as defined by the media, it was hard to distinguish the blue-collar people singled out by the news magazines from the rest of the Middle Americans" (104). She cites a Massachusetts Institute of Technology Professor in a story, based on a poll commissioned by *Newsweek*, as saying that successful blacks were "almost all light-colored" and an investment advisor who defined "law and order" for the pollsters as, "Get the niggers. Nothing else" (105). In my own data, gathered in the late 1990s, John II, a retired architect, said about reparations that,

Not a nickel, not a nickel. I think that's ridiculous. I think that is a great way to get the black vote. But I

think that's a ridiculous assumption because those that say we should pay them because they were slaves back in the past and yet, how often do you hear about the people who were white that were slaves, say, Boy we should get reparations, the Irish should get reparations from the English (Bonilla-Silva 2010: 79).

…we must appreciate the centrality of social movements in fighting racism.

Conclusion

I return to the questions I posed at the outset and discuss what is to be done. First, is Trump's victory evidence of an increase in "racism"? The right question is not if we have more or less "racism" today, but whether systemic racism is still in place. My answer to this more theoretically clear question is that we have had a new racial regime in town for a while: the new racism. Trump's victory denotes the ebb and flow of the race-class question under the new racism regime. Our present situation, in fact, is remarkably similar (including the reaction of the liberal-progressive community) to Regan's victory in 1980 and, to a lesser extent, to Bush's victory in 2000.

Second, are poor whites the reason for why we have racism in the nation and for Trump's victory? As I argued, we should not vilify poor and working whites for Trump's victory or for racism in the nation (racism is society-wide), but I am not suggesting a return to the "workers of the world" approach to politics (class over race) or the empathy-without politics route advocated by Hochschild either. What the moment requires is a more nuanced understanding of the race/class nexus in contemporary America. What we desperately need is an analysis to help us to forge the politics necessary to work with the "white masses."

Now a few words on what is to be done to address the seemingly beyond race and racism (as practices and as ideology) we face today as well as the harsher, more direct version practiced by poor whites and white workers. First, we must preach that racism is not about good and bad people, but about an institutional racial order that benefits some at the detriment of others. Second, if racism is structural, we must fight the nonsense that tolerance, teaching folks to be good people, or organizing "beer summits" are the tools to fight racism. To be clear, being nice and tolerant is good, but none of these things alone will change the basics of our racial order.

For that to happen we need a serious social transformation. Third, since 1980, we all but abandoned the white working class. We viewed them as Archie Bunkers and stopped doing what radical and ethical people should always do: work with as many people as one can in the effort to build the "new society." The white working class, as much as the white middle class, is deeply racialized, so I am not saying the work will be easy. However, they have fractures and ambivalences that can be exploited.

Gest, for instance, suggests that in areas where black and white workers live together and interact meaningfully, class tends to become a more salient identity.

…although we must work on raising the consciousness of the people, we must also educate ourselves. This means moving *beyond liberalism* and becoming anti-racists…

Others, such as David Roediger (2007) and Joel Olson (2004), advocate for an abolitionist-democratic movement from below—a politics committed to expanding freedom through the dissolution of whiteness. But whatever we do, we cannot abandon forty to fifty percent of the people as that leaves the door wide open for Trump-like politicos to play the white ethno-nationalist card.

I end by outlining a specific plan of action for us, sociologists committed to creating a racially just society. First, we must appreciate the centrality of social movements in fighting racism. Given that racism is structural, the bulk of our efforts should be dedicated toward organizing people for social change. (I know we want to do "more research" but research has not freed anyone in history!) Second, although we must do social justice work where we work and live, it is also time to get out of our comfort zone. The struggle for racial justice requires that we do socio-political work in Youngstown, Ohio; Warren, Michigan; Erie County, Pennsylvania; Gary, Indiana; the "rural" counties of Wisconsin; and in the South. Lastly, although we must work on raising the consciousness of the people, we must also educate ourselves. This means moving *beyond liberalism* and becoming anti-racists, and anti-racism begins by

retooling ourselves—recreating how we live our life, with whom we associate, and what we do about systemic, cultural, and personal racism. The time for theoretical progressiveness is over! It is time for all of us to recommit to the struggle; it is time, once again, for action. In the words of black abolitionist Frederick Douglas, "Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will."

