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RESEÑA DE "WHO IS WHITE? LATINOS, ASIANS, AND THE NEW BLACK/
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chapter they focus on the experience of the working-class, including the now seminal short story by Helena Viramontes, “The Cariboo Café.” This is followed with a chapter focusing on the urban experience addressing the symbolism of “the city” and the presence of “barrios” in the lives of urban Latinos. This chapter includes the play “Real Women Have Curves” by Josefina Lopez, which is now a feature-length film, giving those using the anthology in the classroom the opportunity to compare the written and the visual representation of this narrative.

The last two chapters address issues of marginalization as Latinos/as and writers. The seventh chapter includes the experience of being on the fringes culturally, as represented by editor Jose B. Gonzalez’s own poem, “Autobrownography of a New England Latino.” The editors also represent those voices that are the most marginalized within Latino communities. As they explain, “between the mainstream...and the other side (el otro lado), there exist complex underground systems of life in which thousands of people, and many Latinos, network and operate” (307). Such systems result in works like Alba

Ambert’s “Rage is a Fallen Angel,” depicting the psychological turmoil of a Latina mother undergoing treatment at a mental hospital. In the final chapter the editors represent works that go beyond the expected terrain of Latino literary expression and so are at times on the margins of literary audiences. In this chapter they showcase the wide spectrum of themes and styles found in Latino literature, illustrating how writers continue to grapple in new ways with issues such as race, class, and gender. Writings include works by Jack Agueros, Sandra Benitez, and Cecile Pineda.

This anthology is a comprehensive collection of Latino literary works that provides its readers in one succinct text an in-depth introduction to the various seminal writers in the field of Latino literature, while simultaneously introducing new talent. This is a text that no one teaching Latino literature should be without. The editors’ expertise in the classroom has enabled them to give their colleagues a teachable text filled with contextual information and suggestions for assignments and discussions, making this a significant contribution to the fields of Literature and Latino/a Studies.

Who is White? Latinos, Asians, and the New Black/Nonblack Divide.

By George Yancey

Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2003 • 230 pages; \$22.50 [paper]

REVIEWER: HIRAM JOSÉ IRIZARRY OSORIO, The Ohio State University

There has been much talk about “Whites” becoming a “minority” (i.e., numerically) in the U.S. by 2050. In his book, *Who is White? Latinos, Asians, and the New Black/Nonblack Divide*, Yancey directs readers not to take this current popular truism for granted. Instead, he obliges us to rethink and pay attention to what our racial labels actually

mean. Importantly, Yancey offers an alternative way to investigate and understand this future projected hypothesis of “Whites as a minority” by stating,

I will illustrate that while the transformation of nonblack minorities into majority group

status is occurring, the separation of African Americans from the dominant culture, in spite of efforts by blacks to move into mainstream American culture, is just as strong as it ever has been. These twin processes of nonblack assimilation and black separation will move nonblack and black minorities in opposing directions—reinforcing the racial divide in the United States. (4)

Yancey does not disagree that those who we think of as “White” today will be a minority by 2050, but rather posits that membership to the “White” label will be broadened to include those that we consider today as “Latinos” and “Asians.” He pursues this claim by reminding the reader of how other “non-White” groups (i.e., “White ethnics,” such as people who are Irish, Jewish, Italian, etc.) in the past were incorporated into the “White” category when the “traditional Whites” (i.e., “northern European Whites”) were in danger of becoming a minority in the U.S.¹ Thus, he hypothesizes that this will happen with “Latinos” and “Asians.” He bases his hypothesis on structural acceptance data (i.e., marriage outside their own “race” and place of residence; in addition to acceptance by other “races”) and attitudinal data regarding several policy dimensions, which put “Latinos” and “Asians” closer to “Whites” than to “Blacks.”

Another important contribution is Yancey’s attempt not to divorce his methodological and theoretical emphasis on ideas and attitudes from a structural understanding of racism (or the historical racialization of society and the existence of racist structures today).² Nopper (2005) and Davis (2004) also reviewed *Who is White*.³ Both authors discuss in greater detail specific points Yancey raises in his book. In his review, Nopper (2005) hones in “antiblack racism as the

structuring and generative ideology of US race relations and social inequality,” (3) whereas Davis ignores it.

