Defining America's Racial Boundaries: Blacks, Mexicans, and European Immigrants, 1890–1945[1]

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Contemporary race and immigration scholars often rely on historical analogies to help them analyze America's current and future color lines. If European immigrants became white, they claim, perhaps today's immigrants can as well. But too often these scholars ignore ongoing debates in the historical literature about America's past racial boundaries. Meanwhile, the historical literature is itself needlessly muddled. In order to address these problems, the authors borrow concepts from the social science literature on boundaries to systematically compare the experiences of blacks, Mexicans, and southern and eastern Europeans (SEEs) in the first half of the 20th century. Their findings challenge whiteness historiography; caution against making broad claims about the reinvention, blurring, or shifting of America's color lines; and suggest that the Mexican story might have more to teach us about these current and future lines than the SEE one.

INTRODUCTION

America is in the midst of profound demographic change. Just before the passage of the landmark Hart Celler Immigration Act of 1965, Latinos

and Asians combined made up scarcely more than 2% of the U.S. population. By the year 2010 their percentage had increased more than tenfold (Humes, Jones, and Ramirez 2011); by 2050, demographers predict that, together, they will represent nearly 40% of the nation (Passel and Cohn 2008). In order to make sense of the significance of these demographic trends for racial and ethnic boundaries in America, many social scientists have drawn on history as a guide. Citing the work of David Roediger (2005) and others, these scholars note that it was not until the mid-20th century that the boundaries of whiteness expanded or "blurred" to include southern and eastern European immigrants (SEEs), suggesting that the same could happen—and indeed is happening—to Latinos and Asians today (Warren and Twine 1997; Alba and Nee 2003; Yancey 2003; Perlmann 2005; Lee and Bean 2007; Alba 2009; Frank, Akresh, and Lu 2010).[2]

Yet there are several problems with this analogy (Bonilla-Silva 2010, pp. 195–96). First, it ignores the fact that there are ongoing debates about the racial status of SEEs and the nature and location of America's past racial boundaries. Some scholars argue that SEEs were once nonwhite, at least in certain times and places (Roediger 1994, p. 184; Brodkin 2000), or somewhere in between white and nonwhite—transitory occupants of a hard-to-define, murky middle (Orsi 1992; Barrett and Roediger 1997; Hirsch 2004; Roediger 2005). But another group of scholars places all European immigrants squarely within a monolithic white racial category (Takaki 1979, 2000; Klinkner and Smith 1999; Norrell 2005), while still others depict an early 20th-century American racial order with many white races set against many nonwhite ones. This perspective acknowledges the existence of significant racial boundaries among whites while still placing SEEs firmly within the white category (Jacobson 1998; Arnesen 2001; T. Guglielmo 2003, 2010; Gross 2008; Painter 2010).

The vast majority of sociologists, however, appear unaware of these ongoing debates (Yancey 2003; Alba 2005, p. 23; Massey 2007, pp. 113–15; Wimmer 2008b, p. 979; see Alba [2009, pp. 47–51] for one exception). This is particularly problematic given that the implications of viewing SEEs in the early 20th century as "white," "nonwhite," "inferior white races," or somewhere "in between" whites and nonwhites are important, not simply for an accurate view of the historical record but also for our understanding of contemporary and future racial boundaries. If SEEs were once nonwhite or in between but are now firmly considered white,

[2] For an alternative view of the future of the American racial order, see especially Bonilla-Silva (2004).

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then it might make sense to think that the boundaries of whiteness could expand again to include other previously nonwhite categories. If, on the other hand, Americans largely accepted SEEs as white—even a "racially inferior" subset of whites—then what shifted may not have been the boundaries of whiteness but something else entirely. In that case, we may need to reevaluate both the suitability of the SEE analogy for today's immigrants and the claims of some social scientists about the contemporary reinvention, shifting, or blurring of America's color lines.

Second, even if social scientists paid greater attention to the nuances of this historical scholarship, the scholarship itself is needlessly muddled. While we agree with Roediger that "messiness" characterizes the early 20th-century racial order (2005, p. 37), we also believe that advancing debates in this scholarship requires more precise, systematic, and theoretical analysis. This is especially important given that the debate within the whiteness literature is not so much about specific historical details (where there is actually a surprising amount of agreement) but rather about how to interpret their racial meanings, significance, or generalizability (Arnesen 2001).

Finally, while many sociologists rely on the SEE analogy to predict the future of American color lines, few consider that the Mexican analogy may be just as apt, perhaps more so. But here, again, confusion and debates reign. As with SEEs, many scholars have described Mexicans' racial status in the early 20th century as "in between" (T. Guglielmo 2006; Benton-Cohen 2011), "off-white" (Gómez 2007), or "partly colored" (Foley 2004*a*, p. 127) or have emphasized the highly contingent (Montejano 1987) and ambiguous (Glenn 2002) nature of their racial categorization. Others argue that Mexicans "straddle[d] the color line" (Foley 2004*b*, p. 254), for while they may have been "white by treaty," they were usually nonwhite "in practice" (Gross 2008, pp. 254, 281). By one reading of the literature, then, it seems possible that both Mexicans and SEEs might best be described as in between white and nonwhite in the early 20th century. Yet few scholars make such an argument explicitly. Roediger (2005, p. 154), who helped popularize the idea that SEEs were not quite white, places Mexicans squarely within the nonwhite or "people of color" category (on Mexicans as unequivocally nonwhite in this period, see also Massey [2007, pp. 117–18]). Similarly, Perlmann, Alba, and others, who suggest that the SEE analogy is particularly useful for thinking about the racial status of Mexicans today, refrain from comparing Mexicans and SEEs at the same historical moment since they concede that Mexicans' past racial status was so much lower (Alba and Nee 2003; Perlmann 2005, p. 9; Alba 2009, pp. 31–32).

The purpose of this article is to address and remedy these historiographical and theoretical problems. To do so—to help us think more

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precisely and systematically about the nature, location, and social significance of America's past racial boundaries—we draw on the rich social science literature on boundary properties and processes (Barth 1969; Zolberg and Long 1999; Lamont and Molnár 2002; Alba 2005, 2009; Loveman and Muniz 2007; Wimmer 2008*a*, 2008*b*).[3] We focus specifically on the boundaries that defined the black, SEE, and Mexican racial categories during the late 19th and first half of the 20th centuries, a period when a new racial structure came into being and before challenges from various freedom struggles changed it in fundamental ways. We include blacks in our analysis for two primary reasons. First, the existence of a powerful racial boundary separating blacks from whites in the period 1890–1945 is well known and uncontested and has been extensively documented. It can therefore serve as an anchor with which to compare the other two categories and the experiences of their members. Second, while many scholars of the contemporary period find it fruitful to compare the experiences of Mexicans "now" with SEEs "then" (Foner 2005; Perlmann 2005), others believe that the black analogy is more apt. According to this perspective, Mexicans are an "internally colonized" group, subject to persistent discrimination and socioeconomic stagnation, and are racialized as nonwhite (Portes and Rumbaut 2001).[4]

Surprisingly, there have been no detailed national studies that compare the racial boundaries containing (and defining) blacks, Mexicans, and SEEs during the same historical period. Much of the comparative race scholarship focuses on only two of the categories in question: blacks and SEEs (Philpott 1978; Lieberson 1980), Mexicans and blacks (Takaki 1979; Almaguer 1994; Foley 1997, 2010; Glenn 2002), or Mexicans and SEEs (Peck 2000; Hattam 2007; Benton-Cohen 2009). We believe that a systematic comparison across these three categories will help us to make better sense of the nature, location, and significance of racial boundaries.

Before we preview our conclusions, we discuss the theoretical concepts we borrow from the boundary literature, and we detail the type of data used to inform our analyses.

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[3] By "racial" we mean the mode of dividing human beings by "some notion of stock or collective heredity of traits" or blood (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1992, p. 2) and by some visible, physical characteristics—eyes, hair, skin color, and so forth—selectively chosen (see also Cornell and Hartmann 1998). For the period under question, race could denote a dizzying array of large and small categories: from Negro and white to Nordic and Mediterranean; from Celtic and Hebrew to southern Italian and Sicilian.

[4] Owing to space constraints, we are unable to compare across more categories, which during this period might include Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, and Native American groups, among others.

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TABLE 1
Boundary Properties in Theory

	Bright Boundaries	Blurry Boundaries	No Boundaries
How widely is boundary:			
Recognized	Widely	Not widely	Not recognized
Institutionalized	Widely	Not widely	Not institutionalized
How important is boundary for:			
Degree of social closure	Very significant	Less significant	Not significant
Social distance	Very significant	Less significant	Not significant
Boundary crossing	Difficult	Easy	NA

Note.—Boundary properties can also vary across space and time.

BOUNDARY PROPERTIES AND PROCESSES

Boundary scholars often distinguish between bright and blurred boundaries (Zolberg and Long 1999; Alba 2005). Bright boundaries (much like "social boundaries" in Lamont and Molnár's [2002] formulation) are widely recognized,[5] widely institutionalized,[6] and monumentally significant in terms of both the life chances of and social distance between actors on different sides of the divide (see table 1). As a result, "The distinction involved is unambiguous, so that individuals know at all times which side of the boundary they are on" (Alba 2005, p. 22). Blurred boundaries are less recognized, less institutionalized, and not as closely correlated with life chances and social distance. When boundaries are blurred, individuals may be seen as "simultaneously members of the groups on both sides of the boundary or that sometimes they appear to be members of one and at other times members of the other" (p. 25).

   To investigate the properties of past racial boundaries, we rely on a mix of primary and secondary sources, including original analyses of the 1930 census using the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS; Ruggles et al. 2008). In order to determine the extent to which a boundary was recognized and institutionalized, we look at how a wide range of state and nonstate institutions—the U.S. census, state and federal courts, federal and state laws, political parties, businesses, and so on—categorized individuals. But we also look at how these institutional categorizations squared with the views of race scientists and the "common" man or woman, including census enumerators, school administrators, realtors, union officials, employers, and others. In both cases, sometimes we have direct evidence—documented in government records, letters, articles, interviews, and so forth—of how these individuals and institutions drew

[5] We mean "recognize" in the dual sense of knowing (as in recognizing a person) and accepting and honoring (as in recognizing a treaty or law).

[6] By "institutionalize," we refer to the extent to which the state and other institutions—not simply individuals—create and maintain boundaries.

various racial boundaries. But we can also infer this information by look-ing at how individuals and institutions treated category members when, say, whiteness was at issue. When the law said "whites only" on the bus, in the movie theater, or at the school, did these individuals and institutions exclude blacks, SEEs, or Mexicans from the racially preferential treat-ment? Or did they grant them the privileges of whiteness?

To help us further assess the brightness or blurriness of various bound-aries, we look at the consequences or significance of category membership. To do so, we focus on the degree of social closure and social distance. By degree of social closure, we mean the extent to which boundaries are associated with actors' life chances, including the accessibility of material and symbolic resources (Wimmer 2008b, pp. 980, 1001–2).[7] By social dis-tance, we mean, following Shibutani and Kwan, a subjective state of "nearness felt to certain individuals" (as quoted in Alba and Nee [2003, p. 31]). This is not necessarily the same as physical distance or frequency of contacts. Indeed, individuals separated by a bright racial boundary may have sustained and even intimate contact with one another, but the nature of those interactions typically entails some form of hierarchy. To capture the degree of social closure, we determine the extent to which individual or institutional categorization as nonwhite shaped one's access to public accommodations, housing, schools, jobs, marriage partners, and other material and symbolic resources. To capture social distance, we consider attitudes, customs, policies, and laws regarding friendships, mar-riage, and residential proximity across boundaries as well rates of inter-marriage.

Boundaries are not just statically bright or blurred; they may brighten or blur over time, too (Loveman and Muniz 2007; Wimmer 2008b, p. 989). Boundaries may also shift. According to Alba, "Boundary shifting involves the relocation of a boundary so that populations once situated on one side are now included on the other: former outsiders are thereby transformed into insiders" (2005, p. 23). But boundary shifting does not entail just expansion; it may also entail contraction. When boundaries contract, in-siders may be transformed into outsiders (Wimmer 2008b, pp. 987–88). Temporal stability, or the extent to which boundaries persist or change over time, is therefore another important consideration.

While boundaries themselves can brighten, blur, expand, or contract, individuals can also cross racial boundaries, moving from one category to another "without any real change" in the boundary itself (Alba 2005, p. 23). With boundary crossing, individuals are "judged to have acquired

[7] The term "social closure" typically refers to the process by which one group of actors restricts another from access to material and symbolic resources. Here we use "degree of social closure" to refer to the outcome of this process.

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the characteristics that meet the criteria for membership in a different category" (Loveman and Muniz 2007, p. 917). Depending on the nature of the boundary in question, these characteristics might include money, education, language, accent, name, religion, residence, place of birth, citizenship, or other factors or behaviors.