Notes

1. He was sued twice by the Department of Justice in the 1970s (Kranish and O'Harrow Jr. 2016).
2. He was fined in the 1990s by the New Jersey Casino Control Commission for forcing black dealers out when high rollers were around (White 2016).

References

Alexander, Michelle. 2010. *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. New York: The New Press.

Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo. 1997. "Rethinking racism: toward a structural interpretation" *American Sociological Review* 62:465-80.

____. 2001. *White Supremacy and Racism in the Post-Civil Rights Era*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner.

____. 2010. *Racism Without Racist*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2012. *Multiple Cause of Death Data*. Atlanta: United States Department of Health and Human Services.

Ehrenreich, Barbara. 1990. *Fear of Falling: The Inner Life of the Middle Class*. New York: HarperCollins.

Gest, Justin. 2016. The New Minority: White Working Class Politics in an Age of Immigration and Inequality. New York: Oxford University Press.

Hochschild, Arlie Russell. 2016. *Strangers in their Own Land*. New York: The New Press.

Ionide, Paula. 2015. *The Emotional Politics of Racism: How Feelings Trump Facts in an Era of Colorblindness*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Johnston, David Cay. 2016. *The Making of Donald Trump*. New York: Melville House.

Kranish, Michael and Robert O'Harrow Jr. 2016. "Inside the Government's Racial Bias Case Against Donald Trump's Company, and How He Fought It," *The Washington Post, January 23*.

Olson, Joel. 2004. *Abolition of White Democracy*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Omi, Michael and Howard Winant 1986. *Racial Formation in the United States: from the 1960s to the 1990s*. New York: Routledge.

Roediger, David. 2007. *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*. New York: Verso.

Russell-Brown, Katheryn. 1998. *The Color of Crime: Racial Hoaxes, White Fear, Black Protectionism, Police Harassment and Other Macroaggressions*. New York: New York University Press.

Thompson, Heather Ann. 2010. "Why Mass Incarceration Matters: Rethinking Crisis, decline, and Transformation in Postwar American History" *The Journal of American History* 703-734.

White, Abbey. 2016. "A Trump-Owned Casino Was Fined For Agreeing to Keep Black Employees Away from a Racist High Roller," *Paste*, March 10.

2017 DCSS Awardees

The Stuart A. Rice Merit Award for Career Achievements

José Casanova
Professor in the Departments of Sociology and Theology, Georgetown University

The Morris Rosenberg Award

John Curtis
Consulting Researcher

Irene B. Taeuber Graduate Student Paper Awards

Brittany N. Dernberger, PhD Student
University of Maryland

Christian Rafael Suero, MA Student
George Mason University

Sociology & Activism Putting the Social in Science: Sociologists March

Emily McDonald

Earth Day 2017 will be remembered for more than the usual day of service, recycling drives, and tree planting. On the morning of April 22, thousands of people descended on the National Mall (in Washington, DC) for the March for Science while over 600 satellite marches occurred around the globe. Signs ranged from "Grab Him By the Period Table" referencing the abhorrent Access Hollywood tapes that surfaced during the 2016 presidential campaign, to "I'm With Her," a clear play on the Clinton campaign with an arrow pointing to the planet.

Among the signs of chemistry, biology, and environmental puns were some familiar references to the sociological eye. On March 21, 2017, the American Sociological Association (ASA) announced they were partnering with the March for Science, calling sociologists around the globe to gather at their respective marches to stand for sociology. And gather they did.

This activism comes in the form of the…ongoing commitment to imagine and create alternatives in the future through a robust solidarity and forged alliances.

