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## Contemporary Journal of Anthropology and Sociology

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### **Manzanas con Manzanas: Immigrant Reception in an Era of Racial Colorblindness**

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**Abstract:** Over the last twenty years the number of Latino immigrants increased dramatically in unlikely places, establishing new immigrant destinations in cities like Lexington. This study explored how people within a new destination talk about immigrant incorporation during an era of racial colorblindness. This study utilized both semi-structured interviews with White and Hispanic employees and participant observations at a small orchard to highlight the racial boundary making justified through the use of racial colorblindness. Examining immigrant incorporation in a new destination expanded the understandings of racial colorblindness to include the use of language as a proxy for race.

**Keywords:** Immigration, Colorblind Racism, Language, Immigrant Incorporation

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Immigration is a contested issue in the United States, the subject of numerous town-hall meetings, public opinion polls, television reports, printed press coverage, and academic inquiries. While the contestation of immigration is not a new phenomenon, the ‘Latinization’ of immigration and its impact, particularly within new destination cities, is a relatively recent development. Newspaper articles often recite stories about local debates on immigration reform measures or demographic transformations to landscapes resulting from a newly settled group. Immigration is a major political issue, as indicated by the charge of nearly every presidential candidate’s desire to reform U.S. immigration policies or provide comprehensive immigration legislation. While politicians, political pundits, the media, and the public at large debate the merits for and against immigration, immigration is occurring and at an increasingly rate and to new locations across the United States.

Recent literature highlights the influx of immigrants from Asia and Latin America beginning in the 1970s (Durand, Massey, & Capoferro, 2005; Vásquez, Seales, & Marquardt, 2008; Zúñiga & Hernández-León, 2006). Unlike historic immigration settlement patterns, this newer influx of immigrants shifted from traditional immigrant cities (e.g., Los Angeles, California or Chicago, Illinois) to new immigration destinations (e.g., Raleigh, North Carolina or Louisville, Kentucky), and often to communities with little to no existing Latino population base (Singer, 2004; Suro & Singer, 2002; Zúñiga & Hernández-León, 2006). This shift represents a unique difference from previous immigrant waves: new population groups settling into previously low-immigration communities.

The greater Lexington, Kentucky area is one such new destination for Latino immigrants. Between 1990 and 2000, the Latino population in this area grew as much as 500 percent (Rich & Miranda, 2005), making the Latino population the second largest racial minority in the state (Barcas, 2006) and changing the city’s well establish Black-White racial landscape. Among states, Kentucky experienced the eighth largest Hispanic population growth rate in the 1990s (Schirmer, 2006) and is consider a “secondary destination” after immigrants migrate from more traditional gateways in the Southeast (Shultz, 2008).

As the “Horse Capital of the World,” the horse industry surrounding Lexington attracts significant attention for popular culture and serious academic inquiry, including examining immigrant incorporation (e.g., Rich & Miranda, 2005; Zúñiga & Hernández-León, 2006). The horse industry overshadows other areas of agricultural studies. The horse industry is large for Kentucky, arguably the state’s top and most visible commodity, but there are other growing industries reliant on immigrant labor. As farmers began diversifying their crops following the 2004 tobacco buy-outs, newer agricultural commodities slowly emerged. Apples show a steady trajectory of increased harvest and crop revenue (United States Department of Agriculture, 2008; Lensing, n.d.). While immigrants are likely primarily drawn to the Lexington area to work in the horse or tobacco industries (or both) (Rich & Miranda 2005; Shultz, 2008), many find themselves in less well-known Kentucky agricultural settings.

Studying immigrant incorporation, either within traditional immigrant gateways or new destinations, is not new (e.g., Anig and Wang, 2006; Marrow, 2009; Portes & Rumbaut, 1996; Smith & Furuseth, 2006; Suro & Singer, 2002; Vallas, Zimmerman,

& Davis 2009; Zúñiga & Hernández-León, 2006). However, studying the discourse and interactions surrounding immigrant incorporation from a 360-degree vantage point within a work environment provides a unique, micro-level case study of immigrant reception. Through an established relationship at a Kentucky farm just outside of Lexington, this study explores immigrant incorporation in one of those shadow settings: a vegetable and fruit farm primarily focused on apples. Our central research question asks how are Latino immigrants incorporated into the workplace at a Kentucky apple orchard. How do employees talk about immigrant incorporation, particularly in an era of racial colorblindness?