Yancey would argue that it is one thing to want to “move out” of “Black space” or to assume that it should be good to do so; but, it is another thing to be unable to do so even if you wanted to (irrespective if it is good or bad). Davis (2004) obfuscates this structural claim presented by Yancey, which has nothing to say regarding any normative comment about “Black culture.” Nevertheless, I do agree with Davis (2004) regarding Yancey’s lack of differentiation within the “racial groups” he discusses, which end up truncating other possibilities to foresee different future U.S. racial realities. This lack of differentiation is partly due to survey methodology and sampling limitations, which we as analysts must overcome and not become prisoners of, if we really want to better understand social reality and project better futures.

Historically, throughout social theory and thinking we have been able to identify three main “elements” that humans covet: power, wealth, and status. The first two have received greater attention to the detriment of the last one; and this is especially true when we are dealing with contemporary societies. Although it would be simplistic and naïve to think of these coveted social “elements” as independent, it is still analytically useful to demarcate them. Yancey highlights how an emphasis on “status” might present analytical and praxis leverage.

Over all, Yancey’s argument could be considered too pessimistic, but it is still a well-thought-out pessimism. Nevertheless, a better alternative is not to just be an optimist. Several scholars have preferred the terminology of “possimists,” which is a combination of pessimist and optimist. The term “possimist” reminds us to maintain a cautious optimism, in which we are

neither overly pessimistic or overly optimistic. The dangers of Yancey's pessimism is that while we do not take as given the supposed "Whites's" minority status by 2050, we end up taking as a given "Blacks" lowest caste status with no possibilities of coalition allies. The "possimist" would take Yancey's cautioning seriously, but would not close future windows of opportunities beforehand. Partly, Yancey himself opens up windows of opportunity with his cautionary tale. Nevertheless, we might maintain them opened (analytically and strategically) by further unpacking those groups he labels as "Latinos" and "Asians" (and "Whites" from a *political race* perspective⁴). Although those labels might be bureaucratically efficient, they are not productive for purposes of real social understanding or coalition-building efforts because they end up reifying those constructed borders instead of criticizing their construction.

In order to illustrate this point of "windows of opportunities," let us take a look at the case of Puerto Rico and Puerto Ricans. Two reasons for selecting Puerto Rico and Puerto Ricans are first, Puerto Ricans represent the second largest Hispanic/Latino group after Mexicans (they also represent the second oldest Hispanic/Latino group within what we know today as the U.S.); and second, Puerto Rican case presents interesting avenues of understanding the case of globalization and repression (i.e., colonization).

Part of the relevance of Yancey's cautionary note, according to my understanding, is the understanding and praxis of racial issues throughout so-called Latin America. Although we need to be cautious and not oversimplify, Latin America overall has tended to minimize the overt dealing of race and racism.⁵ We have read in many places the quintessential Latin American example of Brazil's "racial democracy" being

fallacious. And if we adjust to contingent and contextual characteristics (i.e., independence date and repressed ethnic/racial groups; and the exclusion of Haiti), this might be considered true overall throughout the region.

Nevertheless, ethnic and racial issues have become part of national agendas and mobilized throughout the last twenty years of the 20th century (e.g., Chiapas, México; Brazil's black movement; Bolivia's peasant mobilization; Guatemala's Rigoberta Menchú, among others). I state this because even though we could agree about the repression of "talking about race and racism" throughout Latin America, this "reality" cannot be considered static; if not for anything else but the reality that nation-states and global arrangements are racialized.⁶ Although this is not true any more, Puerto Ricans who migrated from the Island used to concentrate themselves in New York City (NYC). Juan Flores,⁷ among others, writes about the experiences of this migrant population of Puerto Ricans, calling attention to the deep connections between these migrants and the black community in NYC (i.e., politically, socially, and culturally).

Flores analyzes Puerto Ricans as a racialized working class culture. He also adds the element of colonialism in order to bring light to the Puerto Rican reality and enrich our understanding of marginalized communities. This is neither for reifying the notion of the nation-state nor for undermining the relevance of race and class. He does so for underscoring the un-realization of this "common" route of political organization for the Puerto Rican case and positing that what seemed to be the Puerto Rican "oddity" (i.e., having a colonial status) might represent a potential example of possible transnational realities.