Finally, we consider spatial scale (Neely and Samura 2011). Boundary scholars have clearly documented that boundaries that are bright in some countries might be blurred or nonexistent in others (e.g., Zolberg and Long 1999; Bail 2008) such that "one and the same person may be considered white in the Dominican Republic or Puerto Rico, . . . 'colored' in Jamaica, Martinique and Curaçao . . . [and] may be called a 'Negro' in Georgia" (Hoetink [1967] as quoted in Wimmer [2008*b*, p. 979]). But even within countries, boundaries might be brighter in some regions, states, cities, neighborhoods, or workplaces. Similarly, individuals may fall on one side of a racial boundary in one space or institutional context and on the other side in another.

The spatial scale of boundaries will be particularly important for our analysis because of the profound regional segregation that existed in the first few decades of the 20th century. In 1930, nearly 70% of blacks still lived in the South, 88% of SEEs lived in the Northeast and Midwest, and 87% of Mexicans lived in the Southwest (author calculation, IPUMS). Nevertheless, many comparative race studies of this period focus only on a single location (Philpott 1978; Almaguer 1994) such as Chicago's factories (Cohen 1990), the mines and communities of Cochise County, Arizona (Benton-Cohen 2009), or the cotton plantations of central Texas (Foley 1997). There are certainly virtues to this approach. It allows scholars to "hold constant" the local racial, political, or labor market context and examine the "independent" influence of race. Local studies are also particularly good at capturing on-the-ground complexities and nuances. Still, there are limitations, especially for this historical period. Life in Chicago, Cochise County, or central Texas was not typical of life where most of these groups lived. Indeed, the brightness or blurriness of various racial boundaries across these three regions at times differed significantly. Therefore, a study of racial categories and boundaries in any one city risks yielding a highly distorted perspective of the overall groups' experiences. In this article, we try to balance the desire for a larger national story for this period, with attention to regional (and local) specificity. Therefore, we compare the experiences of blacks in the South to Mexicans in the Southwest to SEEs in the Northeast and Midwest. But we also pay attention to how Americans viewed and treated the members of each category outside their region of concentration.

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OUR ARGUMENT

We make three sets of arguments about the boundaries containing (and defining) blacks, SEEs, and Mexicans. First, a bright boundary—that is, one that was widely recognized and institutionalized and monumentally significant for both life chances and social distance—separated blacks from whites (and, at times, blacks from nonblacks). Some important regional and slight temporal variations notwithstanding, this boundary was national in scope, persisted over time, and permitted very little blurring or crossing (see table 2).

Second, no boundary separated SEEs from whites; SEEs were not widely recognized as nonwhite, nor was such a boundary institutionalized. In fact, where white was a meaningful category, SEEs were virtually always included within it. To be sure, a fairly bright boundary separated SEEs from northern and western Europeans (NWEs) for a time. This boundary was based on religion, national origin, citizenship status, and even intra-European racial categories. It was not, however, based on whiteness or nonwhiteness. One way to think about this is that race and color were not perfect synonyms in the first half of the 20th century: one could be considered both white (color) and racially inferior to other whites (race; T. Guglielmo 2003, pp. 8–9). Instead of a white racial boundary shifting to include SEEs, then, we argue instead that the SEE-NWE boundary blurred significantly over time. Exactly how and when this blurring took place is a subject we leave for others to discuss. The crucial point we emphasize, however, is that the SEE story suggests the remarkable stability of the white-nonwhite boundary, not, as is sometimes assumed, its fluidity.

Third, the virtually uncontested nature of SEE whiteness becomes clearest when compared to the infinitely more complex and fraught history of Mexicans' racial categorization. A boundary separating Mexicans from whites was usually widely recognized and significant for life chances and social distance, but it was also inconsistently institutionalized. Moreover, whether Mexicans, as a category, fell on the white or on the nonwhite

TABLE 2
Boundary Properties in Practice, 1890–1945

	Black-White	SEE-White	Mexican-White
How widely is boundary:			
Recognized	Widely	Not widely	Widely
Institutionalized	Widely	Not at all	Sometimes widely, sometimes not
How important is boundary for:			
Degree of social closure	Very significant	Not significant	Significant
Social distance	Very significant	Not significant	Significant
Boundary crossing	Difficult	NA	Possible

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side of the racial divide could vary by location, time period, or the institutional field in question. Therefore, Mexicans might be considered white in one town and not in another, white in Santa Barbara in 1880 but not in the same city in 1920, white for the purposes of naturalization law but not for the school board, or white for the 1920 census but not for the 1930 one. Finally, whether an individual of Mexican descent was considered white or nonwhite could also vary by an individual's generational status, skin color, or class.

The Mexican-white boundary, then, shares properties of both bright and blurry boundaries. We stress, however, that to say that the boundary was blurred in some respects does not necessarily imply an "intermediate" stage on the way to whiteness or assimilation into the "mainstream," as Alba seems to suggest (2005, p. 25). The white racial boundary at times expanded to include Mexicans, then contracted to exclude them. For Mexicans, their often simultaneous categorization as white and nonwhite—perhaps best described as a form of bright-boundary straddling—was a rather stable feature of their experience. What is more, we argue that a blurred racial boundary was used, paradoxically, to facilitate boundary brightening at times.

We begin our analysis with a discussion of the bright boundaries separating whites from blacks, the quintessential example for the period under question. We then consider the SEE and Mexican cases.

THE BRIGHT BOUNDARIES BETWEEN BLACKS AND WHITES

The existence of a black-white boundary has long been widely recognized and institutionalized (Morgan 1975; Smith 1997). Ever since the first census in 1790, for example, the federal government has counted by race. Initially distinguishing "free whites" from "other free persons" and "slaves," the census introduced the term "colored" in 1820 and thereafter has always included categories for "colored," "black," "Negro," and at times "mulatto," "quadroon," and "octoroon," too (Hochschild and Powell 2008). Nevertheless, the degree to which these boundaries influenced life chances and social distance has varied over time and across space. Exceptionally bright throughout the United States by the mid-19th century, these boundaries blurred some after the end of slavery and the passage of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments. During Reconstruction, the degree of social closure and the extent of social distance between blacks and whites diminished somewhat. In the South, where the great majority of African-Americans lived, few neighborhoods were segregated, and blacks voted in large numbers and held elected and appointed office in some places. While they generally attended separate

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schools and churches, were cared for in separate hospitals, and fought in segregated army units, some intermingling took place in public accommodations. And throughout the North and the West and even in some southern states outside the Black Belt, there was "no generally accepted code of racial mores" nor any "general demand of the white populace that the Negro be disfranchised and white supremacy be made the law of the land" (Woodward 1955, p. 328).

Around the 1890s, however, black-white boundaries began to brighten again, as they became more widely institutionalized and monumentally significant for both life chances and social distance. The development was national—and international (Lake and Reynolds 2008)—in scope and had myriad causes, including whites' fears of and resentment toward blacks' political and socioeconomic advances; white planters' and other elites' use of race to divide and exploit an increasingly disaffected and mobilized working class; a fast urbanizing world where social relations between anonymous individuals held, in the view of many whites, frightfully egalitarian prospects; even white men's use of racial domination and violence against blacks (and others) to soothe anxieties concerning shifting gender norms (Woodward 1955; Cell 1982; Bederman 1995; Gilmore 1996; Hale 1998; Blackmon 2008).

These brightening racial boundaries' most memorable manifestation was Jim Crow segregation, which, while varying from place to place, deeply shaped social interactions in public and sometimes even private life from cradle to grave. In the North and the West, countless restaurants and bars, parks and pools, colleges and schools, nursing homes and hospitals, amusement parks, and, in time, movie theaters excluded black patrons or offered them separate and invariably unequal accommodations. In a few rare cases in the North and the West, this segregation was the law (Murray 1951, p. 14; Sugrue 2008). But it was in the South, of course, where this world of separation and subordination found fullest expression. Here, whether by law or practice, one found everything from segregated hospitals and orphanages, schools and churches, restaurants and hotels, trains and streetcars, lavatories and phone booths, swimming pools and bowling alleys, even separate textbooks in school and separate bibles on which to swear in court. Where blacks and whites were allowed into the same institutions or businesses, they were required to sit in separate sections, or whites were served first (Woodward 1955, pp. 101–2; Dittmer 1977, pp. 16–22; McMillen 1990, pp. 8–11; Litwack 1998, pp. 231–36). The federal state famously sanctioned these laws in 1896, when the Supreme Court upheld the principle of "separate but equal" in *Plessy v. Ferguson*.

Bright racial boundaries also mediated friendships, sex, cohabitation, and marriage. In North Carolina and Virginia, members of interracial

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fraternal organizations were barred from addressing each other as "brother." A Birmingham ordinance made it "unlawful for a Negro and a white person to play [dominoes or checkers] together or in company with each other" (Woodward 1955, pp. 100, 118; Smith 2002, pp. 100–102). Black men who slept with white women risked being castrated or lynched. But whites tolerated sex between white men and black women; rape in such circumstances was seldom if ever prosecuted (Jones 1985, pp. 149–50; McMillen 1990, pp. 15–18; McGuire 2010). Marriage was another matter altogether. By 1900, all of the states south of the Mason-Dixon line, along with 14 others, had miscegenation laws barring blacks and whites from marrying (Hollinger 2003; Pascoe 2009). In Mississippi, it was even illegal to advocate for social equality or endorse intermarriage in print (McMillen 1990, pp. 8–9).

In the South, in addition to formal laws and ordinances, an entire set of unwritten rules of etiquette also reinforced social distance and sub-ordination in the everyday. They dictated that blacks were to enter a white home through the back door and to step aside when whites approached them on a sidewalk. They prescribed how blacks were expected to dress and the days of the week they could shop for their clothes. They determined the level of eye contact they were to have with whites, the terms of address they were expected to employ with whites or could expect from whites, as well as the tone of their voice (McMillen 1990, pp. 9–10, 23–25; Litwack 1998, pp. 238–336).

Violations of these formal and informal, written and unwritten boundaries were met with insults and humiliation, fines, jail time, threats to life and limb, banishment, sexual assaults on women, and brutal violence. Lynching was the ultimate punishment. Between 1889 and 1931, nearly 3,000 blacks were lynched in the South; and dozens of brutal pogroms, which were aimed at blacks and resulted in the death of hundreds, broke out in numerous northern and southern cities and towns in the first two decades of the 20th century (Tuttle 1970). While not the only victims of lynching and mob violence, blacks were the target in the vast majority of cases. Moreover, many white perpetrators of violence walked free: white police officers did little to protect the victims; white eyewitnesses declined to testify against the mobs; white juries refused to convict; and the federal government, until World War II, when domestic racism had international repercussions, seldom took action (Myrdal 1944, pp. 552–53, 560–62; Tolnay, Beck, and Massey 1988; McMillen 1990, pp. 28–32, 205; Brundage 1993; Litwack 1998, pp. 238, 242, 254, 284–85; Hahn 2003, p. 426).

Boundary crossing was extremely difficult as Jim Crow laws and customs made no distinctions between blacks. Young and old, educated or illiterate, desperately poor or comfortably middle-class, all blacks were expected to obey these racial boundaries. In fact, Jim Crow stemmed, in

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part, from whites' concerns that a new generation of blacks—sometimes referred to as the "new Negroes" born after slavery—were guilty of too much striving, being too "uppity," and demanding social equality with whites (Myrdal 1944, p. 580; Woodward 1955, p. 107; Gilmore 1996, pp. xx, 23, 118; Hale 1998, p. 137; Litwack 1998, pp. 230, 238; Glenn 2002, p. 142). As such, it was often the more educated or successful blacks, especially those who appeared to whites to vaunt their status, who bore the brunt of the most virulent aggression (Litwack 1998, pp. 238–39).

Though Jim Crow laws and customs made no socioeconomic distinctions among blacks, there were questions during this period about exactly who qualified as Negro, colored, or white. *Plessy v. Ferguson* left that question to the states to decide, but they often offered inconsistent answers—if they offered answers at all. Some state Jim Crow laws, for example, gave one definition for some laws, like intermarriage, but another or no definition at all for other purposes, like admittance to schools. Nevertheless, between 1900 and 1930, some states moved toward a formal one-drop rule, as did the federal government. In 1930, the U.S. Census Bureau stopped distinguishing between "mulattos" and "blacks," instructing its enumerators that "a person of mixed white and Negro blood should be returned as a Negro, no matter how small the percentage of Negro blood" (Finkleman 1993, p. 955; Nobles 2000, pp. 61–72; Zackondik 2001, pp. 442–43; Smith 2002, p. 84). Similarly, World War II–era draft officials at times used the one-drop rule to determine whether men should be inducted and placed in segregated military units as blacks or whites.[8]

While Jim Crow laws and customs have received the most attention in historical memory, they were only one dimension of these brightening racial boundaries. Whites also drew the color line at work and in unions throughout the country. In many parts of the South, sharecropping, convict leasing, and vagrancy laws trapped blacks into highly exploitative work arrangements only marginally better than those under slavery (Blackmon 2008). Elsewhere, employers simply refused to hire black workers or hired them last and fired them first, placed them in the least-skilled jobs, and paid them the worst wages (Woodward 1955, pp. 98, 115; Cohen 1990; McMillen 1990, pp. 155–66; Litwack 1998, pp. 133, 142–43; Sugrue 2008). Until the Great Depression, when African-American workers and their allies on the left successfully pushed some unions and locals of both the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and especially the newly formed Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) to open their doors to them, a nearly impermeable color line suffused the labor movement, effectively barring blacks from countless jobs (Woodward

[8] Hershey to Neal, April 29, 1941, file 220, box 427, Records of the Selective Service System, RG 147, National Archives, College Park, Md.