## **Literature Review**

### **Immigration: Something Old, Something New**

The history of the United States is comprised of waves of public and political concern with immigration, from the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 to current debates regarding border security and control. The United States attracts more immigrants than any other nation with immigration patterns fluctuating with U.S. and international political and economic unrest. Today's immigration patterns differ from the past in three key ways: who is coming, where people are going, and the volume of people. First, the face of U.S. immigration is changing following massive immigration policy shifts in 1965. Immigrants today arrive primarily from Asian and Latin American countries rather than Europe. Second, immigrants migrate and settle in communities rarely considered in the past: new immigrant destinations. Third, those same immigration reforms, which changed who immigrated also double immigration flows from the 1950s to the present day.

As new immigrant groups arrive, scholars begin their detailed examination of the new group including how the local community responds. Scrutiny surrounding a group is heightened when a group grows at a rapid pace and job insecurity is high. For example, authorization status and wage lowering are areas under scrutiny (Chomsky, 2007). Research investigating the settlement patterns among immigrants to the United States began with Robert Park and the Chicago School (Park, 1967) and continues through to more recent studies of new settlement communities (e.g., Bachmeier, 2007; Durand, Massey, & Charvet, 2000; Durand, Massey, & Zenteno, 2001; Suro & Singer 2002; Singer 2004). Just as scholars examine each new immigrant wave in different ways, people within the receiving communities respond in a variety of ways. Some accept the new settlers while others become more firmly entrenched in their xenophobia. Others adopt inconsistent responses, such as being welcoming in particular areas of their lives or parts of town and not others. Following the release of the 2000 Census, researchers noted Mexican immigrants represented the largest foreign-born group in the United States (Bachmeier, 2007; Fix, Zimmerman, & Passel, 2001), and Latinos more broadly configured the largest racial and ethnic minority group (Suro & Singer, 2002). Some referenced these demographic changes as the "browning" or "Latinization" of America (Bonilla-Silva, 2002; Rodriguez, 2003). Researchers also analyzed and commented on the widespread dispersion of Latinos across the country, particularly to new destination cities, noting what many local communities already observed: an increased presence of Latinos in non-traditional immigrant or Latino populated cities (Gozdziak & Martin, 2005; Fischer & Tienda, 2006; Light, 2006; Singer, Hardwick & Brettell, 2008; Zavella, 2000;

Zúñiga & Hernández-León, 2006). The influx of Latino immigrants to these new destinations shifted the “bipolar racial structures of many communities,” challenging the black and white color line (O’Brien, 2007; Marrow, 2009; Zúñiga & Hernández-León, 2003). While Latino immigration to the United States is the largest, oldest and most steady type of migration (Durande, Massey, & Capoferro, 2006), most settlement occurred in traditional immigrant settlement cities like Los Angeles, New York, and Miami (Brown, 2013). The Latino population in the U.S. increased more since the 1990’s than ever before and continues to shape the U.S. social landscape (Cardenas, 2004; Durande, Massey, Millard & Chapa, 2004; Hirschman & Massey, 2008; Singer, Hardwick, & Brettell 2008), particularly in new immigrant destinations.

As immigration levels drop in traditional gateway cities, like Los Angeles, California and Houston, Texas, immigrants arrive in new destination cities, like Nashville, Tennessee and Charlotte, North Carolina. Many researchers cite most new destination cities are in the Southeast and the Midwest and suggest the changing of jobs in rural America is responsible for this demographic shift (Leach & Bean, 2008; McConnell, 2004; Portes, 2006; Saenz, 2011; Schleef & Cavalcanti, 2009; Zúñiga & Hernández-León, 2006). The United States’ progression toward industrialization brought changes to the economy, resulting in a growing sector of low-skilled jobs, such as in factories, food processing, or on farms (Jensen, 2006). The common relationship is these new destinations attract immigrants to these low-skilled, low-wage labor opportunities because of the lack of native-born job competition (Hirschman & Massey, 2008; Millard, Chapa, & McConnell, 2004; Shultz, 2008). Coupled with the differences in immigration today is a new dominant

racial ideology – a shift from Jim Crow racism to racial colorblindness.