On the morning of the march, the K Street office of the ASA was packed with sociologists from Washington, DC to San Francisco, gathering for breakfast before the day's events. In their outreach efforts, the ASA suggested three statements for signs: "Good Public Policy Needs Sociology," "Are Marches Effective? Ask A Sociologist," and "Sociology: The Science of Us." These signs, along with a few other creative ones, such as "What the Foucault?" and "This Is Not Normal" with an arrow pointing outside of a bell curve, were all around the National Mall and throughout the satellite marches. Meanwhile the #March4Sociology hashtag brought together sociologists marching around the globe via social media to share their experiences.

While well-represented, scientists as a whole were not all in agreement that the March for Science was the right move. According to a *New York Times* article published five days before the march, some saw this as a politicization of science that would only result in increasing the perception that science is nothing more than partisan ideology (Roston 2017). Yet, the March organizers remained committed to a nonpartisan march that "champions robustly funded and publicly communicated science as a pillar of human freedom and prosperity" (March for Science 2017). Considering Burawoy's (2005) ASA presidential address that spurred over a decade of ongoing conversations and debates on sociology's relationship to the public, a march sponsored and supported by the ASA highlights both the ongoing transformation of the discipline and the complicated times in which we find ourselves.

Source: Emily McDonald

I found a few hours in the day to sneak off to my neighborhood coffee shop in Washington, DC where I took a break from the day's activities to work on a paper due the following week. The coffee shop was full of individuals wrapping their signs with clear packaging tape to protect their messages from the forecasted rain before heading to the mall. I struck up conversation with a couple next to me, giving them some guidance on the bus routes. I wished them luck and said I would be out there soon as well.

One of them, a molecular biologist, asked, "Are you a scientist too?" To which I replied: "Well, sort of. A social scientist. I am a sociology PhD student." She responded: "You're absolutely a scientist. We all have to stand together during this time. Who cares about the subtitle?"

NRA CEO Wayne LaPierre named “academic elites” as one of America’s “greatest domestic threats”…

As a young sociologist with an admittedly newfound commitment to showing up and making a public statement in the era of Trumpism, I find myself reflecting on the nature of activism often. What is new? What has always been true, but not clear to me as a privileged woman in the academy? It seems activism is not and can no longer be about simple policy recommendations, but about gauging the public imagination on what we are willing to hold as fundamentally important, such as the ability to explore and debate empirically without threat of retaliation.

This activism comes in the form of marches and protests, but also in the ongoing commitment to imagine and create alternatives in the future through a robust solidarity and forged alliances.

Certainly sociology should remain a contributing voice to the conversation about a future beyond the limited possibilities we currently allow ourselves to imagine.

Funding wars that have loomed in the academy over the past decade have pitted disciplines against one another to prove their scientific worth. Sociology has arguably not been immune to the effects of funding crises as departments feel the pinch to prove their relevance and establish themselves as a “respectable social science” (Dinerstein 2017). Less than a week after the March for Science, President Donald Trump delivered the keynote speech at the National Rifle Association’s (NRA) annual convention in Atlanta. During the convention, NRA CEO Wayne LaPierre named “academic elites” as one of America’s “greatest domestic threats” (National Public Radio 2017).

Source: Emily McDonald

Theorizing and contemplating the politics of solidarity and alliances has a long history in the social sciences and the humanities, and scholarship provides a robust critique of solidarity that artificially erases unequal power relations, but returns us to the importance of true coalitions again and again. Whether it is the March for Science, the Women’s March, or the Tax March, the power distribution among constituents must and should be historicized. As Alicia Garza (2017) suggests in her reflective post-Women’s March article: “No one is safe from the transition this country is undergoing … Simply said, we need each other, and we need leadership and strategy.”

As with the other mass mobilization marches that have taken place over the last few months, the question remains as to whether or not the March for Science is a brief moment of solidarity, or the beginning of a broad collaboration to speak for a better future. Ana Dinerstein (2017) suggests that: “The creation of utopias, as expressions of the desire for a better way of being or living, is the proper and distinctive method of sociology” (p. 14-15). Certainly sociology should remain a contributing voice to the conversation about a future beyond the limited possibilities we currently allow ourselves to imagine.