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1955, p. 98; Bernstein 1960, pp. 84, 107–8; Lieberson 1980, p. 339; Jones 1985, p. 147; Göbel 1988; McMillen 1990, pp. 164–65; Litwack 1998, pp. 142, 166–67; Nelson 2001; Lichtenstein 2002, pp. 72–87).

New instruments of residential segregation emerged during this period as well. In some regions, particularly the Midwest, "sundown towns" sprouted up, where white residents "drove blacks out by force, enacted ordinances to prohibit black occupancy . . . and sometimes posted signs . . . warning blacks of the dire consequences of staying around after sunset" (Sugrue 2008, p. 202; Loewen 2005; Jaspin 2007). By the 1910s and 1920s, as growing numbers of blacks began migrating from the rural South to cities across the country, racially restrictive zoning laws were passed in more than a dozen cities and towns throughout the South and in border cities such as Indianapolis and Baltimore (Hirsch 1993). When the Supreme Court struck these measures down in 1917 (*Buchanan v. Warley*), whites either disregarded the decision (Brown-Nagin 2011, p. 60) or devised other exclusionary methods. Starting in the 1920s, realtors, local "improvement" organizations, and white residents used restrictive covenants to confine African-Americans to the least desirable and most underserved neighborhoods (Woodward 1955, pp. 100–101; Philpott 1978; McMillen 1990, p. 13; Massey and Denton 1993, pp. 36, 41–42). In time, the federal government helped enormously in this endeavor. By the 1930s and 1940s, federally funded housing projects often insisted on or acquiesced to local demands for black-white segregation. A great deal more far-reaching and devastating, however, were the policies of the Federal Housing Administration, the Home Owners' Loan Corporation, and later the Veterans Administration, all of which over the course of several decades denied black homeowners or would-be homeowners hundreds of millions of dollars in federally backed home loans and mortgages, excluding blacks from sweeping swaths of postwar suburbia (Jackson 1985; Katznelson 2005; Freund 2007).

By the early 20th century, though bright black-white boundaries were national in scope, their singular brightness in the South came in part from the unique political context there, especially the wholesale exclusion of blacks from electoral politics. Almost every Southern state by 1910 had adopted some combination of cumulative poll taxes, residency tests, registration requirements, literacy tests, direct primaries open to white voters only, and "grandfather," "understanding," or "character" clauses, all aimed at eliminating blacks from electoral politics. According to eminent political scientist V. O. Key, the more blacks in a state, the more stringent were the suffrage qualifications (Key 1949, pp. 537–40; see also Myrdal 1944, pp. 479–86; Woodward 1955, pp. 83–84; Kousser 1974; Kantrowitz 2000; Keyssar 2000, pp. 111–13; Perman 2001; Hahn 2003, pp. 440–46). The effect of suffrage restrictions, which the federal government did little to

stop (see Perman 2001; Glenn 2002, p. 112; on white primaries, see Hine [1979]), was stunning. The number of registered blacks in Louisiana plummeted from 130,334 in 1896 to 1,342 after the literacy test and poll taxes were adopted (Keyssar 2000, pp. 114–15). In conjunction with disfranchisement, blacks also lost their rights to hold office, to serve on juries, to receive political patronage, and to have a say in how they were taxed and how their tax dollars were spent (Glenn 2002, p. 112; Hahn 2003).

This last point was no more vividly illustrated than in schooling. Many blacks attended segregated and inferior schools in the North (Douglas 2005; Sugrue 2008, pp. 169–71), but public education for blacks in the South, in particular, provided a daily lesson in social closure and social distance. Blacks were taught in segregated and vastly inferior schools, if they were provided schools at all. Indeed, 17% of black children between the ages of 7 and 15 did not attend school in 1930, nearly three times the rate of white children (author calculation, IPUMS). States in the South were slow to pass compulsory education laws and lax in their enforcement. White planters in the South often complained when black parents insisted on sending their children to school. "What I want here is Negroes who can make cotton," said one, "and they don't need education to help them make cotton" (Litwack 1998, p. 98). Furthermore, planters feared that too many literate and well-educated blacks might heighten discontent and undermine common justifications for civil and political subordination. Where black high schools existed, the focus was on vocational education or industrial training (Dittmer 1977, pp. 141–42, 146; Lieberson 1980, p. 135; Anderson 1988; McMillen 1990, pp. 90–93; Gilmore 1996, pp. 159–60; Litwack 1998, pp. 65, 70–78, 98–99; Glenn 2002, pp. 139–41).

Bright black-white boundaries involved not simply the material realities of lynching and disfranchisement, segregation and poverty, however. They also involved a handy set of schemas that explained, justified, and helped produce these realities. By the turn of the 20th century, the field of race science, which included the new and old disciplines of sociology, anthropology, ethnology, biology, paleontology, and history, had done as much as any institution to naturalize, sanction, and circulate common beliefs about black racial difference and innate inferiority. In the mid-19th century, some race scientists—"polygenists"—believed that blacks and whites were so distinct that they constituted separate species. Yet even as the belief in polygenism declined, after the 1859 publication of Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species*, race scientists continued in their efforts to prove blacks' biological inferiority. In one especially influential book, *Race Traits and Tendencies of the American Negro* (Hoffman 1896), for example, statistician Frederick Hoffman argued that blacks' supposedly in-born deficiencies doomed them to extinction (Fredrickson 1971, pp. 249–51). True, the work of Franz Boas and others, which emphasized the cultural and

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environmental rather than the biological roots of perceived differences in human behavior and ability, became increasingly influential throughout the United States (and elsewhere) in the 1930s and beyond (Barkan 1992). And yet the impact of this earlier work lived on. Several World War II–era national opinion polls, for example, found that nearly half of white respondents believed that blacks were less intelligent than whites and that this would not change even if they received the same education and training as whites (Erskine 1962, p. 138).

Throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries, African-American activists and their allies struggled mightily to transcend, blur, or eliminate white-black boundaries, demanding and occasionally receiving help from the state. The Supreme Court outlawed racial zoning in 1917 and blacks' exclusion from publicly financed graduate schools in 1938 (Klarman 2004). As growing numbers of blacks moved north and became a key voting bloc in the New Deal coalition, they pushed President Franklin Roosevelt and members of the Democratic and Republican Parties to act on their behalf. They forced FDR to form the Fair Employment Practices Committee in 1941, which, while lasting only a few years and lacking enforcement powers, was still the federal government's first major race reform since Reconstruction. Along with a booming wartime economy and an increased demand for workers, it helped many African-Americans to improve their wartime wages and job prospects. The Civil Rights Section of the Justice Department became increasingly active in investigating cases of racial violence against blacks. The Supreme Court outlawed white primaries in 1944, helping to boost southern blacks' postwar electoral participation (Klarman 2004). Dozens of states and cities passed antidiscrimination laws and ordinances (Chen 2009). And the scientific attack on white supremacy intensified further, as the evils of Nazism became horrifyingly clear.

But the war also brightened black-white—and even black-nonblack—boundaries. When the Red Cross and the U.S. military organized their first national blood donor program in 1941, they first excluded African-American donors from taking part and then, only after wide-ranging protest and growing demand for blood, accepted them, but solely on a segregated basis. Jim Crow blood policies, aimed solely at blacks, remained in place for the entire war and several years beyond (T. Guglielmo 2010). Meanwhile, the armed services, with few exceptions, mandated other black-white Jim Crow policies: not simply in military units but in nearly every activity imaginable both on and off base—eating, sleeping, drinking, dancing, dating, marrying, theatergoing, swimming, and bathing. The military insisted on these policies not simply in the U.S. South but all over the United States and, as military personnel moved overseas, around the world (MacGregor 1981). The World War II–era U.S. armed

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services nationalized and internationlized American-style Jim Crow on an unprecedented scale.

By the war's end, then, despite slight modifications here and there, bright black-white boundaries remained well intact. They were decades old, widely recognized, thoroughly institutionalized nationwide, and monumentally significant in terms of life chances and social distance. Only a massive postwar black freedom struggle—something that the war energized like nothing before—would blur them in any significant way.

THE NONEXISTENT BOUNDARIES BETWEEN WHITES AND SEES

No such mass freedom struggle was necessary for SEEs, even though they faced significant race-based boundaries in the late 19th- and early 20th-century United States. These boundaries were "race based" because a broad swath of white Americans (among others) saw these newcomers as constituting a range of big and small and overlapping European races—Hebrew and Jew, Italian and southern Italian, Slav and Slovak, Latin and Iberic, Alpine and Mediterranean—that differed from and paled in comparison to other European races, namely, the Anglo-Saxon, Nordic, Aryan, and Teutonic. The former, so the conventional wisdom went, were biologically and culturally less intelligent, more criminal, less manly, less courageous, less fit (if fit at all) for self-government, and, thus, were a serious menace to the American nation (views of Jews differed slightly; see Goldstein 2006). These ideas enjoyed enthusiastic support and widespread circulation from many of the most eminent scientists and eugenicists of the day; popular magazines, newspapers, and novels; presidents, congressmen, and Progressive reformers; business and union leaders; and ordinary workers. They peaked in influence in the early 1920s, when Congress, on the basis of explicitly racialized notions of desirability and undesirability, severely curbed the number of SEEs permitted to migrate to the United States (Jacobson 1998; Roediger 2005). By this point and for some years beyond, these notions shaped to some extent the lives and life chances of many SEE immigrants and their children—their ability to find a job, join a union, earn an honest wage, and so forth. They also produced significant social distance between native-born whites of NWE "stock" and SEEs. One survey of over 1,700 American college students from the 1920s, for example, found that compared to their NWE counterparts, SEEs were deemed to be far less desirable as neighbors, "personal chums," coworkers, fellow citizens, or marriage partners (Bogardus 1928).

While a fairly bright racial boundary separated SEEs from NWEs, no racial boundary separated SEEs from whites. To understand the distinction, we must recognize that, in contrast to today, many Americans in the

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first third of the 20th century viewed race and color as overlapping but not identical terms. Color was typically used to designate categories such as whites or blacks, or what some called the "grand divisions of mankind" (U.S. Immigration Commission 1911, p. 6). Race described these categories as well but also described smaller ones such as Italians and southern Italians, Mexicans and Hebrews, Alpines and Nordics. These latter categories might sound to our contemporary ear like different nationalities or ethnicities, but many Americans called them *races* and distinguished between them—just as they did with, say, whites and blacks—on the basis of notions of stock, heredity, blood, and selectively chosen physical characteristics. As a result, one could be categorized both as white and—thanks to one's classification as, say, southern Italian—as racially inferior to other whites (Jacobson 1998; T. Guglielmo 2003).

There is evidence, to be sure, of individuals, and even an occasional institution, challenging SEEs' categorization as white: explicitly calling them or treating them as not white or not fully white; describing them as "swarthy," "dark," and "dark complected"; and comparing them to blacks and Asians, even claiming at times that the groups shared some of the same blood. But this evidence, as bountiful as it may appear, constitutes only a part—a small part, we would argue—of the story. Indeed, most striking is how rarely any Americans—individually or institutionally—ever placed SEEs beyond the boundaries of whiteness.

The proper place to begin this discussion is the federal state, which has immense power to "simplify complex social facts into a set of categories that are easily 'legible'"—and widely accepted (Canaday 2009, p. 214; Bourdieu 1994). Among these categories was certainly whiteness, around which the state drew bright boundaries when counting and classifying people in every decennial census, when deciding which immigrants could and could not naturalize as U.S. citizens, when raising a segregated military, and when recording information on countless forms such as visa and naturalization applications. In some of these matters, the state occasionally questioned SEEs' whiteness. In 1912, the House Committee on Immigration "debated and doubted whether Italians were full-blooded Caucasians" (T. Guglielmo 2003, p. 6); U.S. naturalization attorneys in Minnesota attempted to bar some politically "radical Finns from naturalization on the ethnological grounds that they were 'Mongolian' and therefore not white" (Roediger 2005, p. 61; Goldstein 2006); and Armenians and others from the "geographic borderlands between Asia and Europe" faced similar challenges by naturalization officers (Gross 2008, pp. 230–36; Craver 2009).