### **The New Style of Racism**

Just as U.S. immigration is changing in terms of new destinations, immigration rates and country of origin, U.S. racism is also changing. Most whites no longer hold fast to Jim Crow style racism; a newer, subtler form of racism emerged which serves to mask contemporary prejudice under the auspices of colorblindness or race neutrality (Bonilla-Silva, 1997, 2003; Bonilla-Silva & Forman 2000). Bonilla-Silva, Lewis, and Embrick (2004) contend racial colorblindness, as a dominant racial ideology, helps individuals interpret and understand racial phenomenon in the world. In the Marxian approach, ideologies link to material forces didactically, such that “material forces would be inconceivable historically without form and ideologies would be individual fancies without material forces” (Gramsci, 1987, p. 377). In this sense, racial ideologies are individuals’ prejudices without linking to real material disadvantages for people of color. Ideological discourse serves to obfuscate social reality and benefit the dominant group, Whites, with material advantage. According to Heywood (2007), “whether consciously or unconsciously, everyone subscribes to a set of political beliefs and values that guide their behavior and influence their conduct” (p. 3). Thus everyone adheres to some ideology, which in turn influences attitudes and behaviors.

Colorblind racism is an ideology deeply embedded in the social structure and influences people’s attitudes and behaviors. The ideology of colorblind racism is not a personality disorder or even an individual shortcoming. Rather, it is the dominant worldview for contemporary race relations in the United States. For example, Ramsaran (2009) argues many White Americans have

a lingering assumption that the civil rights laws born out of the civil rights movement eradicated racial discrimination in the United States, eliminating the need to openly talk about race or provide race-based policies to minimize racial discrimination.

Colorblind racism, advanced by Bonilla-Silva (1997), proposes racism is “the ideological structure of a social system that crystallizes racial notions and stereotypes. Racism provides the rationalizations for social, political, and economic interactions between races” (p. 474). According to Bonilla-Silva (1997), racism persists in sanitized talk so individuals can make prejudiced statements without seeming racist by preceding statements with claims of colorblindness, such as “I’m not a racist but...” (p. 472). Additionally, Bonilla-Silva (2001) states colorblind racism operates through frames: abstract liberalism, naturalization, cultural racism, and minimization of racism. According to Bonilla-Silva (2001), frames are the most important aspect of interpretive repertoires and are “central to the maintenance (or challenge) of a racial order... [and] once they emerge, they mold or circumscribe actors’ views on race-related matters” (p. 67). As such, frames help guide people’s understandings and processing of information. These frames are made known through the discursive practices, which in turn, support ideologies. Frames serve as the visible or audible building blocks of an ideology.

This paper explores the use of racial colorblindness among orchard employees to describe the incorporation of new Latino immigrants during an era of racial colorblindness. How are Latino immigrants incorporated into the workplace at a Kentucky apple orchard? How do employees talk about immigrant incorporation in an era of racial colorblindness?

## Methodology

Data for this study come from semi-structured in-depth interviews and structured and unstructured participant observation research conducted by the lead author on a Kentucky orchard between September and November 2012. This mixed methods approach captures both the ways individuals talk about immigrant incorporation and the actions used by orchard employees concerning the growth of the Latino population.

The lead author’s role as a full-time orchard employee provided the opportunity for nearly 500 hours of structured and unstructured field observations throughout the days on both weekdays and weekends. Observations were made in each of the three main orchard workspaces: the retail store, the kitchen, and the field. Permission to study the orchard was granted based on a prior relationship with the orchard owners/managers, including full-time employment during the previous fall season. Pseudonyms are used to protect the identity of employees and the orchard.

Interviews were conducted with two owners/managers and six employees, for a total of eight participants. These 8 participants were recruited through convenience sampling, yet is a representative sample of the 15 full-time employees who worked across all areas of the orchard. While the orchard increased the number of employees in the fall and summer seasons, these employees were temporary hires for extra special events or particularly busy weekends and were excluded from analysis.

Study participants were between the ages of 20 and 60. Half of the interviewees were White and half were Hispanic. Both owners/managers were included in this study, and each space of the orchard (kitchen, field, and store) was represented in the employee interviews. The demographic

characteristics of the White interviewees were as follows: 75% male; median age of 35; all Kentucky born; all English speaking. The demographic characteristics of the Hispanic interviewees were as follows: 75% female; median age of 33; half hailed from Guatemala, half from Mexico; half were undocumented, 25% were seeking legal status, and 25% were documented; 75% of the interviews were conducted in a mix of Spanish and English and the other 25% of the interviews were conducted in English.

Each interview was semi-structured and consisted of open-ended questions about basic demographics, roles or job responsibilities at the orchard, and perceptions of the Hispanic population growth in the area. The interviews lasted from approximately 40 minutes to 80 minutes and were recorded for transcription and analysis. The employers implemented an English only expectation for all orchard employees, meaning every employee must be able to communicate in English. Thus, all interviews were conducted primarily in English; however, the interviewer is proficient in Spanish and utilized Spanish during interviews to clarify questions when necessary. Interviews took place in private settings both on and off the orchard.