Thus, Flores uses the Puerto Rican case (i.e., on the Island and within the U.S.) to uncover the effects of globalization now that a "traditional" understanding of the nation-state is being questioned (structurally). Furthermore, the Puerto Rican case makes explicit the racialization of reality (in addition to U.S. "Blacks") from the migration point of view. Many critics highlight the low ranking status of "Latinos" and attribute it to "illegal immigration"; however, while Puerto Ricans have been legal U.S. citizens since 1917, they still occupy the "lowest socio-economic ranks" within the U.S. In other words, the issue of legality is only a superficial and insufficient explanation for how the "Latino" communities fare within the U.S. A more complete explanation and better understanding of these realities only arise from a racial structural perspective, which contingently puts into spatial and temporal contexts these troubling exclusionary outcomes.

I would like to present one final comment regarding the usually heated discussion of "self-interest." I have read about differentiations between "self-" vis-à-vis "group interest" in order to make sense of the so-called "White working class" or "poor Whites" voting against their "self-interest" because of their support for Republicans. This is the case because "self-interest" tends to be automatically associated to material/economic "self-interest." Thus, some have attempted to explain this analytical inconsistency by creating and stating the reality of "group-interest" and the possibility of it trumping "self-interest" (i.e., understood as material "self-interest").⁸ Martinot (2003) provides an analytical example of an ideational structural fight, which supports Yancey's work:

What the left requires, if it wishes to develop movements of opposition to oppression (in general), is a strategy to unravel the cultural framework, to invent a corrosive alternative to the white identity that is woven into and constitutes it. It would need strategies that would call for an end to the property entitlement of whiteness, and thus the property basis of society itself. To break down the racialized class structure and put an end to racism, the entire structure of racialization, meaning the social structure of whiteness and the white corporate state that concretizes it, would have to be demolished. To do this, an alternate politics and political culture would have to evolve in the United States—one that stands outside the white corporate state and makes possible a distance from the systems of narratives by which people have been racialized, so that they can be rethought and reencountered again as people and not as generalizations.⁹ (208)

Yancey's findings and analytical efforts could be understood as an exemplification of those "symbolic" interests, within a discussion of the relevance of "status." All of this discussion, I argue, makes relevant and essential two dimensions of structural inequalities that I think need to be thought of simultaneously: understanding structural dynamics (i.e., historically and contemporaneously) and conceiving and implementing strategic interventions (i.e., materially and ideationally) to redress structural disparities. While, certainly not mutually exclusive, there can be tension between these two structural dimensions—one being essentially material and the other more ideational. I think we should attempt to address this tension, not solely through more analysis, but rather through communicative action. Yancey's work helps us work and walk better in that direction.

NOTES

¹ For a detailed discussion on how “ethnic whites” became “whites” see: Roediger, David R. (2005). *Working Toward Whiteness: How America's Immigrants Become White, The Strange Journey from Ellis Island to the Suburbs*. New York,: Basic Books.

² For a discussion on material and ideational structures see Sewell, William H. Jr., “A Theory of Structure: Duality, Agency, and Transformation.” *American Journal of Sociology* Volume 98 Number 1 (July): 1–29, 1992.

³ Amanda Davis, and George Yancey. “Who Is White?: Latinos, Asians, the New Black/ Nonblack Divide.” *African-American Review* (Spring): 2004. Available at the World Wide Web: (http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2838/is_1_38/ai_n6060948). Tamara K. Nopper, “The Browning and Yellowing of Whiteness.” *The Black Commentator* Issue 138 (May),:2005. Available at the World Wide Web: (http://www.blackcommentator.com/138/138_whiteness.html).

⁴ See Lani Guinier and Gerald Torres. *The Miner's Canary: Enlisting Race, Resisting Power, Transforming Democracy*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002.

⁵ See Evan S. Lieberman, *Race and Regionalism in the Politics of Taxation in Brazil and South Africa*. Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

⁶ See David Theo Goldberg, *The Racial State*. Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 2002; and Andrew L. Barlow, *Between Fear and Hope: Globalization and Race in the United States*. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003.

⁷ See for example: Flores, Juan. *Divided Borders: Essays on Puerto Rican Identity*. Houston: Arte Público Press, 1993. Flores, Juan. *From Bomba to Hip Hop: Puerto Rican Culture and Latino Identity*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2000.

⁸ See also Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom*. New York: Knopf, 1999.

⁹ Steve Martinot, *The Rule of Racialization: Class, Identity, Governance*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003.