References

Burawoy, Michael. 2005. “2004 ASA Presidential Address: For Public Sociology.” *American Sociological Review*, 70(1), pp.4-28.

Dinerstein, Ana. 2017. *Social Sciences for an Other Politics: Women Theorizing without Parachutes.* Palgrave Pivot.

Garza, Alicia. 2017. “Our cynicism will not build a movement. Collaboration will.” *Mic*, January 22.

March for Science. 2017. “Our Mission.” Retrieved April 23, 2017 (https://www.marchforscience.com/mission/).

National Public Radio. 2017. “Trump Criticizes '8-Year Assault' On Gun Rights At National Rifle Association.” Retrieved April 29, 2017 (http://www.npr.org).

Roston, Michael. 2017. “The March for Science: Why Some Are Going, and Some Will Sit Out,” *The New York Times*, April 17.

Representations of South Asian Characters in U.S. Media

An Interview with Bhoomi K. Thakore
by Briana Pocratsky

On April 10, 2017, The Sociologist (TS) *interviewed Dr. Bhoomi K. Thakore, Assistant Professor and Chair of the Department of Sociology at Elmhurst College. Dr. Thakore recently gave a presentation at George Mason University as part of the graduate student Public Sociology Association (PSA) speaker series titled "Fostering Civic Engagement: The Social and Political Dimensions of Race." Her research primarily focuses on race, the media, and inequality. Dr. Thakore is the author of the book* South Asians on the U.S. Screen: Just Like Everyone Else? *The book discusses stereotypical representations of South Asian characters in contemporary popular television and film. Dr. Thakore uses audience reception to understand changing perceptions of race in the 21st century.*

TS: In your book, you explain that popular media in the U.S. tends to represent South Asians in stereotypical ways. What you mean by "stereotypical representations" in the media?

Bhoomi K. Thakore: There are representations that tend to rely on our quick gut reactions and assumptions about different groups in our society. When we look at the role of stereotypes as it applies to racial groups, they become particularly damaging, especially when we think about the racial hierarchy and its history in the United States. Stereotypes tend to be reproduced by these media representations in that they rely on the lowest common denominator of understanding, characterizing, and perceiving different groups.

TS: Can you provide an example of a stereotypical representation of a South Asian character in U.S. media?

Bhoomi K. Thakore: The classic stereotype of South Asians in the media is Apu from *The Simpsons*. Apu is a good example because the show is still on the air after around thirty years. Apu exudes the very stereotypical representation of South Asians in that he has an accent, he is different from everyone else, and he tends to be the butt of jokes as a result of his otherness or difference. There are larger repercussions of that when we think about the status of immigrants in our society and how people who are not seen as assimilated into American society are treated as other and are often ridiculed as a result, either in comedy or in more severe instances.


Source: Bhoomi K. Thakore

TS: Is there an example of a multidimensional South Asian character that contradicts or challenges these stereotypes?

Bhoomi K. Thakore: A character like Mindy Kaling from *The Mindy Project* or even Aziz Ansari in *Master of None* are instances that do a good job of challenging what we have seen historically. They are both on a streaming service, which is a non-conventional media outlet, and there is a lot more freedom on what they can do through those outlets. Both characters break the mold regarding overt stereotypes of South Asians.

Being South Asian is not who they are, it is just a part of who they are. This comes out in their family dynamic, ethnicity, and the things they consume, which I think is the experience for most ethnic Americans. They are not confined by the limitations of networks. *The Mindy Project* is an interesting example because it was on Fox, and it was cancelled. Now it's on Hulu. Since being on Hulu, they have been able to make some of these interesting transitions in a way that they weren't necessarily able to when the show was on Fox. Although, I still tend to be critical of both of those representations.