## Results

Field observations and interviews revealed several interesting patterns regarding immigrants' incorporation into space and jobs at the orchard. The interviews enabled employees to share personal accounts of their perception of the Hispanic growth in the area. The field research supplied the day-to-day interaction of the employees and employers at the orchard as well as showed how workspaces play a vital role at the orchard. It also served to either confirm or challenge interviewees' accounts. Field observations exposed three racially segregated workspaces at the

orchard: the kitchen, the store, and the field. Participants relied on frames of racial colorblindness when discussing the orchard's segregated workspaces and the types of work performed. Most notably, however, was the use of language as a central factor in justifying both the segregation of workspace and jobs assigned to employees.

## Segregated Workspaces

The orchard was a large, nearly 200-acre farm offering seasonal fruits, vegetables, and a large family farm entertainment area replete with a barnyard petting area, hayrides, you-pick produce, a children's fun zone, a small café, and store. The orchard contained three primary workspaces: the kitchen, the store, and the field. These workspaces were segregated based on employees' race and gender where mostly Whites worked in parts of the orchard open to the public (i.e., the store) while mostly Latino/as worked behind the scenes in locations not open to the public (i.e., the kitchen and fields). During interviews, White individuals and light-skinned Latino/as reluctantly noted the racially segregated workspace, often attributing much of the segregation to language ability or individual choice while dark-skinned Latino/as quickly noted the segregated space and a desire for a more integrated work environment. Despite Whites and light-skinned Latino/as reliance on language as a justification for segregation, observations highlighted fluid and easy communication between the English-speaking Whites and native Spanish-speaking Latino/as and the strictly enforced English-only policy mandating all employees use English while on the clock. Some White and light-skinned Latino/a interviewees also suggested individual choice played a role in where and how people work. Again, observations and

interviews suggest many of the individuals identified as “choosing” particular jobs or working longer hours were constrained in their choices.

The kitchen was a private area within the orchard where baked goods like fried pies, baked pies, cider donuts, and other café items are made. The kitchen was staffed with dark-skinned Latinas who worked between 10-12 hour days, the lone exception being a White woman who worked every couple of weeks to make the orchard’s fudge. The kitchen was one large room with a large metal food preparation table located in the center. The walls were lined with a walk-in deep freezer, an industrial sink, metal racks for fudge storage, a condiment refrigerator, and a large grill with a deep fryer. The kitchen adjoined the café and a section of the store with soda fountains, ice cream machines, and premade snack items. A small window to pass food separated the otherwise windowless kitchen from the café. The café shared an inside door with the main store where the canned goods and various country and orchard themed knickknacks were sold. The store is a large open room with various displays of seasonal produce. There was a wall of refrigerators displaying more produce and apple cider. A long counter extended across two walls, which displays desserts on one wall, and the cash registers occupied the other, shorter, wall. Young Whites staffed the store, café, and outdoor family fun areas (including hayride, you pick areas, play areas, and barnyard). There were two exceptions to these divisions: one light-skinned Latino and one light-skinned Latina worked in the store; however these two employees had lived most of their lives in the U.S., either in Illinois or Kentucky. The field, consisted of those areas of the orchard not typically open to the public, except during you-pick hours and select seasonal activities. This part of the orchard was staffed primarily with dark-

skinned Latinos who planted, pruned, and crops. Thus, only Whites and light-skinned Hispanics were visible to the public eye at the orchard while the more private parts of the orchard, those not visible to the general public, were staffed by dark-skinned Hispanics.

Further field observations and analysis of the interviews showed these racially segregated workspaces were reinforced and monitored both by managers/owners and fellow employees. Racial colorblindness, through both the notion of individual choice and differences in language ability, was used by all interviewees to justify the segregation of the workspace (the kitchen, store, and field) and the differences in workplace conditions (job responsibilities and interactions with customers and fellow employees).

### **Racial Colorblindness and Individual Choice**

One frequent explanation among orchard employees for the segregated workspace and differences in job responsibilities stems from the individual choices employees make. The notion of individual choice flows among Bonilla-Silva’s (2003) frames of racial colorblindness, primarily within abstract liberalism. Some participants rely heavily on the ability of all employees to choose how and where to work on the orchard, closely resembling the frame of abstract liberalism – “using ideas associated with political liberalism (e.g., ‘equal opportunity,’ the idea that force should not be used to achieve social policy) and economic liberalism (e.g., choice, individualism) in an *abstract* manner to explain racial matters” (p. 28, 26). For example, John (White, 23, store employee, U.S. citizen) discussed the long work hours and tremendous work ethic among Latinos on the orchard. While describing the immigration growth, John noted immigrants

work in places most Americans do not want to work but capitalize on these positions and “work enormous hours a week because they have that opportunity that they didn’t have wherever they came from.” When pressed about the long hours Latinos work compared to his work schedule, he continues,

They are always there whenever I get there and they are always there whenever I leave, they’re still working. So, they do work enormously more than any of the Caucasian workers do...I think it is mostly choice. Yeah, I really do think it’s mostly choice.... I think a lot of times they decide to take on projects and things like that.