But, in the end, these stories were either exceptions to the rule or examples of the state momentarily questioning but not denying white status. The inescapable fact is that the state consistently classified all

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Europeans as white: Latins as much as Nordics, Jews as much as Aryans, Slavs as much as Saxons, NWEs as much as SEEs. Every federal census counted all Europeans in this way, a fact of immense significance, given that "censuses provide the concepts, taxonomy, and substantive information by which a nation understands its component parts as well as the contours of the whole" (Hochschild and Powell 2008, p. 60). When, throughout this period, the state maintained a rigidly segregated army, all Europeans served in so-called white units, which received better training, quartering, and recreational facilities off the battlefield and all the most heroic assignments on it (Gerstle 2001; Sterba 2003; Lentz-Smith 2009; Bruscino 2010). On millions of naturalization applications, which often contained separate questions about "complexion," "race," and "color," the state sometimes classified SEEs as having "dark" complexions and as "racially" Croatian or Ukrainian or Polish; on the all-important question of "color," however, it classified them and all other Europeans as white (T. Guglielmo 2003, p. 9). In 1911, a highly influential congressional commission on immigration—popularly known as the Dillingham Commission—published its *Dictionary of Races or Peoples*. It denigrated numerous SEEs on racial grounds but grouped them all within a larger white or Caucasian category (U.S. Immigration Commission 1911; see also Perlmann 2001). Even 1920s immigration legislation, which, as noted, was steeped in race-based notions of SEEs' undesirability, still "distinguished persons of the 'colored races' from 'white' persons from 'white countries'" in assigning annual immigration quotas (Ngai 2004, p. 27) and classified all Europeans among the latter groups.

At the same time that the federal state clearly and consistently classified SEEs as white, it just as clearly and consistently refused to classify them as nonwhite. Consider the crucial and well-researched case of naturalization rights. Racial exclusions to citizenship were written into the first Naturalization Act of 1790, such that individuals had to be "free white persons" to naturalize. Over time, Congress extended these naturalization rights to an ever-widening circle of people—to those of African nativity and descent, in 1870; to "descendents of races indigenous to the Western Hemisphere," in 1940; to those of Chinese descent in 1943; and so forth—until, in 1952, it eliminated race as a bar to naturalization altogether. Throughout the late 19th and first third of the 20th centuries, the federal courts excluded different Asian immigrants from naturalization on the basis of their nonwhite status. But no courts ever denied European immigrants the right to naturalize as "free white persons," a fact of immense significance given that some states prohibited aliens—sometimes aliens "ineligible for citizenship" especially—from voting, owning land, holding public office, working in certain licensed occupations, or teaching in the

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public schools (Haney-López 1996; Gross 2008, pp. 230–36). On laws against aliens, see Murray (1951, p. 18).

One of the reasons the courts never seriously challenged SEEs' claims to whiteness is that race scientists categorized SEEs as white. True, the early 20th-century field of race science sanctioned and circulated beliefs about SEEs' racial inferiority, helping to produce fairly bright boundaries between them and NWEs. Typical was Edward Ross, one of the most eminent sociologists of his day, who argued that SEE immigrants, when compared to the "'American' pioneer breed" from northern and western Europe, were sorely lacking in "good looks," stature and physique, vitality, and morality; that they had "sub-common" blood, belonged in "skins, in wattled huts at the close of the great ice age," and threatened America with "race suicide" (Ross 1914, pp. 615, 621). Yet it is difficult to find any social, physical, or "gentleman" scientists from this period who classified SEEs as nonwhite or in between white and nonwhite (Roediger 2005, p. 50). Even those "experts" who expressed the gravest, race-based concerns about these newcomers often took their whiteness for granted. Historian Lothrop Stoddard, one of the period's most prolific and influential writers on race and immigration, offers a prime example. In his popular book *The Rising Tide of Color against White World Supremacy* (Stoddard 1920), he denounced SEEs as "lower human types," who "upset standards, sterilize better stocks, increase low types, and compromise national futures more than war, revolutions, or native deterioration." But he was even more distressed about the "colored" peoples of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. "If the *white* immigrants [SEEs] can gravely disorder the national life," he wrote, "it is not too much to say that the *colored* immigrant would doom it to certain death" (p. 267; italics added).

If race scientists seemed quite certain about SEEs' white status, some individuals among the general public still had their doubts (Roediger 2005). A railroad construction boss from the West Coast told a congressional committee in 1891 that a "Dago" was not "a white man" (Higham 1955, p. 66). An employer in Brooklyn seemingly implied that Italians were not white when he described the division of labor on the docks: "in discharging [the ship] we employ all Italians and in loading all white men" (Roediger 2005, p. 75). A white Texan revealed his nuanced position on the racial status of Bohemians when he declared, "The Bohunk wants to intermarry with the whites. Yes, they're white, but they're not our kind of white" (p. 43). And we could add other examples to this list.

This questioning of the boundaries of whiteness, however, was not simply about where to fit SEEs. Individuals of NWE origin could also sometimes fall outside the boundaries of whiteness since "whiteness" was at times construed as being or acting "American," middle class, or "manly" (Foley 1997; for a critique, see Arnesen [2001, pp. 24–25]). More important

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still, the popular questioning of SEEs' whiteness was not, as this entire section shows, widely recognized. After all, had it been otherwise, the courts might have held that SEEs were not white and therefore were ineligible for naturalization, especially once the Supreme Court ruled that common understandings of race trumped science in determining whiteness (Haney-López 1996). Indeed, in its landmark *U.S. v. Bhagat Singh Thind* decision in 1923, the Supreme Court justices characterized "immigrants from Eastern, Southern and Middle Europe, among them the Slavs and the dark-eyed, swarthy people of Alpine and Mediterranean stock" as "unquestionably akin" to NWEs, all belonging to "the various groups of persons in this country commonly recognized as white" (Haney-López 1996, p. 182). Moreover, some observers were perplexed by individuals who placed SEEs outside the boundaries of whiteness. Paul Taylor, a social scientist who traveled the country in the 1920s and 1930s to study Mexicans, noted that in some northeastern Colorado communities, many people considered "unassimilated" Europeans as falling outside the boundaries of whiteness, but he found the practice rather "strange" (Taylor 1929, p. 104).

In fact, government power—not simply at the federal level, as noted, but at the state level as well—further institutionalized SEEs' whiteness. Take miscegenation law, for example. As historian Peggy Pascoe has found, dozens of states by the 1930s prohibited a long list of groups from marrying whites. In addition to blacks (and "Negroes," "Ethiopians," and "Persons of African Descent"), these groups included mulattoes, quadroons, octoroons, persons of color, Indians, mestizos, half-breeds, Mongolians, Chinese, Japanese, Malays, Kanakas, Koreans, Asiatic Indians, West Indians, and Hindus. But not a single law targeted SEEs (Pascoe 2009, pp. 119–20).[9]

Even if miscegenation law did not target SEEs, can we find examples of the state permitting marriages between SEEs and blacks where white-black marriages were illegal (as we show below occurred with Mexicans)? Only one case even comes close (*Rollins v. State*, 18 Ala. App. 354 [1922]). In 1920s Alabama, a black man named Jim Rollins was charged with violating the state's antimiscegenation statute because he and an Italian American woman named Edith Labue "lived together in adultery or fornication." Rollins was convicted, but on appeal, the lower court's decision was reversed. The reversal may appear on its face to demonstrate the ambiguity of Italians' color status (Jacobson 1998, p. 4; Roediger 2005,

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[9] This was true even if, in 1935, one Washington State legislator attempted, but failed, to pass a bill that "would have defined White so as to exclude 'those of eastern and southeastern Europe embracing the Balkan peninsula or states, and Russia as now delineated'" (Pascoe 2009, pp. 119–20).

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p. 48). However, the case was reversed on a mere technicality. Rollins argued that calling Labue "'Sicilian' did not prove she was white rather than 'negro,' any more than calling her 'Swedish' or 'German' would have proven her racial status; she might be any nationality and still be either white or not white." The appeals court offered "no formal finding" on Labue's race, stating simply that the lower court had failed to investigate her (or even Rollins's) racial status (Gross 2008, pp. 230–31).

We do find evidence, however, of fairly bright racial boundaries separating SEEs from NWEs when we consider social distance; rates of intermarriage between the two were somewhat low. In 1930, 71% of household heads who migrated from southeastern Europe as children or who were born in the United States to SEE parents married other SEEs, 9% were married to NWEs, and 20% were married to third-plus generation native whites whose specific European origins are unknown (author calculation, IPUMS). There is also evidence that marriages across religious lines were less frequent (Kennedy 1952). Nevertheless, unlike marriages between whites and blacks, which were exceedingly rare (only 0.2% of black household heads were married to whites nationwide), such marriages were relatively common, and they were never a crime (T. Guglielmo 2003, p. 28; Roediger 2005, p. 198). Furthermore, out-marriage rates for most SEEs—with Jews the most common exception—rose fairly quickly in the mid-20th century (Kennedy 1952; Alba and Golden 1986; Alba and Nee 2003, pp. 90–93).

Similarly, in the hundreds of state laws and local ordinances that required racial segregation in schools, streetcars, water fountains, hospitals, and the like, not one of these ever singled out SEEs or defined them as nonwhite (Murray 1951). It is true, of course, that de facto discrimination could be rampant in these areas, as was the case for blacks in the North and the West and, as we will see, for Mexicans as well. But only in exceptionally rare cases can one find instances of SEEs being turned away from whites-only public spaces (see Roediger [2005, p. 45] for some exceptions). Indeed, when an SEE immigrant on the Chicago Board of Education proposed segregated schools for blacks in Chicago, the Chicago *Defender*, an African-American newspaper, asked, "Would a proposition of this kind be entertained or considered for one moment if it had for its object the segregation of Polish, Jewish, Italian or even children of those with whom we are now at war?" The answer was a resounding no (Philpott 1978, p. 161).

In fact, not only were SEEs allowed to attend white schools (Thompson 1920, p. 73; Roediger 2005, pp. 193–95); the common school movement tried to lure European-born parents into sending their children to the public school system instead of the private parochial institutions that some SEEs preferred (Lieberson 1980, p. 135; Tyack 2001). By 1930, child labor

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and compulsory school laws helped keep 94% of SEE children—the same rate as native-born whites—in the classroom and off the factory floor (author calculation, IPUMS). Where southern whites saw the presence of large numbers of blacks as "a strong deterrent to the enactment of compulsory education laws," northern reformers saw large numbers of SEEs as necessitating "rigid" laws with strong enforcement (Ross 1924, pp. 39, 76–77; Lieberson 1980, pp. 135–37; Pacyga 1991, pp. 55–56). To be sure, the experience was not always pleasant. Teachers often ridiculed SEEs' "funny" names, publicly questioned their cleanliness, and assumed that SEE students were "retarded" and mentally deficient (Roediger 2005, pp. 193–95). After the end of World War I, selective northeastern universities also limited the number of Jews allowed to enroll (Higham 1955, p. 278; Karabel 2005). But if black-white boundaries meant segregation and exclusion for African-Americans, SEE-NWE boundaries often meant incorporation and Americanization (albeit sometimes coerced) for SEEs.

SEEs' inclusion within the boundaries of whiteness also applied to neighborhoods. Throughout the early part of the 20th century, many native-born white residents and realtors had serious concerns about SEEs' effects on property values and about their overall desirability as neighbors (Bogardus 1928, p. 25; T. Guglielmo 2003, p. 164; Roediger and Barrett 2004). Yet the systematic and widespread campaigns to "protect" the whiteness (or, in some cases, the nonblackness) of towns and neighborhoods, which began in the early 20th century and extended well beyond World War II, rarely targeted SEEs. Whatever the technologies of racial exclusion—zoning laws, sundown towns, neighborhood associations, grassroots violence, realtor ethics codes, restrictive covenants, or, in time, federal government housing policies—they spared SEEs, with Jews being the most common, if still rare, exception (Philpott 1978, pp. 183, 166, 196, 202; T. Guglielmo 2003, pp. 165–69; Roediger 2005, pp. 171–73). Indeed, as the debate over segregation before the Chicago Board of Education suggested, in time many SEEs became active agents of racial exclusion themselves (Philpott 1978, p. 161; Hirsch 1982; Sugrue 1996, pp. 209–30; T. Guglielmo 2003, pp. 39–58, 146–71; Goldstein 2006, p. 68).

Furthermore, in stark contrast to the case of blacks, what race-based boundaries that did exist for SEEs in housing often blurred with social mobility or perceived assimilation. Speaking about an influential set of desirability rankings that had placed several SEE groups toward the bottom, one well-known Chicago real estate expert explained, "the classification . . . applies only to members of the races mentioned who are living in [immigrant] colonies at standards below those to which Americans are accustomed" (Hoyt 1933, p. 314). Thus while SEE immigrants were more residentially segregated from native-born whites than were NWE immigrants (Lieberson 1963, pp. 65–68; Massey and Denton 1993,

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p. 27), the former were never forced to live in hypersegregated urban "ghettos" and moved to so-called white towns and neighborhoods with only limited, if any, trouble (Chudacoff 1973; Philpott 1978; Conzen 1979; Göbel 1988; Massey and Denton 1993, p. 33; Roediger 2005, pp. 163–69). And unlike blacks, SEEs were also able to take advantage of the hundreds of millions of dollars in federally backed home loans and mortgages through the Federal Housing Administration, the Home Owners' Loan Corporation, and the Veterans Administration (Jackson 1985; Roediger 2005, pp. 224–34; Freund 2007).