...these representations…become ingrained in our psyche…we don't really challenge these stereotypes…

TS: Why is the study of media representation so important?

Bhoomi K. Thakore: The media is a major influence on the way we understand our society. The

media helps us to navigate how to interact with people and to understand our social spaces. Sociologists have long understood that, but the role of the media in the socialization process is becoming more and more significant. When we think about representations in the media, the subtle messages or not so subtle messages that come out of these representations have the potential to have negative impacts for how we interact with people and understand our social space.

When it comes to understanding how race is represented, it becomes an important topic as we acknowledge the increasing diversity of the United States and the increasing importance of understanding and being able to work with this diversity. If your understandings of diversity are limited to stereotypical understandings of different ethnic groups, then you are at a disadvantage in society in interacting with those groups and in helping society move forward.

This awareness will also help you in making decisions about what you do consume.

TS: Based on your research, have popular film and television improved the way in which they depict South Asians? Are characters becoming more multidimensional in relationship to race and ethnicity?

Bhoomi K. Thakore: I think the media overall is getting better. We can look at examples of racial and ethnic, and even gender, groups in the media and understand how the stereotypes are not as overt as they used to be. In many ways, they're covert, subtle. But, the tenets of the stereotypes are still embedded in the characterization of these representations. I think that can be equally damaging. What ends up happening is that there is a subconscious way of reading and understanding these representations. While it's not as in your face as it used to be, the by-products of these subtle stereotypes is that they become ingrained in our psyche and in turn we don't really challenge these stereotypes as we have understood them historically, leading up to today. It's getting better, but I tend to be somewhat critical of these representations.

There is a political economy of the media that tends to inform how these representations are created, how actors are cast, and what storylines actually get to production. This becomes a big part of our understanding of what images are on the screen in the first place. In the 21st century we can acknowledge that that screen is no longer what it used to be with Netflix, YouTube, and independent film. There are avenues where these stereotypes can be broken and different stories can be told. In that sense, there is a lot of progress being made, but there are still places that can be improved.

TS: Audience reception studies focuses on how audiences are understanding and interpreting messages contained in media. Given your research, why is audience reception studies so important?

Bhoomi K. Thakore: Media is the disregarded family member of sociology. It used to be a big part of sociology, and I think that it is now more under the realm of cultural studies or communication. There is a lot of relevance to media studies within the field of sociology, and I think this is where audience studies and audience perceptions come in.

To be able to fully understand the impacts of media, we need to understand how these representations resonate in society. It is useful to take a media product and examine the content, but that's not really a good sociological intervention. To make a content analysis sociological, we need to expand that content analysis across wider audiences and really get at the impact of this particular content on audiences as a whole and be able to get at systematic conclusions about how this representation resonates. I see sociology intervening in this important field of media through audience studies.

TS: Simply avoiding problematic depictions in the media is nearly impossible. What advice do you have for someone who wants to be a responsible and thoughtful consumer of media?

Bhoomi K. Thakore: Always have both eyes open when you are watching the media. When something doesn't feel right to you in the media, that's probably significant; when something feels stereotypical or one-dimensional or limited in its characterization, that's probably significant. Through that lens, you can better understand how that representation you are consuming is limited and how these things tend to happen across representations.

This awareness will also help you in making decisions about what you do consume. The easiest corollary to this is news media. When a story doesn't sound right to you, you know it's coming from a biased source. You are more inclined to identify other media outlets where you can get a more balanced perspective on that news story. This places as lot of responsibility on the consumer. It starts with really understanding the things that you are watching.

There is No Prison in Washington: Challenges of Reentry in the District

Maria Valdovinos

In 1997, The Revitalization Act directed the Federal Government to assume responsibility for many of the functions typically managed by state governments, which helped relieve Washington, DC of some of its financial and management responsibilities (Bouker 2016). However, the Revitalization Act has created some unique challenges related to criminal justice.