John’s interpretation was an enthusiastic yet somewhat disbelieving support of Latinos working countless hours in order to capitalize on new opportunities in America. As a college student who set his own work schedule, John failed to see both his own privilege and the pressure to work longer hours exerted on Latino/as. One family lived on the orchard’s property and refusing to work longer hours or take on additional projects could put their livelihood in jeopardy. For example, after 5 years of working in the orchard’s kitchen, Maria (dark-skinned Latina, 21, kitchen employee, undocumented) noted a recent speed up in pie production,

In one day we make four, five hundred apple pies. The boss [Kelly] say, you need to make 800 pies in one day and me say, “No, no more.” It’s very, very fast and very, very tired and she say, “No, you make 800 pies a day now.” There are only three people [in the kitchen] and one is new. That one is very, very slow, you know. So I say, no and she [Kelly] is... angry, making trouble. She said, “Go to your house right now. Get out.”

John’s interpretation that Latino/as work longer hours in order to capitalize on the newly afforded opportunities was a false sense of individual “choice” offered to some employees and stands in stark contrast to Maria’s interaction with Kelly (one of the owner/managers). Maria’s resistance to the increase in pie production resulted in her

losing both her livelihood and place of residence.

Similar to John, Peter (White, 23, store employee, U.S. citizen) discussed his job compared to other jobs at the orchard said,

There is a certain group of people who are Latino that work in those kinds of jobs that people can’t really see that much that are just back behind the doors making those things but kind of, I don’t want to say hidden from the public because *they’re not being forced to like not come out behind the doors.*

Peter recognizes that Latinos are doing particular jobs “behind the doors” or outside the public view yet his reflection incorporates ideas of choice where individuals are not “forced” into those jobs or into the private nature of those jobs.

The use of abstract liberalism as a frame of racial colorblindness obfuscates the way race works within the orchard and masks the availability of choice. Maria (dark-skinned Latina, 21, kitchen employee, undocumented) noted she likes to work with Americans “because they are sweet” and would like to work with Americans more but was restricted to kitchen work. Abstract liberalism suggests the choices made by individuals are just that – choices; yet larger structural forces on the orchard and in the community inform those choices.

While some White and light-skinned Latino/as relied on frames of abstract liberalism, others relied more heavily on the frame of naturalization. This frame “allows whites to explain away racial phenomena by suggesting they are natural occurrences” (Bonilla-Silva, 2003, p. 28). Every White participant discussed the segregation as natural divisions where likeness just gravitates toward each other. Lee (White, 60, owner/field manager, U.S. citizen) recognized and played an active role in fighting discrimination his long-time farm manager faced with local police officers and retailers, often being the intermediary to

ensure fair treatment. When asked how employees related to each other at the orchard (i.e., were those same Latino employees treated differently by the other farm employees) he said, “they kind of segregated.” He later described a social event on the orchard and again suggested people self segregate,

Lee: It seems like the Spanish people want to be with Spanish people. I try to include everybody, you know, and really make an effort to do that but they are and it’s just a minority issue thing, I don’t know if it social minority or insecurity type thing. If you’re insecure you step down that ladder a little bit...

Layla: The Latinos you mean?

Lee: Yeah. Like the other night at our bonfire, Adriana and them were off to this side and you noticed Benito was back behind, you know. You try to bring them in and include them in doing things but you know that’s just way it segregates itself.

Lee relied on racial colorblindness as a way to justify the boundary maintenance between Latino/as and Whites at the orchard. It’s not Lee or where folks work at the orchard which causes people to segregate, even at social events, but rather simply because people prefer to be with people like them. For Lee, the segregation might be an “insecurity” or “social minority thing”, but it is not a result of the existing workplace segregation.

Peter (White, 23, store employee, U.S. citizen) also relied on racial colorblindness through the frames of naturalization and cultural racism when discussing the lack of intermingling between Latino/as and White employees by stating,

Well, I don’t know. Us, those of us who are American have all sorts of like pop culture and whatever to reflect on with each other, you know because we have some sort of shared experience. I’m sure that the Latino population at work has a similar shared experience with one another, too, that they could kind of discuss with one another whether that’s music or whatever it is.