In stark contrast to blacks, SEEs also never experienced mass, race-based disfranchisement. While there were certainly suffrage restrictions in the North such as literacy tests, preelection day registration laws, and the like, "what transpired in the southern states was far more draconian, sweeping, and violent," wrote historian Alexander Keyssar. "The disenfranchisement was massive rather than segmented, the laws were enforced brutally, and they were always administered with overtly discriminatory intent. In New York and Massachusetts, an illiterate immigrant could gain the franchise by learning to read; for a black man in Alabama, education was beside the point whatever the law said" (Keyssar 2000, p. 170). And, significantly, these laws in the South never successfully targeted SEEs. In 1898, legislators in Louisiana considered excluding Italians along with blacks from the franchise, but their efforts, in contrast to those against blacks, failed. Much more common is what occurred in Baltimore around the turn of the 20th century. When the Democratic Party mobilized to pass disfranchisement legislation aimed at African-Americans, it welcomed Italians and presumably other SEEs into its ranks. One local politician campaigned among Italians as the "white man's ward leader" and started speeches with the claim "There's no man in the state who hates the darky more than I do" (Shufelt 1998, p. 179).

Some native-born whites and others hated SEEs, too, of course, which resulted on occasion in the most brutal forms of physical violence, even lynching. The 1915 mob killing of Leo Frank, a young Jewish factory manager convicted of murdering a white girl, is a well-known example, as is the lynching of 11 Sicilians who were suspected of killing the New Orleans police chief in 1891 (Jacobson 1998, pp. 57–68; Goldstein 2006, pp. 43, 62, 65–67). And there were, all told, as many as two or three dozen other similarly gruesome cases during this period. But their racial meaning is not crystal clear. After all, numerous native-born whites were lynched in this era as well (see Brundage 1993). And, in any case, Roediger rightly points out that "these patterns of violence [against SEEs] were utterly incommensurate with the racist violence visited on thousands of Native Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans, and African Americans in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries." In the case of lynchings, he

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notes that black victims "outstripped those of new immigrants by perhaps a factor of 75 to 1 or more" (Roediger 2005, p. 106).

Some SEEs faced bright boundaries in the workplace. At times, employers and foremen placed them in dirty and dangerous jobs, promoted them slowly if at all (Gosnell 1928, p. 933; Roediger 2005, p. 75), paid them less than NWEs (McGouldrick and Tannen 1977; Roediger 2005, p. 77), and, especially in the case of Jews, excluded them outright from employment. In New York City at the end of World War I, for example, one estimate found that roughly 90% of all general office jobs were closed to Jews (Higham 1955, p. 278; see also Steele 1991). While, in most cases, these boundaries were based on religion, nativity, citizenship status, or European racial categories, occasionally a nonwhite or less than fully white workplace status was also to blame: employers or fellow workers made distinctions between SEEs and "whites" or "white men" in wage rates, jobs, or work areas on select plantations in the South (Campisi 1943, p. 83; Brandfon 1964, p. 610; Scarpaci 1977, p. 38), in several railroad and mining camps in the Midwest and Southwest (Leiserson 1924, pp. 71–72; Gordon 1999, p. 104; Roediger 2005, pp. 74, 77; Benton-Cohen 2009, pp. 96–99), and on at least one dock in New York (Barnes 1915, p. 8).

But this evidence is complex. For example, even when SEEs were excluded from "white man's" mining camps, as they were for a time in Bisbee, Arizona, they were still allowed to attend Bisbee's local white church and their children attended the white school. Census data listed SEEs in the town as white. They were eligible for naturalization as "free white persons," and local elites included SEEs (but not Mexicans) in their Americanization efforts, sure that, at least for European immigrants, "'Americans' could be made, not just born." Indeed, the ideology of the white man's camp was equated in large part with being American and speaking English, so much so in fact that it included black Americans (Benton-Cohen 2009, pp. 95–104). SEEs' exclusion from the white man's camp was certainly significant for their status in Bisbee's local racial order. Yet while their white color status was questioned in one institutional context, it was simultaneously affirmed in many others.

Moreover, whether workplace questioning of SEEs' whiteness was common in regions such as the South and West is still unclear. What seems clearer is that such white-SEE workplace boundaries were exceedingly rare in the cities and towns of the Northeast and Midwest where the great majority of SEEs lived and worked (T. Guglielmo 2003, J. Guglielmo 2010). And, as in the case of housing, they could blur rapidly thanks to social mobility, assimilation, or a host of other factors. In railroad camps in Wisconsin, for example, foreigners became white through Americanization. One observer noted in 1924 that "the 'white man' is a laborer of

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any nationality who speaks English, who eats American food, and travels alone. 'Foreigners' are those who speak no English, travel and work in gangs under the leadership of an interpreter, and board themselves in their native fashion" (Leiserson 1924, p. 71; see also Scarpaci 1977, p. 44; Benton-Cohen 2009, pp. 142–46).

Many unions, for their part, harbored serious reservations about SEEs, at least for a time. Around the turn of the 20th century, the AFL, which championed various immigration restrictions and propagated eugenic thinking about SEEs' inferiority (Greene 1998, p. 40; Roediger 2005, pp. 80, 82), made few significant efforts to organize them (Göbel 1988), focusing instead on skilled workers who were more likely to be NWEs (Greene 1998, pp. 20, 22–23, 39). There were reports of discrimination against specific groups, such as Jews and Italians (Lieberson 1980, p. 341), and some unions had citizenship restrictions, barring all aliens from their ranks. But SEEs never faced the same sorts of blanket exclusions African-Americans did (Roediger 2005, pp. 208–9); nor is there any evidence that any union that prided itself on its all-white membership barred SEEs. Indeed, their many race-based misgivings notwithstanding, most union leaders understood that they could ill afford to shut out SEEs from unions altogether (Barrett 1992, p. 1002). According to Roediger, "the AFL increasingly, if reluctantly, got into the business of organizing and Americanizing new immigrant workers in the early twentieth century" (2005, p. 83). And evidence of growing participation among SEEs abounds. By the 1930s, SEEs made up 30% of the leadership positions in the CIO and 19% in the AFL (Göbel 1988). Not bad for a group whose members arrived principally after 1900 (Perlmann 2005, p. 16).

Taken together, then, some whites of NWE origin drew fairly bright boundaries between themselves and SEEs on the basis of a range of issues, including European racial categories, religion, literacy, nativity, and citizenship status. The boundary between SEEs and NWEs was widely recognized and institutionalized and was fairly influential in terms of life chances and social distance, although nowhere near as consequential as the boundary separating blacks from whites. But efforts to place SEEs beyond the bright boundaries of whiteness were rare; successful efforts were rarer still. In the isolated instance in which individuals or, much more seldom, an institution classified SEEs as nonwhite, it was often both short-lived and spatially contained, affecting perhaps a home or a workplace, but not an entire neighborhood, city, state, region, or nation.

THE BRIGHT, BLURRED, AND SHIFTING BOUNDARIES BETWEEN WHITES AND MEXICANS

In the last half of the 19th century, it was difficult to generalize about Mexicans' precise position along America's white-nonwhite boundary. On the one hand, the census categorized most Mexicans as white, and the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848 guaranteed to Mexicans who stayed in the United States after the conquest "all the rights of citizens of the United States," including the rights to vote, hold public office, own land, and testify in court—all the rights, that is, of "free white persons." Light-skinned or elite Mexicans were generally accorded relatively high social status. And where Mexicans still owned land, social mingling and intermarriage with "Anglos"[10] were common; segregation in public accommodations and schools was not. On the other hand, not all Mexicans were categorized as white or enjoyed these rights and privileges equally (Camarillo 1979, pp. 53–78; Montejano 1987; Almaguer 1994, pp. 45–74; Gordon 1999, pp. 99–100). Many of those who were poorer and darker, or who lived in communities where Mexicans had lost their land, lived in residentially and socially segregated barrios (Camarillo 1979, pp. 53–78, 117; Montejano 1987) and were occasionally classified by federal or state officials as Indian and thus denied the rights of free white persons (Almaguer 1994, p. 57).

With the early 20th-century rise of large-scale capitalist agriculture and mining in the West, Mexican migration to the United States rose, class conflict exploded, America's southern border hardened, and the white-Mexican boundary became, if anything, more complex (see Montejano 1987; Gordon 1999; Johnson 2003; Ngai 2004). By the 1920s, the boundary between Mexicans and whites was widely recognized and significant in terms of both life chances and social distance. But the boundary was also inconsistently institutionalized. As a result, Mexicans—both individually and collectively—straddled this bright boundary, blurring it in certain contexts. At some times and places, all Mexicans were white; other times and places they were not. At some times and places, an individual Mexican's personal characteristics—socioeconomic status or skin tone, for example—could make her or him white; other times and places they could not. Despite this complexity, starting around the 1920s and beyond, the sometimes shifting boundaries that separated Mexican from white were

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[10] We use the term "Anglo," popular in some parts of the Southwest at this time, to describe people of non-Spanish European descent. Since the entire point of this article's section is to describe the sometimes-white, sometimes-nonwhite position of Mexicans, we wish to avoid fixing that position ourselves by writing, say, of "whites and Mexicans." For the same reason, we avoid referring to those Mexicans accepted as white as "crossing" white-nonwhite boundaries.

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infinitely brighter, more common, and more spatially expansive than those that separated SEE from white; but they were, by and large, blurrier, less common, and less spatially expansive than those that separated black from white.

The federal government's take on these matters, which was as capricious and complex as any, is a good place to start. As with SEEs, the census consistently classified Mexicans as white for decades; but, contrary to the case of SEEs, this changed in 1930 when, responding to congressional pressure, the Census Bureau began distinguishing Mexicans from whites and enumerating them as a separate racial group along with Negroes, Indians, Chinese, and Japanese (Hochschild and Powell 2008). The census instructed enumerators as follows: "Practically all Mexican laborers are of a racial mixture difficult to classify, though usually well recognized in the localities where they are found. In order to obtain separate figures for this racial group, it has been decided that all persons born in Mexico, or having parents born in Mexico, who are not definitely white, Negro, Indian, Chinese, or Japanese, should be returned as Mexican ('Mex')" (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1933, p. 27). This racial classification was unique because it applied only to the first- and second-generation immigrants, omitting those who had lived in the United States (or sections of the West that eventually became part of the United States) for several generations. And it was distinct from the one-drop rule used to categorize blacks because it explicitly allowed for the possibility that some people of Mexican heritage might best be described as white, even if the numbers were small. Indeed, census enumerators categorized just 4.5% of individuals born in Mexico, and 3% of the second generation, as racially white instead of Mexican (author calculation, IPUMS). By 1940, the Census Bureau resumed classifying Mexicans as white, unless "definitely Indian" or some "other nonwhite race," but only after years of organizing from Mexican American activists, who were assisted by the Mexican consuls, the U.S. State Department, and some local, state, and national politicians. Moreover, the issue of federal classification was not easily settled. Many of the same groups had to lobby the Social Security Board, the Treasury Department, the War Department, the Immigration and Naturalization Service, and the Works Progress Administration to discontinue their practice of distinguishing Mexicans from whites (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1943, p. 3; Garcia 1984; Foley 2004*a*; T. Guglielmo 2006; Molina 2010, pp. 198–99; Lukens 2012).

The state's racial classification of Mexicans in naturalization matters was similarly complex. As with SEEs, and in line with the promises of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, the state permitted all Mexican immigrants to naturalize as free white persons. And yet Mexicans faced challenges to these rights that were unlike anything SEEs encountered.

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In 1893, Mexican immigrant Ricardo Rodriguez was forced to appear in federal court to defend his right to naturalize. In the end, the court ruled in his favor, citing U.S. treaty obligations. But in contrast to SEEs, whose claims to whiteness were affirmed in court, the judges in the Rodriguez case questioned Mexicans' whiteness in their decision. "If the strict scientific classification of the anthropologist should be adopted," the court declared, "he would probably not be classed as white" (Foley 2004*b*, p. 345; see also Gross 2008, pp. 257–59).

These racial challenges became more serious during the Depression (Molina 2010, pp. 178–79). In 1935, under pressure from a prominent California nativist organization, a New York judge upheld an immigration examiner's denial of three Mexicans' naturalization petitions on the grounds that they were "of Indian and Spanish blood" and, therefore, not "free white persons." Only immense pressure from the Mexican government and the U.S. State Department convinced the judge to change his position, but federal government officials remained skeptical of Mexicans' whiteness throughout this period. In order to prevent further controversies—not least those that might interfere with a United States–Mexico alliance that both sides increasingly valued as another world war loomed—the U.S. Congress, in 1940, extended naturalization rights to "all races indigenous to the Western Hemisphere" (*New York Times* 1935; Molina 2010; Lukens 2012). Mexican immigrants' access to U.S. citizenship was secure, even if their claims to whiteness still were not.