After the Revitalization Act passed, Washington DC's prison, Lorton Reformatory, closed in 2001 (Kress, Moser, Tatro, and Velazquez 2016). As a result, individuals convicted of a crime in the District who are sentenced to serve prison time are sent to 26 institutions across the country. "The DC system makes it difficult to keep families together," says Nancy Ware, Director of Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency (CSOSA).

In addition to making it difficult for families to stay connected through the period of incarceration, the lack of a prison in the District poses several challenges for 'returning citizens'[1] preparing to transition back to their communities after serving their sentences. For many, there is no access to local service providers until they have set actual foot in the District. The delay in accessing services can have devastating impacts, especially for those in need of medical and mental health services.

Recognizing the challenges for returning citizens, there are discussions currently underway about creating a District-wide strategic reentry plan to make it easier for returning citizens to navigate some of these challenges.

Unless sentenced to serve life in prison, most incarcerated individuals will at some point be released from institutional confinement. Reentry is a term used to describe the process of, as well as, the "issues related to the transition of offenders from prison to community supervision" (Markman, Durose, Rantala and Tiedt 2016). In any given year, approximately 600,000 to 700,000 individuals are released from state prison to reenter society (Petersilia 2009; Carson and Sabol 2012).

In the past four decades, the prison population in America has increased considerably, from approximately 350,000 in 1970 to over 2 million presently (Travis, Western, and Redburn 2014: 33). Currently, America's prison population comprises 25 percent of the world's prison population in any given year (Walmsley 2009; Weiss and MacKenzie 2010: 269). Any way you look at it, the numbers are not insignificant.

Reentry Reflection

To learn more about the challenges of reentry, in February 2017, I attended *Reentry Reflection 2017,* which is a month long "period of observance intended to raise public awareness about the challenges facing men and women returning home from prison." It is hosted every year by CSOSA for the District of Columbia, in partnership with various other organizations and communities. All events are open to the public.

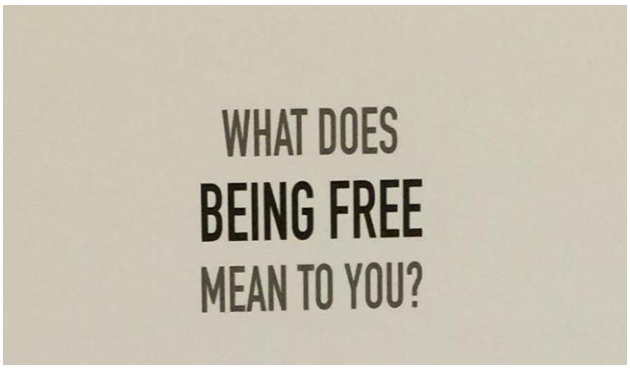
I attended three events, each of which addressed different issues and challenges of reentry. At "Sharing Our Stories to Reclaim Our Lives" I heard stories of struggles and successes and learned about the trauma in prison for females. At the "Family Reunification: Barriers to Reentry and the Impact on Loved Ones" event, I learned about the massive reach of incarceration, and its impact beyond the incarcerated individual to families and communities. The third event was a forum held at Pepco Edison Place Gallery to disseminate the findings of the most comprehensive examination of reentry in the District to date, conducted by the Council for Court Excellence. The report details the unique challenges returning citizens face in the District; the report also provides recommendations on how to overcome some of those challenges.

The increase in educational requirements for employment will make it nearly impossible for returning citizens to secure employment in the District.

Unique challenges of reentry in the District

While there are many common and expected challenges to reentry across the nation, there are some unique challenges in the District of Columbia, because there is no state government for the District.

Washington, DC's criminal justice system is composed of both local and federal jurisdictions, which makes the reentry process difficult to navigate. Some other unique challenges for returning citizens are: (1) Affordable housing is hard to come by. It is no surprise that housing in the District is incredibly expensive.



Source: Maria Valdovinos

The Council for Court Excellence found that three months into community supervision, more than 20 percent of employed returning citizens and more than 30 percent of those who are unemployed but otherwise employable were in a precarious housing situation and at high risk of becoming homeless.