For Whites at the orchard, individuals choose where to work, how long to work, and with whom to socialize or work alongside. The narrative of choice is complicated when paired with descriptions from Latino/as wanting more inclusive workspaces or observations noting enforced maintenance of boundaries. The field observations show those segregated boundaries are maintained even when White employees attempt to work outside of the store and particularly on those occasions where Whites attempted to assist Latino/as who were overwhelmed with tasks. One instance, which lingered throughout the remainder season, occurred when the kitchen staff had to roll out crust for hundreds of fried pies and had fallen behind schedule. A few White store employees offered to help because the store was unusually slow. First, a fellow employee, Diego (light-skinned Latino, 20, store employee, seeking legal status), realized White store employees were in the kitchen rather than in the store and exclaimed, “Kelly [one of the owners/managers] is going to come in here and be like, ‘What are you all doing in here?!’” Moments later, Kelly and Lee (the two owner/managers) walked into the kitchen. The lead author’s field jottings noted their shocked and frustrated reactions: In a raised voice Kelly asked, “What are you all doing in here?!?” Her eyes immediately darted to the three White store employees (including the lead author). Before we had a chance to reply, Lee asked, “Who’s making me money and who’s costing me money in here?” This exchange typifies what happened when employees leave their primary workspaces, even if it is to assist other employees. The White store employees offered assistance to their fellow employees yet for the owners/managers this behavior was transgressive and intolerable. This incident established an unspoken rule among

employees to not “cross boundaries.” If an employee went to an unassigned area, tension immediately filled the air until they returned. Shortly after this incident Lee (owner/manager) installed cameras to the inside workspaces (i.e., the store and kitchen). During the slow times Lee sat in the manager’s office and watched employees. Field note jottings included a comment from Kelly (White, 35, owner/store and kitchen manager, U.S. citizen), regarding Lee’s camera installation: “Now he just sits and watches us all day, making himself sick.” During busy times, it was likely difficult to keep track of employees because the sheer number of customers throughout the store; however, employees still avoided “crossing over” and would comment when fellow employees transgressed.

Latinas, in particular, wanted more flexibility for White store employees to work in the kitchen, especially when extra help was needed for the large kitchen tasks or when the store was slow. However, the crossover between workplaces was not embraced by the owners/managers and boundary maintenance was reinforced by other employees and by the looming fear of being caught. While the prospect of “getting caught” going into another area certainly loomed large for employees, the reasons for segregated work spaces or designation of job duties never centered around this fear. Rather than fear of the owners/managers, employees all cited either justifications of self segregation, individual choice to do particular jobs, or, more often than not, language as the central reason for segregation space and job responsibilities.

### **Cultural Racism & Language**

While individual choice resonated with many employees in terms of explaining flexibility of work conditions, the choice to take on new projects, or segregation of

work, all employees used the previously mentioned frame of cultural racism or relied on cultural differences as a tool for explaining differences between White and Latino/a work experiences and incorporation into the larger community. In the previous section, both Lee and Peter’s explanation of individual choice rely on elements of cultural racism: while individuals choose whom to be with, people want to be with others who are most like them. The cultural explanations ranged from Kelly’s (White, 35, owner/store and kitchen manager, U.S. citizen) extreme example suggesting the Latino employees at the orchard once lived in “mud huts” and “ate grass” and thus need to be taught quite a bit in order to learn American norms to Sofia’s (light-skinned Latina, 33, store employee, documented) seemingly more benign suggestion that Latinos need to “raise kids the right way and ... follow rules [and then]... everything [Latino growth in the Lexington area] will be fine.” Each of these discussions relied heavily on culture, rather than race, as the distinguishing characteristic between Latinos and Whites. If and when Latinos learn American culture then any divisions that exist will erode.