As the Rodriguez decision suggests, one reason that Mexicans' claims to whiteness were not secure is that race scientists typically did not recognize Mexicans as white. While "experts" rarely—if ever—questioned the whiteness of SEEs, many claimed that Mexicans in Mexico, and especially those who migrated to the United States, were either primarily Indian or of mixed blood (U.S. Immigration Commission 1911, p. 96; Thomson 1927, p. 577; California Mexican Fact-Finding Committee 1930, p. 24; Benton-Cohen 2011). Lothrop Stoddard argued that "taken as a whole, 'Latin America,' the vast land-block from the Rio Grande to Cape Horn, is racially not 'Latin' but Amerindian or negroid, with a thin Spanish or Portuguese veneer. In other words, though commonly considered part of the white world, most of Latin America is ethnically colored man's land, which has been growing more colored for the past hundred years" (1920, p. 105). In his report to the U.S. Secretary of Labor, economist Robert Foerster argued that even though the government often labeled Mexicans as white, their "color designation" was more properly described as "copper" (1925, p. 11; see also Handman 1930, pp. 609–10; Molina 2010, p. 186).

Most ordinary Anglos agreed with race scientists, refusing to recognize Mexicans as white (Montejano 1987; Haney-Lopez 1998; Sheridan 2003;

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Foley 2004*a*; Gross 2008; Benton-Cohen 2009, p. 30). A northern lawyer living in Texas told Paul Taylor, for example, "Our people don't recognize them [Mexicans] as white people" even though "the law does. There is the same race prejudice here as against the Negro" (Taylor 1930, p. 421). California Governor C. C. Young's Mexican Fact-Finding Committee, which surveyed the status of Mexicans throughout the state in 1930, explained that there existed a "prejudice against the Mexican which manifests itself in the common classification of the Mexican as 'not white'" (California Mexican Fact-Finding Committee 1930, p. 176). These perceptions were not limited to the Southwest. A Chamber of Commerce employee in Chicago explained his view that "the Mexicans are lower than the European peasants. They are not white and not Negro; they're Mexican" (Arredondo 2008, p. 106). And when a prominent restrictionist in Congress wrote to the secretary of Labor in 1929, suggesting that Mexicans be denied the right to naturalize because they were not white, the secretary affirmed Mexicans' legal right to naturalize, even though he agreed with the restrictionist that most Mexicans were not, in fact, white.[11] Yet in contrast to the case with blacks,[12] it is possible to find Anglos who included Mexicans in the category white. A lunch counter proprietor in California, for example, explained that his "white-only" sign was directed at blacks: "Mexicans are white people, just a little darker" (Taylor 1928, p. 87).

The federal government's confusion over whether to categorize Mexicans as white or nonwhite, coupled with the growing commonsense and scientific consensus about Mexicans' nonwhite status, produced further confusion on the ground for those who were tasked with categorizing individuals of Mexican descent for federal record keeping. In 1930, census enumerators classified more than 250,000 people as racially "Mexican" who, per census instructions, should have been categorized as white because they were third-plus generation Americans of Mexican descent (author calculation, IPUMS). And even before the 1930 census revisions, rogue census workers in Cochise County, Arizona, marked an "M" for Mexican under the race column, "only to have a supervisor write over it with a 'W' for 'White'" (Benton-Cohen 2009, p. 153). Similarly, during World War II, official instructions called on local draft boards to classify Mexicans as white, but in thousands of cases, boards chose the category "other" instead (Selective Service System 1942, p. 261; 1953, pp. 113–14).

In contrast to SEEs, state and local governments also occasionally class-

[11] Davis to Johnson, February 14, 1929, Correspondence, Carton 10:1, Paul Taylor Collection, Bancroft Library, Berkeley, Calif.

[12] The inclusion of blacks in Bisbee's white man's camp is one exception (Benton-Cohen 2009).

ified Mexicans as nonwhite, sometimes following federal guidelines and other times departing from them (Hayes-Bautista and Chapa 1987; Benton-Cohen 2009, p. 153). Chicago's death certificates classified Mexicans alternately as "brown," "Mexican," and sometimes "white" (McCoyer 2007, p. 162). On birth certificates, federal census officials explained in 1934 that "very many Mexican births" throughout the country were "designated as white," but that local practices were changing since the introduction of a "Mexican" racial category on the census (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1934, p. 4). Indeed, in 1936, city officials in El Paso, Texas, grew concerned that including Mexican morbidity and mortality data within that for whites distorted the city's overall statistics and presented a singularly sickly face to potential tourists. As a result, following the Census Bureau, they reclassified Mexicans as "colored" on birth, death, and other civil records, as, they claimed, officials in other Texas cities had done. Mexican Americans in El Paso, however, fought the reclassification, considering it insulting and a potential threat to their civil and political rights. City officials ultimately backed down. Under continued pressure by Mexican American activists, all candidates for mayor in El Paso's next election rejected Mexicans' nonwhite classification (Garcia 1984; Foley 1997, p. 210; Lukens 2012, pp. 100–104). By 1936, pressure on Los Angeles city officials also led the mayor there to declare that Mexicans would henceforth be categorized as white in public health data (*La Opinion* 1936).

This confusion over how to categorize Mexicans was also evident in the laws and social conventions surrounding marriage. No miscegenation laws specifically barred unions between whites and Mexicans (Hollinger 2003; Pascoe 2009). In this way, their experiences seem more akin to those of SEEs than of blacks. And yet some miscegenation laws were applied to Mexicans even if they did not explicitly say so. Historian Peggy Pascoe found that states such as Arizona, Oregon, North Carolina, and Virginia all outlawed Indian-white marriages and, at times, defined Mexicans as Indian. In Virginia, an admittedly extreme case, "the state registrar of vital statistics voided marriages between 'whites' and 'Mexicans' in the belief that 'Mexicans' were a mixture of 'Spanish or Portuguese, Indian and negro'" (Pasco 2009, p. 122). She noted no similar instances for SEEs. Mexicans' ability to marry Anglos was also heavily circumscribed in practice. While intermarriage between Mexican women and Anglo men in the 19th-century Southwest was relatively common, as the status of Mexicans deteriorated, such marriages were increasingly stigmatized (Taylor 1934, pp. 257–60; Deutsch 1987, p. 175; Almaguer 1994, pp. 57–60; Glenn 2002, pp. 165–69; Benton-Cohen 2009, pp. 37, 159–60). Writing about Dimmit County, Texas, in 1930, Paul Taylor observed, "The line against intermarriage is held. Although legal, it rarely occurs" (Taylor 1930, p. 424).

Census data on intermarriage rates demonstrate both the consequences

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of these strictures and the wide social distance between Mexicans and Anglos. Even if we include in our calculations only those born in the United States (second generation) and those who migrated as children (1.5 generation), 97% of Mexican household heads married Mexican spouses in 1930. This is slightly lower than the rate of intracategory marriage among blacks (99.8%) but significantly higher than that among SEEs, since already by 1930, only 71% of 1.5- or second-generation SEEs were married to other SEEs (author calculation, IPUMS).[13] And while intermarriage soon became the norm for most SEEs, intermarriage rates among Mexicans remained low nearly five decades later (Alba and Golden 1986, pp. 206–8).

While many factors might influence out-marriage rates, color considerations appear to be important in explaining the high levels of endogamy among Mexicans. Out of the roughly 7,000 Mexican heads of household who were racially categorized as white instead of Mexican, 46% were married to Anglos, 41% to other white Mexicans, and only 3% to individuals racially categorized as Mexican (author calculation, IPUMS). Were these Mexicans categorized as white because they married Anglos? Or could they marry Anglos because they were racially categorized as white? Either case suggests the importance of white-nonwhite categorization for intermarriage. Indeed, when asked whether Mexican-white intermarriage would occur in the future, two young white women gave voice to an attitude prevalent in their Colorado community: "We don't believe intermarriage will take place on account of color even if the Mexicans were clean and educated" (Taylor 1929, p. 230).

While census data show that both black-SEE and black-Mexican marriages were extremely rare, at times state officials, in contrast to the case with SEEs, permitted Mexicans to marry Anglos as well as blacks, even when the law prohibited black-white marriages (Taylor 1934, pp. 266–69, 296–97; Greenfield and Kates 1975). This was the case in the Mississippi Delta (Weise 2008, pp. 759–60) and in Texas (Foley 1997, p. 208), where one official told Taylor that Mexicans seemed to fit in between: "We permit whites and Mexicans to intermarry, and Mexicans and Negroes. There is no law against Negro and Mexican intermarriage. We don't class Mexicans as white here" (Taylor 1930, p. 392). The issue was more complicated elsewhere. In Arizona in 1921, Joe Kirby, son of an Irish man and a Mexican woman, who, according to a judge, appeared to be Indian, was married to a black woman for seven years. But when

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[13] Scholars note that exogamy—or out-marriage—is influenced by group size, propinquity, sex ratios, as well as other factors (Alba and Golden 1986). These factors, however, should be less important where there are legal prohibitions or strong cultural norms against out-marriage.

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Joe grew tired of the marriage, he asked the courts for an annulment, rather than a divorce, on the grounds that the state prohibited marriages between him—a person of "Caucasian blood"—and his wife—a "negro." Accepting this logic, the judge in the case held the marriage in violation of the state's miscegenation law and granted Kirby's request for an annulment (Pascoe 2009). In California, on the other hand, county clerks sometimes refused to issue licenses to Mexicans and blacks who wanted to marry but had no problem issuing such licenses to Mexicans and South Asians, even though the state's miscegenation law prohibited marriages between whites and Asians (Hollinger 2003). In yet another case, this time in Indiana, where white-black marriages were also illegal, the courts validated a marriage between a Mexican woman and a black man, arguing (in a manner similar to *Rollins* in Alabama), "It is no more logical or consistent to say that all Mexicans are white persons than to say that all inhabitants and residents within the United States are white persons. We cannot adopt the contention of the appellant that the word 'Mexican' should necessarily be construed to be a white person from that country" (Greenfield and Kates 1975, pp. 684–85).

The boundaries Mexicans faced in public accommodations were equally convoluted and place specific. In many parts of the Midwest and especially the Southwest, "whites only" signs barred Mexicans from movie theaters, dance halls, parks, swimming pools, beaches, barber shops and beauty parlors, drugstores, bowling alleys, restaurants, and cemeteries (Taylor 1928, pp. 83–94; 1930, pp. 416–21; 1934, pp. 250–55; Kibbe 1946, pp. 208–12; Rangel and Acala 1972; Reisler 1976, pp. 140–41; Camarillo 1979, pp. 192–93; Foley 1997; Haney-López 1998; Valdes 2000, pp. 62–63; Donato 2003). Sometimes exclusion or segregation was signaled not with a sign, but with a leaflet, a notice on the menu, a newspaper advertisement, unpleasant service or no service at all, exorbitant prices, a city decree (which, in Gary, Indiana, required that Mexicans be buried in a segregated cemetery; Reisler 1976, pp. 141–42), or a public announcement. At one 1941 Independence Day dance in Lockhart, Texas, an orchestra leader asked a group of Mexicans to leave since, as he announced, the event was "an American celebration" and thus "for white people only."[14]

Mexicans' exclusion from white public accommodations was far more common than that which SEEs faced, but not as far reaching as that which bedeviled blacks. Jim Crow against Mexicans was seldom institutionalized in state and local laws. Nor did this form of social closure and social distance reach into nearly every area of public life or blanket, as in the South, every last public accommodation (Menefee and Cassmore

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[14] Alonso Perales to Sumner Welles, August 22, 1941, Decimal File 811.4016, Records of the Department of State, RG 59, National Archives, College Park, Md.

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1940, p. 51; Donato 2003, pp. 75–76). In 1927, one San Jose, California, swimming pool boasted that it was the "only pool in the city that does not allow Mexicans," showing the limited reach of segregation there (Taylor 1934, p. 264n13). Whether "white only" excluded Mexicans could also at times be unclear. To clarify matters, some shop owners posted signs saying "no Mexicans allowed." And in contrast to the case of many blacks, certain factors—skin color, class status, even the demographics of a particular town or city or region—could blur the boundaries that Mexicans faced. Mexican anthropologist Manuel Gamio observed in 1930 that "the darkest-skinned Mexican experiences almost the same restrictions as the Negro, while a person of medium-dark skin can enter a second-class lunchroom frequented also by Americans of the poorer class, but will not be admitted to a high-class hotel, while a cultured Mexican will be freely admitted to the same hotel, especially if he speaks English fluently" (Gamio 1930, p. 53).