In addition to cost, housing restrictions due to felony conviction make securing housing extraordinarily challenging. (2) Most jobs in Washington, DC require some sort of post-secondary training. In 2012, almost half of all jobs in the District required a college degree and by 2020, it is expected that more than 75 percent of the jobs in the District will require a college degree (Rothwell 2012; Carnevale, Smith, and Strohl 2013).

The challenge here seems not to be one of lack of services but rather, finding ways to improve the accessibility of these services.

The increase in educational requirements for employment will make it nearly impossible for returning citizens to secure employment in the District. (3) Childcare in the District is the most expensive in the nation (Fraga, Dobbins, and McCready 2015). Women are currently the fastest growing segment of the incarcerated population in America (Swavola, Riley, and Subramanian 2016) and most of these women are mothers. Women who are returning citizens and primary caregivers for their children have to balance childcare responsibilities with the requirements of community supervision. These are severe challenges exacerbated by the lack of affordable childcare in the District.

Despite these unique challenges, there is an opportunity for the District to serve as a model for reentry across the nation. Recently, I met a woman at a networking event who told me she relocated to the District because of the great number of services available to help returning citizens overcome some of the challenges to successful reentry.

The event was organized to help returning citizens develop their own small businesses in the District. The challenge here seems not to be one of lack of services but rather, finding ways to improve the accessibility of these services. The District is hard at work on finding ways to overcome this challenge.

Notes

1. The use of "returning citizen" as opposed to "prisoner" is reflective of the use of "people first" language which aims to move past the use of dehumanizing and stigmatizing language such as "offenders," "inmates," or "convicts" when talking about people who have come into contact with the criminal justice system. For more information see: La Vigne, N.G. 2016. People First: Changing the Way We Talk About Those Touched by the Criminal Justice System. Washington, DC: Urban Institute.

References

Bouker, J. 2016. *The D.C. Revitalization Act: History, Provisions, and Promises.* Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution.

Carnevale, A.P, Smith, N., & Strohl, J. 2013. *Recovery: Projections of Jobs and Education Requirements Through 2020.* Washington, DC: Georgetown Public Policy Institute at Georgetown University.

Carson, E. A., & Sabol, W. J. (2012). Prisoners in 2011. *NCJ, 239808*, 11, Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics.

Fraga, L., Dobbins, D., & McCready, M. 2015. *Parents and the High Cost of Child Care.* Arlington, Virginia: Childcare Aware of America.

Kress, J., Moser, B., Tatro, E., & Velazquez, T. 2016. *Beyond Second Chances: Returning Citizens' Re-entry Struggles and Successes in the District of Columbia.* Washington, DC: Council for Court Excellence.

Markman, Joshua A., Matthew R. Durose, Ramona R. Rantala, and Andrew Tiedt. 2016. *Recidivism of Offenders Placed on Federal Community Supervision in 2005: Patterns from 2005 to 2010.* Washington, D.C: Bureau of Justice Statistics.

Petersilia, Joan. 2009. *When Prisoners Come Home: Parole and Prisoner Reentry*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Rothwell, J. 2012. *Education, Job Openings, and Unemployment in Metropolitan America.* Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution.

Swavola, E., Riley, K., & Subramanian, R. 2016. *Overlooked: Women and Jails in an Era of Reform.* New York City: Vera Institute of Justice.

Travis, Jeremy, Bruce Western, and F. Stevens Redburn. 2014. *The Growth of Incarceration in the United States: Exploring Causes and Consequences*. Washington, D.C.: The National Academies Press.

Walmsley, R. 2009. *World's Prison Population List*. London: International Centre for Prison Studies.

Weiss, Douglas B. and Doris L. MacKenzie. 2010. "A Global Perspective on Incarceration: How an International Focus Can Help the United States Reconsider Its Incarceration Rates." *Victims & Offenders* 5(3):268–82.