Bonilla-Silva (2003) argues cultural racism is a frame of racial colorblindness where Whites “rely on culturally based arguments... to explain the standing of minorities in society” (p. 28). While interviews and field observations both document reliance of culturally based arguments such as differences in food standards or cultural values, to explain the position of Latinos in the larger community, every employee justified workplace segregation by language differences. Every participant attributed both workspace and job duty segregation to a language barrier. Language emerged as a way to discuss the segregation within the three primary orchard workplaces without discussing race. In this

way, language became the proxy for discussing race. For example, when Kelly (White, 35, owner/store and kitchen manager, U.S. citizen), was asked why *only* Latinas worked in the kitchen and *only* Whites worked in the store she stated, “I don’t know! (laughs) Yeah and why do they [Latinas] only work in the kitchen? Well, they don’t speak English, that’s a good one. English speaking is a good reason.” Kelly’s explanation that both space and job duty segregation was a result of the kitchen staff’s inability to speak English violates one of the Orchard’s unwritten policies: English is required. Lee (White, 60, owner/field manager, U.S. citizen) explained his reasoning for English only:

Well, you’ve got a lot of other people that don’t speak Spanish and just out of respect for me basically. If you know English, I don’t know Spanish. I’ve explained to them, it’s not that I don’t respect you but if I walk into your house I’ll try to speak Spanish but if you’re in my house I want you to speak English. I felt like it was a slap in my face when it was pushed that way and that’s fine but we’re going to go in a different direction now.

For Lee, speaking English to him and in his “house” (orchard) is a sign of respect, and he felt that speaking Spanish was a direct insult to him (“a slap in the face”). Lee’s English-only policies extended beyond communication among orchard employees to also include a ban on Spanish radio in the kitchen. Peter noted a cultural disconnect between Americans and Latinos related to pop music, yet Lee’s strictly enforced no Spanish radio policy prevented an opportunity for cross-cultural transfusion. Adriana (dark-skinned Latina, 35, kitchen employee, undocumented) further confirms the English only work environment, “The boss does not want us to speak Spanish at work.” When asked why she responded, “I don’t know... it could be that they don’t understand it but they told us to not speak

Spanish and to only speak English.” Each employee is expected speak English at work unless they need clarification from a fellow employee.

The line between language and race can be somewhat difficult to determine, as race and language maintain a close, often overlapping relationship with one another. Linguistic barriers exist for some new immigrants as they arrive in the United States, including some Latino/as as arriving in new destinations. As Mendoza (1996) notes, it is important to examine the larger social context in order to distinguish between race and language and when race neutrality is presented in order to discriminate against those who speak a foreign language (p. 210). There were certainly some linguistic challenges for some orchard employees, especially those who arrived more recently with lower levels of English proficiency. However, the orchard’s policies required all employees to speak English while on the clock and when communicating to each other on the orchard grounds (with the exception previously noted). All employees were able to communicate in English proficiently enough to participate in a job interview with the owners/managers. Thus attributing workplace segregation to differences in language ability ignores the English mandate policy and serves to mask any claims of racial discrimination or enforced racial segregation. Using language ability rather than race as the determining factor between where one works and the types of job assignments performed can seem legitimate if there are in fact communication barriers. However, language as racial proxy utilizes the dominance of racial colorblindness to both mask discriminatory practices and provides a cloak of neutrality for some employees to not question the arrangements.

Lee (one of the owner/managers) indicated he implemented the English-only workplace policy because he felt disrespected when he could not understand his employees. As Kelly, the other owner/manager stated, “That’s good to know, English that is. [Lee] is wanting... you should ask him about this... he wants them to speak English all the time. I think he wants to know what everybody is saying.”

While the owners/managers seemingly implemented the English-only policy in order to better understand and communicate with employees and because they believe English is “good to know” and a sign of respect to the owner/manager, non-native English speakers were not provided the opportunities to take advantage local ESL classes to improve their English. Unlike some of the White employees who worked erratic hours in order to take classes at the local college, Latino/as who wished to improve their English language abilities were not provided the same benefits. Field observation jottings noted the number Latinos/as required to work on Mondays, the day when local ESL classes were offered and the only day the orchard was closed. Maria (dark-skinned Latina, 21, kitchen employee, undocumented) noted her desire to take classes,

It is necessary to learn English because without English you have no jobs. For me I’d like to learn more English so I can be better at the language. But right now I don’t have the time to go to the English school. I need to work so I can have money to pay my bills and buy food.

The English-only mandate coupled with the inability for Latino/a employees to advance their English skills through ESL classes, and the expectation for employees not cross workspace boundaries despite the ability of all employees to speak English and some employees’ (both Latino and White) ability to speak Spanish, leads to a larger picture of

racial boundary and attributing boundaries to language rather than race. For example, Peter (White, 23, store employee, U.S. citizen) explained the language barrier was to blame for the lack of intermingling between Latinos and Whites:

I’m not sure that people know how to navigate interacting with people of other cultures who haven’t previously been exposed to it.... As the population of Latino immigrants seems to grow maybe that’s even more difficult for people on either side of that issue to understand how to interact with one another. I’m not really sure because there are more people speaking a different language now than there was before and people, I think, by in large who have long lived in this region and speak English don’t, in my experience at least, seem to care about learning another language. They think those people should have learned our language since they came here.