A similarly complicated story obtained in schools. Just as in the South, local school boards in the Southwest were lax in their enforcement of compulsory school laws. In fact, one-quarter of Mexican children did not attend school in 1930, compared to 17% of blacks and just 6% of SEEs (author calculation, IPUMS). Furthermore, in contrast to SEEs, rampant segregation of Mexican students from Anglos (and sometimes blacks, too) existed throughout the Southwest and in parts of the Midwest and Plains states as well (Taylor 1928, pp. 83–86; Rangel and Acala 1972, pp. 313–14; Fincher 1974, pp. 76–79; Reisler 1976, p. 141; Gonzalez 1985; Valdes 2000, p. 63; Ruiz 2001; Foley 2004*b*, p. 350). One Mexican American in the League of United Latin American Citizens said he might understand the temporary segregation—for three grades—of students on account of language if all non–English speakers were treated the same way. But they were not: "the Bohemian and German and other non–English speaking children go to the American school," but the Mexican children did not (Taylor 1934, p. 224). Yet instances of school integration were not uncommon either. Even in Texas, where one 1943 report found that well over 100 school districts in 59 counties forced Mexicans to attend segregated schools, some Mexican students, whom school officials deemed sufficiently "white" or "clean" or who made it to advanced grades, were permitted to attend white schools (Taylor 1928, pp. 83–86; 1934, pp. 216–25; Rangel and Acala 1972, pp. 314–15; Foley 1997, p. 41). Especially in places where few Mexicans lived, segregation was sometimes deemed prohibitively expensive (Taylor 1929, pp. 218–19; 1934, p. 216; Donato 2003, pp. 79–80). Oftentimes school integration came as a direct result of Mexicans' organized protest. In 1931, Mexican parents in Lemon Grove, California, refused to send their children, who had not been previously segregated, to the newly built separate and unequal "Mexican school."

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With the help of the Mexican Consul, they sued and won. In *Alvarez v. Lemon Grove School District*, the judge ordered that the Mexican children be allowed to return to their integrated school (Ruiz 2001; for a similar story in Mississippi, see Weise [2008, pp. 766–71]).

Sometimes segregated schools were a product of segregated neighborhoods. While racially restrictive housing covenants were aimed principally at blacks, they also occasionally targeted Mexicans in cities from Illinois to California (Taylor 1928, pp. 79–83; 1929, pp. 216–17; 1930, pp. 396–98; Abrams 1955, pp. 52–53; Camarillo 1979, pp. 205, 209; Jones-Correa 2000–2001; Donato 2003, p. 75). In Texas, they could be found in sections of Houston, Corpus Christi, Fort Worth, San Antonio, Dallas, Brownsville, and McAllen. Some restrictive covenants were ambiguous about whether they excluded Mexicans, limiting the sale of property in a given area to members of the Caucasian or white race. In Houston, for example, there were 323 such covenants and only 10 with clauses explicitly excluding Mexicans.[15] In other areas, especially in the rural Southwest, restrictive covenants proved unnecessary to segregate Mexicans residentially since custom, violence, the threat of violence (Taylor 1930, p. 397), deed restrictions (Taylor 1928, p. 81; California Mexican Fact-Finding Committee 1930, pp. 176–77; Kibbe 1946, p. 229), discriminatory realtor practices (Taylor 1928, p. 81; 1929, p. 209), and, in certain rare cases, town ordinances worked just fine on their own (Foley 1997, p. 42; Johnson 2003, p. 179; see also McCoyer 2007, pp. 110–25). In the 1940s and beyond, federally funded housing projects kept Mexicans and other "Latin Americans" apart from whites (and sometimes from blacks, too) in dozens of cases.[16]

As with schools and public accommodations, however, racial boundaries in housing were hardly universal. In some parts of the Southwest

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[15] Clarence A. Miller to the Secretary of State, memo, June 10, 1942, Decimal File 811.4016, Records of the Department of State, RG 59, National Archives, College Park, Md.

[16] "Mexican (Latin-American) Occupancy in PHA Low-Rent Projects," memo, n.d., c. March 1954, folder "Correspondence—Management—Occupancy—Latin Americans," box 9, entry 47 (a1), Records of the Public Housing Administration, RG 196, National Archives, College Park, Md. For evidence of restrictive covenants in various Texas cities and towns, see William P. Blocker to the Secretary of State, February 27, 1942, Enclosure 1, Decimal File 811.4016, Records of the Department of State, RG 59, National Archives, College Park, Md.; State Department Memorandum, September 12, 1941, pp. 4, 13, 14–15, 17, also Records of the Department of State, RG 59; Lalla Rogers to Si Cassidy, July 21, 1942, Records of the Department of State, RG 59; Alonso S. Perales to Coke R. Stevenson, February 25, 1944, Coke R. Stevenson Papers, Box 296, Folder "Interracial Discrimination 1944," Texas State Library and Archives Commission, Austin, Tex.; Omar Josefé to Maury Maverick, January 20, 1941, George I. Sanchez Papers, Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas at Austin.

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and Midwest, and especially in other parts of the country where fewer Mexicans resided, they lived side by side with Anglos peaceably (Taylor 1928, pp. 81–82; 1930, pp. 396–98; 1934, pp. 228–29; Weise 2008). In 1929, the Chicago Chamber of Commerce briefly considered a formal plan to segregate Mexicans in neighborhoods but ultimately opted against it. "People would like to segregate the Mexicans as well as the Negroes," explained the chamber, "but we . . . understand that the Mexicans are legally classed as white" (as quoted in Reisler [1976, p. 142]). And Mexicans' "legal classification" certainly mattered beyond Chicago. While the courts always upheld restrictive covenants against blacks (at least until the Supreme Court struck them down in 1948), they were far less consistent with Mexicans. Lower courts in California, for example, sometimes saw covenants aimed at Mexicans as "contrary to the Good Neighbor policy" and refused to enforce them (Taylor 1928, pp. 80–81; Ming 1949; Williams 1949; McCoyer 2007).

Nevertheless, courts upheld or institutionalized racial boundaries more often than they challenged them. In Texas and elsewhere in the Southwest, for example, Mexicans were systematically excluded from jury service (Kibbe 1946, p. 229; Greenfield and Kates 1975, pp. 687n124, 725–26; Sheridan 2003). Yet, in a singularly peculiar twist, it was Mexicans' (nominal) whiteness rather than their nonwhiteness that was responsible. Consider the case of Serapio Sanchez. In 1944, he was convicted by an all-white jury in Texas of murdering a white man. Though Sanchez claimed the action was made in self-defense, he was convicted of murder and sentenced to death. His lawyer appealed, claiming that Sanchez could not get a fair trial by an all-white jury. The court, however, held that "Mexican" was a nationality, not a race, and since Mexicans were racially white, an all-white jury constituted a jury of Sanchez's peers. The Fourteenth Amendment, therefore, did not apply. Shedding light on this sort of cynical move, a lawyer in a related case told the Supreme Court (*Hernandez v. Texas, 1954*) that "for all practical purposes, about the only time that so-called Mexicans—many of them Texans for seven generations—are covered with the Caucasian cloak is when the use of that protective mantle serves the ends of those who would shamelessly deny to this large segment of the Texas population the fundamental right to serve as jury commissioners, grand jurors, or petit jurors" (Foley 2004*b*, p. 347; Haney-López 1998; Gross 2008, pp. 278–88).

As with jury pools, some Mexicans also faced bright boundaries at the ballot box, especially in Texas (Burma 1954, pp. 104–5; Bridges 1997, p. 8). In contrast to the case of SEEs, at least five counties there excluded Mexicans (along with blacks) from voting in white primaries (*New York Times* 1934; Kibbe 1946, p. 227). At times, Mexicans also faced serious voter intimidation. In Corpus Christi, Texas Rangers told Mexican would-

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be voters "that, if they could not read, write and speak the English language and they voted, they would be put in the penitentiary" (Montejano 1987, pp. 146–47). In the late 1940s, Key argued that in many Texas counties, especially where there were no political machines, "Mexican-Americans meet a barrier to the ballot similar in character if not in degree to that which discourages Negro voting in most of the South" (1949, p. 273).

Mexicans also faced bright racial boundaries at the workplace. Some employers refused to hire Mexicans outright; others consigned them to work "Mexican jobs" for "Mexican wages"—or, often worse yet, Mexican women's jobs for Mexican women's wages. These so-called Mexican jobs tended to be the dirtiest, most dangerous, and least skilled (Kibbe 1946, pp. 157–206; Perales 1974, pp. 60–61, 88–91, 117; Montejano 1987, p. 265; Vargas 1997, 2005; Gordon 1999, pp. 46–64; Glenn 2002, pp. 151–58; Benton-Cohen 2009, p. 83). Promotions of any kind were often exceedingly rare. As one 1942 government report on the Southwest put it, "In many cases Mexicans have worked as common laborers for ten, twelve, twenty, and even thirty years without having been promoted."[17] As with SEEs, sometimes these workplace boundaries hinged on citizenship status or other ostensibly nonracial factors; but in far more cases the white-nonwhite distinction was paramount. Some Mexicans were segregated from white (and, much more rarely, black) coworkers in union locals (Vargas 2005), in locker rooms, in cafeterias, in bathrooms, at time clocks, at pay windows, and even in the use of water pails. In June 1941, on a construction job at Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio, Jesus Valdez lost his job when his foreman spotted him drinking from a water pail marked "For Whites" rather than the one next to it "For Mexicans."[18]

Also unlike SEEs, Mexicans faced extensive race-based violence (Roediger 2005, p. 106). In Texas, after groups of armed Mexicans attempted to overthrow Anglo rule in 1915 and reestablish Mexican control along the lines of the "Plan de San Diego," "vigilantes and Texas Rangers led a far bloodier counterrevolution that included the indiscriminate harassment of individuals of Mexican-origin, forcible relocation of rural residents, and mass executions." Estimates vary widely on the death toll from 300 to as many as 5,000 (Johnson 2003, pp. 2–3). Beyond Texas and this remarkably bloody event, Tuskegee Institute files mentioned some 50 lynching victims of Mexican descent in the Southwest; another source,

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[17] Trimble to Cramer, Memorandum, p. 3, attached to Lawrence Cramer to Sumner Welles, November 6, 1942, Decimal File 811.4016, Records of the Department of State.
[18] Jesus Valdez Affidavit, June 26, 1941, attached to William Blocker to the Secretary of State, February 27, 1942, Decimal File 811.4016, Records of the Department of State.

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covering the entire United States between 1891 and 1930, put the number at 166 (Carrigan and Webb 2003). "It may seem too extravagant to say that there is an open season for shooting Mexicans in unpoliced districts along the Rio Grande," opined the *New York Times* in 1922, "but the rude jest finds expression among a certain class in the American communities. The killing of Mexicans without provocation is so common as to pass almost unnoticed." As with blacks, few whites were ever prosecuted for lynching Mexicans. But, unlike the case with blacks, the Mexican government protested these abuses and, in response, the U.S. government initiated a policy of compensating foreign-born victims' families monetarily for their loss (Carrigan and Webb 2003).

In immigration, the federal government seemed to be of multiple minds when dealing with Mexicans, something both rooted in and productive of bright and blurred racial boundaries. On the one hand, it exempted the entire Western Hemisphere from race- and nation-based quotas (largely to appease agribusiness's desire for an unlimited supply of cheap labor) at the very time it drastically reduced slots available to SEEs. On the other hand, beginning in the 1920s, the U.S. government, responding to increasingly shrill cries to stem the Mexican and "Mexican Indian" invasion (Ngai 2004, p. 52), began policing its southern border as never before. For decades, the border was a largely invisible line, across which most people could move back and forth without documents of any kind. No more. Now Mexican and other immigrants seeking entry to the United States from the south needed to apply for and receive a visa, pay a fee, undergo sometimes horribly invasive physical exams, and contend with a border patrol, which was intent at times on keeping them out. As a result of these new policies, Mexican deportation rates rose, as did the size of the unauthorized Mexican population. Those Mexicans who were considered to be "illegal" found it much harder to legalize their status, thanks to federal rules that privileged the legalization of Europeans instead (Ngai 2004). Bespeaking both bright and blurred racial boundaries, Mexicans were, by the 1920s, both nonquota immigrants and "prototypical illegal alien[s]" (p. 71). When the Depression hit, social workers and city officials hired trains and repatriated tens of thousands of destitute Mexicans—whom they viewed as racially unassimilable—to Mexico. But these officials protected SEEs and other Europeans from similar abuses (Fox 2012). All told, hundreds of thousands of Mexicans, perhaps as many as a third of the Mexican-origin population, many with U.S. citizenship, were deported or pressured to repatriate during the first few years of the Great Depression (Hoffman 1974), a movement of people so large it was described as "the greatest exodus since the Huguenot hegira in the sixteenth century" (*Washington Post* 1931).

Taken together, between 1890 and 1945, the boundary between Mex-

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icans and whites was both blurry and bright: blurry because the boundary was inconsistently institutionalized; bright because it was widely recognized and deeply shaped life chances and social distance. Over this period, the boundaries of whiteness expanded to include Mexicans and contracted to exclude them, though, by the 1920s, there tended to be more brightening, contracting, and excluding. Still, even at this later date, variations abounded on the ground according to time, space and place, institutional context, as well as Mexicans' individual characteristics such as generational status, skin color, or class.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this article, we have attempted to adjudicate debates about the contours of past racial boundaries. We have applied conceptual tools from the boundary literature to compare systematically the experiences of blacks, Mexicans, and SEEs in the first half of the 20th century. We find that the boundaries containing these categories differed fundamentally from one another; more important, we show exactly how they differed along several key dimensions: institutionalization, recognition, the degree of social closure, and social distance, as well as spatial scale and temporal stability.