Immigrant Laborers Bring May Flowers

Louise M. Puck, Lucy Y. Twimasi and Shannon N. Davis

Immigrant labor is a key contributor to the U.S. economy in all sectors. Research from the Institute for Immigration Research (IIR) at George Mason University has documented that in 2012, foreign-born households contributed approximately $106 billion to state and federal income tax. Subsequent research has revealed that immigrants added $1.6 trillion to the gross domestic product in 2013. Immigrants make up 13 percent of the U.S. population but are, for example, 28 percent of physicians and surgeons, 40 percent of medical scientists in manufacturing research and development, 22 percent of nursing, psychiatric and home health aides, and 15 percent of registered nurses.

Some immigrants who work in public spaces are day laborers, temporary workers hired by contractors to perform a specific job. These immigrant workers are the extra hands that tend to our beautiful gardens in spring, the season of flowers.

A team of researchers from the IIR interviewed Guatemalan and Salvadorian day laborers at the Centreville Labor Resource Center (CLRC) in Virginia. The center is one of many organizations nationwide supporting fair market for day laborers, countering wage theft, and preventing a sub-wage street-side hiring system. The initial planning of CLRC started in 2007 and was led by an outreach committee of the United Church of Christ, who also initiated a series of open community dialogues discussing the effects of immigration.

Today the center acts as an employment facilitator by providing a place for employers and day laborers to connect. Small contractors come to hire temporary workers with skills needed from a safe location, while day laborers receive protection with employer-signed contracts guaranteeing fair working conditions and pay.

Rather than taking jobs away from local job seekers, day laborers fill specific labor market needs within a given community.

The day laborers can be seen replacing roofs on humid Virginia days or sweating under the hot sun while mowing lawns or planting flowers. They undertake temporary or seasonal jobs with no real career advancement. These jobs often require great physical resilience. Poor economic conditions, violent civil wars, coupled with military dictatorships and repression in Guatemala and El Salvador, destroyed economic opportunities and led to chronic underemployment. Most day laborers immigrate to the U.S. as unskilled workers.

Landscapers. Source: Elvert Xavier Barnes

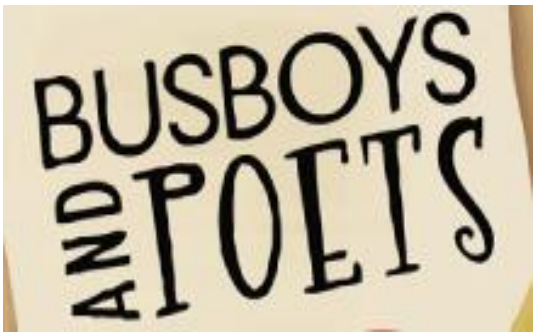
There are temporary visa types available to unskilled workers. This can be viewed as an acknowledgment by the U.S. government that there is a solid need for unskilled labor. However, the allocation of visas for unskilled labor does not meet the significant demand of the retail, food service, construction, landscaping, and hospitality industries within the U.S. economy. Rather than taking jobs away from local job seekers, day laborers fill specific labor market needs within a given community. Back at the CLRC, day laborers are landscapers, painters, and cleaners, but also find additional opportunities in the restaurant, construction, and retail industries. These immigrants work long hours, and contribute to the economic and social fabric of everyday life.

As you stop to smell the roses, view the cherry blossoms, or behold the irises and tiger lilies, you would be right to presume that immigrant labor made your spring olfactory experience more pleasant. To learn more about the Institute for Immigration Research and our CLRC Study (and other recent work), visit iir.gmu.edu.

Louise M. Puck is a Social Science Researcher at the Institute for Immigration Research, George Mason University. Lucy Y. Twimasi is a Legal Contributor at the Institute for Immigration Research, George Mason University. Shannon N. Davis, Ph.D. is Associate Professor of Sociology, George Mason University.

Annual Banquet
&
Award Ceremony

Thursday, May 25, 2017



2021 14th Street, NW,
Washington, D.C. 20009