Peter invokes his naivety (“I’m not really sure...” and “People who live in this region”) while adhering to the central tenets of racial colorblindness (“people don’t know how to interact with one another because of language”). According to Peter, race isn’t the factor dividing people, language is. Similarly, John (White, 23, store employee, U.S. citizen) relied on language in order to make sense of the treatment of the Latinas in the kitchen: “Kelly (owner/manager) is sometimes short with the girls in the kitchen and I think that goes back to the language barrier.” For John, it makes sense for Kelly to be “short” with the Latinas working in the kitchen because she’s frustrated when trying to communicate with them. Adriana (dark-skinned Latina, 35, kitchen employee, undocumented) recognized the divisions amongst employees, but also attributed this to the language difference. She shared, “I think that we, as Latinos, are treated differently because the non-Latinos can goof around, laugh, and make jokes. The Latinos cannot; if we make jokes in Spanish not

many people will understand and they [the employers] would get mad.” Even when individuals see differential treatment language becomes the justification, not race.

### **Discussion**

Racial colorblindness, as a new racial ideology, explains racial dynamics through anything but race and serves to maintain or exacerbate structural inequalities. Thus, segregated workspaces or differences in job responsibilities can attribute to an individual’s choice to work particular jobs, take on additional tasks, desire to be near people “like them,” or language ability rather than the concerted effort to maintain boundaries between racial groups. In this paper we explored the use of racial colorblindness among orchard employees to describe the incorporation of new Latino immigrants during an era of racial colorblindness. We asked how Latino immigrants were incorporated into the workplace at a Kentucky apple orchard and how employees talked about immigrant incorporation, particularly in an era of racial colorblindness? Our study, which utilized in-depth interviews and participant observation, highlights an acceptance of racial inequality (through segregated work conditions and differential treatment in job duties and workplace freedom) explained through racial colorblindness, namely individual choice and language ability. As Bloch (2014) highlights, “colorblind racist discourse is important for understanding how people talk about and make sense of immigration in conversation with other” (p. 51). While individual choice aligns with Bonilla-Silva’s (2003) existing frames of racial colorblindness, language became a way to both talk about race, immigrants, and differential treatment without violating the dominant racial ideology. In this way, “language discrimination [served] as an acceptable method of discrimination against

a certain group without explicitly resorting to race” (Galindo and Vigil, 2006, p. 427). Orchard employees readily accepted language discrimination in a way they likely would not have tolerated racial discrimination.

Proxies have been used to describe various racial groups throughout history. For example, citizenship has been used as a proxy for whiteness (Lopez, 2006), names as a proxy for race (Bertrand and Mullainathan, 2004), and illegal aliens or undocumented immigrant as a proxy for Latino (Douglas, Sáenz, & Murga, 2015; Fan, 2011). Language as a proxy for race has historical roots in *Hernandez vs. Texas* (Galindo and Vigil, 2006; Gross, 2006; Mendoza, 1996), where Mexican Americans were summarily dismissed from jury duty eligibility on the basis of language ability. More recently Proposition 227 in California publically focused on language (Johnson and Martinez, 2000) while arguably centering on concerns over immigrants of color, especially Mexican immigrants. As in the past, proxies are used for differential treatment in legally or socially acceptable ways. Attributing differential status or segregation to language ability rather than race served to both place the blame squarely on the shoulders of those discriminated against and maintained existing racial hierarchies. As Gross (2006) states, “Discrimination on the basis of cultural and linguistic differences will appear neutral and respectable and racial hierarchy will continue to flourish” (p. 391-392). As a racial ideology, colorblind racism helps individuals understand and interpret the world racially. It also operates to eschew individual subscribers from any personal responsibility of racism and maintains existing racial hierarchies but denying and ignoring race.

In conclusion, language as a proxy for race adheres to the central tenets of colorblind racism by obfuscating social

reality and benefitting the dominant social group by justifying racially segregated workspaces and job duties. Thus, in this new destination setting, native-Spanish speaking immigrants were relegated to marginalized workspaces and positions through seemingly justifiable and legitimate means (language ability) despite workplace policies mandating English. Language becomes a justifiable boundary-making tool separating dark-skinned Latino/as from Whites and light-skinned Latino/as. Our paper offers an expansion to racial colorblindness, as a racial ideology, in light of the “browning” and “Latinization” of America. In new destination settings, where racial boundaries are being established, language is the colorblind proxy used for race in order to justify and maintain racialized boundaries.

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