Tuning Out Blackness: Race and Nation in the History of Puerto Rican Television

By Yeidy M. Rivero

Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005 • 280 pages; \$21.95 [paper]

REVIEWER: TOMÁS LÓPEZ-PUMAREJO, The City University of New York—Brooklyn College

In *Tuning Out Blackness*, Yeidy Rivero examines the history of Puerto-Rican television from a revealing angle. She contends that for many years local broadcasting companies, contrary to demographic reality, represented the country's people as primarily white. This deceptive but culturally satisfying picture disguised the fact that the Island was, in fact, a racially mixed society with a sizeable black minority. In the course of showing how this media legerdemain took place, the author answers many important questions about the Spanish-language broadcast industry in Puerto Rico and the

crucial role of Cubans in its development. The book covers approximately five decades, running from the 1940s to the 1990s. In her account of this era, Rivero shows how the Puerto Rican small screen dealt with important political and demographic changes over this lengthy period. She manages to consider these external factors without reducing them to colonialism. On the contrary, she denounces this intellectual strategy (which characterizes much of the work on the subject) and highlights the decisive role of individual agency in events that appear to have been driven by imperial forces.

Blackface performers are pivotal to Rivero's argument about race in Puerto Rico. Her approach to this genre initially appeared to break no new ground, as her study joins an extensive body of academic work that regards blackface as symptom and promoter of segregation and discrimination. Unlike John Strausbaugh's path-breaking *Black Like You* (2006), *Tuning Out Blackness* does not understand the existence of this genre as a kind of implicit recognition and acceptance of Puerto Rico's mixed nature and as an important mediator between white and black, as Strausbaugh's book does, regarding the U.S. Despite this difference, Rivero still regards blackface as a vehicle for otherwise impermissible social critique and for the representation of the working class point of view. She argues that this critical stance was certainly part of Ramon Rivero's acts, who was a beloved blackface performer. His deeds are the main subject of the first chapter and a picture of him putting on blackface in the screen of a 1950s black-and-white TV set appears on the book's cover.

Blackface television performances continued in Puerto Rico until 1985, long after they had become taboo in the U.S. They only stopped on the Island, in fact, when the last performer developed an allergy to the heavy makeup. The author argues that this apparent lag in awareness needs to be understood in light of Puerto Rico's cultural nationalism, which saw the U.S. as a racist society and the Island as a more enlightened enclave. According to this view, blackface did not mean the same thing in this context as on the mainland; and black Puerto Ricans supposedly loved Angela Meyer, the performer with whom this tradition died. In this explanation the author borrows an idea from Arlene Davila's work on Puerto Rican cultural nationalism. She shows that this mindset about the Island's racial exceptionalism was based on a conception of themselves as “white mongrels.”

This self-understanding became the basis for the country's pervasive denial of its own anti-black racism. As Rivero explains in the fourth chapter, this denial was so deep that it wasn't until the 1990s that a situation comedy (*Mi familia*) featured a black family, although its “blackness” was underplayed to match an otherwise “white” media landscape.

Cubans occupy a prominent place in this story of self-deception and denial. This is not surprising, given their longstanding importance to the Island's broadcast industry as providers of program format, capital, and media professionals. The author defines the Cubans' presence in the Island's media as a “CubaRican space” and traces the origin of the blackface figures discussed earlier to turn-of-the (20th)-century Cuba. After the revolution in 1959, the Cubans' presence in the Puerto Rican media increased. Affluent immigrants, some of them well-established media pioneers such as Gaspar Pumarejo, sought American refuge by moving to the Island. This influx of entrepreneurial talent led to the so-called “golden age” of local television, which meant not only a relative abundance of profitable local fare but also the export of shows and talent. Resentment toward the wealthy, right wing, and allegedly pretentious Cubans, however, eventually grew so extreme that it became material for situation comedies. Shows like *Los Suegros (The In-Laws)* mocked the bigotry of both the anti-Castro Cubans and the Puerto Rican xenophobes. This lingering bitterness finally disappeared in the 1980s, when the Dominicans took over center stage as the new “invaders.” But while the Cubans were construed as the pompous bailiffs of imperialism, the Dominicans became the “undesirable black.”

Tuning Out Blackness describes Puerto Rican television as fiscally captive to outside sponsors for much of its history, yet as still somewhat autonomous and permeable. In 2001, however, Univision