In line with countless other scholars, we have argued that a bright black-white boundary (and, at times, a black-nonblack boundary) emerged around the turn of the 20th century. The boundary was widely recognized and institutionalized and significant for life chances and social distance. Notwithstanding some variations across space and over time, the bright boundary covered nearly all the nation, lasted well into the post–World War II years, and brooked little crossing, blurring, or shifting.

In stark contrast, there was essentially no SEE-white boundary. Contrary to the arguments of many whiteness studies historians and the social scientists who have drawn on their work, we contend that wherever white was a meaningful category, SEEs were almost always included within it, even if they were simultaneously positioned below NWEs. Some individuals and an occasional institution questioned—or appeared to question—the whiteness of SEEs and other Europeans, blurring the boundary in limited contexts. But the categorization of SEEs as nonwhite was neither widely recognized nor institutionalized. In fact, quite the opposite. Federal agencies including the census, the military, the immigration service, the Civilian Conservation Corps, and others all counted by race and placed SEEs firmly within the white category. No court ever denied Europeans the right to naturalize as free white persons at least in part because race scientists and the "common man" placed SEEs within the boundaries

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of whiteness. Furthermore, when SEEs saw Whites Only signs in movie theaters, restaurants, swimming pools, playgrounds, buses and streetcars, and at places of employment, they could—with near certainty—be confident that those signs were not meant to exclude them. Similarly, when housing covenants restricted the sale of homes to whites, when unions declared that their membership was restricted to white workers, when schools declared that their doors were open to white children only, and where marriage laws prohibited miscegenation, SEEs quickly learned that the category "white" included them, too.

The many race-based challenges that SEEs did face are better understood as a consequence of NWE-SEE boundaries, not white-SEE ones. Unlike the latter, the former were widely recognized and, at times, institutionalized in the first third of the 20th century. Census officials, immigration officials, and race scientists all collected and produced mountains of data on European immigrants, sometimes with the express purpose of proving the racial superiority of NWEs over SEEs. These boundaries were also significant for both life chances and social distance, especially for the first generation. SEEs often received lower pay and were assigned dirtier and more dangerous jobs than NWEs. They suffered ridicule at school and in popular culture. Many native-born and immigrant NWEs considered them less desirable neighbors, friends, and marriage partners. SEEs were also subject to immigration quotas designed to reduce their presence on American soil and stave off "race suicide." Those who remained in the United States were coerced into assimilating, told that to be good Americans they had to shed all traces of their SEE heritage. Owing to pervasive anti-Semitism, Jews in particular were often singled out for discriminatory treatment, subject to quotas at elite colleges and universities, informally barred from employment in certain occupations, and excluded from certain clubs, hotels, and neighborhoods.

Our analysis suggests that scholars who have argued for SEEs' non-whiteness or in-betweenness have made four mistakes: they have not adequately addressed issues of spatial scale; they have relied too heavily on the same set of limited examples in which SEEs' whiteness was questioned; they have ignored distinctions between intra-European racial boundaries, on the one hand, and white-nonwhite ones, on the other; and they have downplayed evidence in which SEE whiteness was acknowledged or assumed.

Given that an overwhelming scholarly consensus agrees that SEEs suffered from severe racial discrimination in the early 20th century, why does it matter whether or not they were categorized as white? It matters, we argue, for several reasons. First, whiteness conferred unique privileges, determining in many cases whom one could marry; what jobs one worked; what wages one received; what social welfare benefits were available; the

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schools one could attend; where one could live, eat, swim, or be laid to rest, among myriad other things. The material privileges of whiteness, moreover, had lasting consequences (Oliver and Shapiro 1997; Roediger 2005, pp. 199–234). To be precise about SEEs' location vis-à-vis the white-nonwhite boundary, then, is to be precise about the lives and life chances of SEEs and their descendents.

Second, recognizing SEEs' whiteness matters for the way we understand certain foundational racial categories and boundaries historically. That many Americans marked SEEs simultaneously as white and as religious outsiders, foreigners, noncitizens, destitute workers, and racial others (i.e., Slavs, Latins, Alpines, Mediterraneans, etc.) speaks to the remarkable stability of white-nonwhite boundaries, not their fluidity or flexibility. This point is all the more remarkable when one remembers that there are no transhistorical givens in race making and boundary making. Things might have turned out differently.

Finally, SEEs' whiteness matters because numerous scholars have drawn on a faulty sense of that category's past to make claims about present and future racial boundaries. It may very well be that the boundaries of whiteness are expanding today and will continue expanding in the future. But, to the extent that it is relevant at all, the SEE story should not be used to confirm the likelihood of those developments.

In comparison to the case of SEEs, Mexicans' relation to the white-nonwhite boundary was infinitely more complex, so complex, in fact, that it complicates the literature on boundary processes and practices in some important ways. Some of the literature on boundary properties, for example, presents bright and blurred boundaries as alternative conceptualizations. We think that the evidence here suggests that the boundary between whites and Mexicans appeared simultaneously bright and blurred. For example, the boundary was blurred in the sense that it was inconsistently institutionalized at the federal, state, and local levels. Federal agencies such as the Census Bureau, the War Department, and the Immigration and Naturalization Service classified Mexicans as white except during the Depression decade, when all these agencies and others reclassified Mexicans as nonwhite. Similarly, state and local authorities varied in their categorization schemes. Many local authorities categorized Mexicans as white on birth and death certificates, for example, but changed their practices and counted Mexicans variously as "Mexican," "brown," or "colored" after the census reclassification of 1930. Mexican Americans appear to have fought these reclassification efforts wherever they occurred and often won. Some state and local agencies nevertheless continued to categorize Mexicans as nonwhites. Others, including the U.S. Census Bureau, continued to collect and report data on Mexicans (or Spanish-speaking or Spanish-surnamed persons), but for some years they

refrained from presenting these data in a way that suggested Mexicans' nonwhiteness (Gross 2007, pp. 359–60).

Also indicative of a blurred racial boundary were the confused and contradictory ways the state treated Mexicans when whiteness was at issue. The federal government placed Mexicans in all-white military units and accepted them as white for the purposes of naturalization, but it also acquiesced to state and local demands to segregate Mexicans in housing projects in dozens of cases. State officials, who had to enforce antimiscegenation laws barring marriages between whites and blacks, at times treated Mexicans as white and at other times did not. Indeed, in some places, Mexicans were allowed to marry both Anglos and blacks, even where white-black marriages were prohibited.

The boundary between whites and Mexicans was also blurred in the sense that Mexicans could be seen simultaneously as white and nonwhite or were recognized as white in some contexts but not in others. This disjuncture was perhaps nowhere more glaring than in 1954, when lawyers for the State of Texas argued before the Supreme Court that Mexicans' systematic exclusion from jury service in Jackson County for over 25 years did not violate Pete Hernandez's right to a fair trial because Mexicans were white too. And yet at the very courthouse where Hernandez was tried, the restrooms were segregated: one was unmarked, and the other was labeled "Colored Here" and "Hombres Aqui" (Haney-López 1998). White, yet not white. This duality played itself out in countless ways. The same Mexican individual might be judged white by the naturalization examiner but nonwhite by the school official. Or white by the standards of the marriage clerk but nonwhite by the standards of the bus driver. Or even white by the marriage clerk in California but nonwhite by the marriage clerk in Virginia. While laws defining blackness also varied by state and, at times, by purpose, in practice, the one-drop rule typically defined who was and was not black. As long as one's ancestry was known or one's appearance marked one as "black," there was little ambiguity. The boundary was bright. Not so for Mexicans.

On the other hand, the boundary between Mexicans and whites could also appear rather bright in the sense that a wide range of individuals and nonstate institutions recognized Mexicans as nonwhite. Many race scientists categorized the vast majority of Mexicans as nonwhite. Numerous Anglos did as well, a point that became most obvious when Mexicans found themselves excluded from white-only public accommodations, when realtors refused to sell them homes in white neighborhoods, or when school officials excluded them from white schools. Indeed, for "the masses of working class mexicanos, many of them first generation," writes Neil Foley, "the idea that they were members of the white race would have

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struck them as somewhat absurd. Anglos were white; mexicanos were, well, mexicanos" (2004*a*, p. 138; see also Gross 2007).

The boundary between Mexicans and whites also appeared bright in the sense that it was closely correlated with life chances and social distance from Anglos. Most Mexican children attended segregated schools, and as many as a quarter attended no school at all—more than four times the rate of SEE and native-white children. Mexican adults were usually stuck in some of the worst jobs with some of the worst wages. They were at times prohibited from white man's primaries, often discouraged from voting, in some places systematically excluded from juries, and at times subject to indiscriminate violence at the hands of Anglos, who often went unpunished. Though Mexicans were usually permitted to marry Anglos, there were strong prohibitions against doing so, especially in the 20th century. Intermarriages between Mexicans and Anglos in 1930, therefore, were quite rare and remained so for decades. Highlighting the importance of color, the few Mexicans who were racially classified as white married others classified as white.

But the degree to which Mexican-white boundaries were recognized and correlated with life chances and social distance varied by time and place, too. The boundary was brightest in the Southwest, especially after World War I, when migration from Mexico increased significantly. But within the Southwest, the significance of these racial boundaries for the degree of social closure and social distance was at times more muted in areas where Mexicans managed to hold on to land or retained some political power (e.g., New Mexico and some south Texas border cities; Montejano 1987).

This history of the Mexican-white boundary also challenges some scholars' assumption that boundary blurring entails a unidirectional "intermediate" stage on the way to whiteness or assimilation into the "mainstream" (Alba 2005, p. 25). Mexicans' bright-boundary straddling—that is, their simultaneous location on both sides of the formidable white-nonwhite divide—was not a short-lived or transitory stage on the way to some more stable categorization. It persisted for decades and despite significant changes—the Civil Rights movement; the concurrent rise of the Brown Power movement (Haney-López 2003); the institutionalization of "Hispanic" as a panethnic, not a racial, category (Mora 2009)—has arguably continued to this day. Take the census, for example. Though Mexicans—and Latinos more generally—are now treated as an ethnic group, whose members may be of any race, many Mexicans reject the available racial categories and self-identify as racially "other" on government forms (Telles and Ortiz 2008, pp. 229–36), while those who compile and distribute census and other data often treat Latinos—even those who self

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identify as white—as if they represent a separate racial category, distinct from whites and others.

The history also suggests that Anglos at times took advantage of some blurred boundaries to brighten others. The cases of Serapio Sanchez and Pete Hernandez are but two examples in which the state used Mexicans' nominal whiteness to justify their exclusion from juries. In later years, Texas state officials attempted to "desegregate" schools by combining black and Mexican American students while leaving Anglo schools alone; some courts accepted this strategy (Foley 2004*b*, pp. 352–53; Gross 2007).

Finally, the Mexican case complicates how we think about boundary crossing. On the one hand, Mexicans could "cross" white-nonwhite boundaries much more easily than blacks could. All blacks (with the exception of the few who could "pass" as white)—those with money and education as much as those without—were subject to the same Jim Crow restrictions. But those Mexicans whom Anglo individuals and institutions judged to be sufficiently light-skinned, educated, or well-to-do could gain acceptance as whites, at least in some contexts, in some places, and at some times. Even so, we question whether this acceptance should be seen as a case of boundary crossing, which implies that an individual who belongs to one category is able to cross over a fixed boundary into a new category. Most Mexicans "belonged" simultaneously to the white and nonwhite categories, and the boundary itself was never fully fixed. To say Mexicans "crossed" a boundary, then, is to summarily settle a fundamentally unsettled question: where to "properly" place them along the white-nonwhite divide.

In the end, as with the SEE case, the history of Mexican-white boundaries cautions us against making broad claims about post-1965 immigration and the reinvention, blurring, or shifting of America's current and future color lines. Indeed, we suggest that the Mexican story might have more to teach us than the SEE one. The former demonstrates that bright and blurred racial boundaries can coexist and persist for decades, suggesting that the same could be happening today or might happen in the future, not simply for Mexicans but for other Latin Americans and, perhaps, for Asians and Middle Easterners, too (Kim 2007; Bayoumi 2008). It suggests that institutionalization, recognition, the degree of social closure, and social distance need not always push in the same blurred or bright direction; that blurriness need not necessarily be an intermediate stage on the way to something else; that, in some contexts, it can even facilitate social closure and, therefore, boundary brightening. Instead of asking, then, whether Asians and Latinos will become white, we may be better served by asking exactly which boundary properties are changing and which ones are not. We may find, for example, that certain Asian-white boundaries continue to be widely recognized and institutionalized,

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while simultaneously less important for some forms of social closure and (perhaps) social distance. And we may see somewhat different patterns not only for Latinos, Middle Easterners, blacks, and others, but also for specific ethnic groups within these larger panethnic categories.

But the primary purpose of this article has been to look backward, not forward, and to suggest one seemingly obvious point: that attempts to make sense of the present and future require a sound and systematic reckoning with the past.

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