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## **Confronting Institutional Discrimination in a Color-Blind World**

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**Abstract** This article builds on the scholarship on color-blind ideology by examining discourse challenging two cases of institutional discrimination (the criminalization of unauthorized immigrants and sports teams' use of Native American symbolism). Our research questions are first, what general options do anti-racists have for navigating norms of color-blindness in the public sphere? Second, how does context influence how people confront institutional discrimination? Based on an ethnographic content analysis of 165 letters to the editor published in American newspapers, we find that opponents of institutional discrimination have the choice of addressing one of four laminations. In each lamination, authors acknowledge framings of racial discrimination that are unacknowledged in previous ones. In the abstraction lamination, authors do not recognize race and ethnicity. In the pigmentation lamination, authors identify race and ethnicity, but not discrimination. Authors in the discrimination lamination acknowledge the practice is harmful to a particular racial or ethnic group, and the contextualization lamination lends added dimensionality to the discourse. A comparison of the laminations of pro-immigrant and anti-mascot letters demonstrates varying willingness to acknowledge racial discrimination. Namely, the pro-immigrant discourse was more color-blind than anti-mascot criticism. We consider the potential causes of these findings and offer suggestions for future research in the conclusion.

**Keywords** Color-Blind Racism; Framing; Laminations; Indian Mascots; Immigration

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Since the 1960s, White Americans have subscribed to a color-blind racism that “explains contemporary racial inequality as the outcome of nonracial dynamics” (Bonilla-Silva 2006:2). While the color-blind ideology that governs American culture legitimizes institutional discrimination, it also proscribes overt expressions of racial prejudice (Bonilla-Silva 2006). Much scholarship has supported this conclusion by documenting the variety of circumstances where color-blind ideology allows defenders of institutional discrimination to avoid appearing racist (e.g., van Dijk 1992; Moras 2010). A growing body of work is addressing how anti-racists confront these norms (Every and Augoustinos 2007; Goodman 2010; Rojas-Sosa 2016). This study builds on these efforts by addressing two questions. First, what general options do anti-racists have for navigating norms of color-blindness in the public sphere? Second, how does context shape their rhetorical choices? We pursue these questions with an ethnographic content analysis (Altheide and Schneider 2013) of letters to the editor written in opposition to Indian mascots and punitive immigration policies. Taken together, answers to these two questions will yield theoretical benefits. It will add to our understanding of the ideational processes that contribute to the maintenance of color-blind ideology. More specifically, we demonstrate how Goffman’s underused concept of laminations can facilitate our understanding of how race can be variably unacknowledged in public discourse. Because we draw on two cases, we will gain a sense of the generality and variability of anti-racist efforts.

Although the political struggles over Indian mascots and immigration policy are vastly different,

they are both instances of racial projects (Omi and Winant 1994). When people discuss whether or not to retire a mascot, they inevitably construct what it means to be Native American. Likewise, stereotypes about Latina/os and Asians inform the debate about immigration policy. The norms of color-blind racism constrain both those who seek to maintain and oppose the racial hierarchy. The term color-blind racism sensitizes us to some of the patterned ways that Whites justify institutional discrimination. Racial and ethnic relations, however, are contextually bound. A comparative analysis can help to distinguish between general and particular features of contemporary racial ideology. Specifically, the comparative analysis that follows will allow us to observe which potential definitions of race go “unacknowledged” (Silva 2014). A claim that is common in one dispute may be absent from others. For instance, as will be demonstrated below, discourse over Indian mascots is far more likely to include the perspective of Native Americans than pro-immigrant discourse is to address the subjective experience of Latina/o immigrants. Such an analysis, then, might add to our conceptualization of our vocabulary (Mills 1940) for discussing racial and ethnic relations in the public sphere.

The following study will uncover how those who support undocumented immigrants and those who oppose the continued use of Indian mascots go about confronting these specific instances of institutional discrimination in the era of color-blindness. Understanding such “work” (Miller and Holstein 1989; Borer and Murphree 2008; Borer and Schafer 2011) will be facilitated by measuring the laminations (or levels) (Goffman 1974) of acknowledgment

of discrimination in discourse over racial projects. Before we answer these questions, we provide some context for our cases, discuss the relevant theoretical literature, and outline our methods.

## Color-Blind Ideology

American support for explicit white supremacist principles plummeted after World War II. Numerous sociologists have sought to interpret these findings. Despite differences, these scholars suggest that racial ideologies have morphed from explicit to implied justifications for institutional discrimination (Quillian 2006). Bonilla-Silva (2006) goes beyond survey research to explore *how* White Americans justify the status quo in a cultural climate where explicit prejudice is no longer acceptable. Through the analysis of qualitative data, he uncovers the color-blind ideology Whites use to explain racial and ethnic inequality without using the explicitly white supremacist language of the Jim Crow era. Bonilla-Silva (2012:174) further argues that “‘racial domination’ generates a grammar that helps reproduce racial order as just the way things are. The racial grammar helps accomplish this task by shaping how we see or don’t see race in social phenomena, how we frame matters as racial or not race-related, and even how we feel about race matters.” For example, the existence of the terms Black movies or HBCUs (historically Black colleges and universities) and the absence of the terms White movies or HWCUs (historically White colleges and universities). Likewise, numerous studies have examined how color-blind justifications propagate racial inequality (Holyfield, Moltz, and Bradley 2009; Léonard 2014).

A small but growing body of literature has moved from documenting how Whites avoid being labeled racist to the influence of color-blindness on racial and ethnic minorities and those who confront institutional racism. Color-blindness is a resource for those who wish to defend institutional practices against charges of racism (Goodman 2010). Accordingly, norms of color-blindness make it difficult to acknowledge and directly challenge racial discrimination (Every and Augoustinos 2007; Goodman 2010; Rojas-Sosa 2016). There is a small literature outlining how color-blind norms influence minorities and anti-racists (Every and Augoustinos 2007; Goodman 2010; Rojas-Sosa 2016). Rojas-Sosa (2016) demonstrates how American Latina/o college students are reluctant to define situations as discriminatory. These students are only making sense of their lives and not trying to influence the public sphere, however. Every and Augoustinos (2007) analyze Australian Parliamentary debate over asylum seekers and conclude that it is possible, but difficult to confront racism. Likewise, Goodwin (2010) examines public discussion over asylum and immigration in the United Kingdom. He shows that those who defend immigrants in the public sphere are very hesitant to accuse their adversaries of racism. While it is clear that norms of color-blindness extend to those who experience and confront institutional racism, there is still more to learn. We add to this scholarship by asking two questions.

First, *what general options do anti-racists have for navigating norms of color-blindness in the public sphere?* The existing studies focus on a particular case. The advantage of doing so is that they can provide much detail about the specifics of each situation. The lim-

itation of such work is that it becomes difficult to observe general features. Our contribution to the literature will be a comparison of how anti-racism operates in two separate cases. This comparison will allow us to obtain a more basic sense of how individuals negotiate color-blindness.

A comparative analysis will also allow us to observe the variability of such efforts. Hence our second question, *how does context influence how people confront institutional discrimination?* That is, how does the willingness to acknowledge racial discrimination vary by the situation? While color-blind racism seems to exist in many societies, it stands to reason that contextual factors will shape its power. But how? By comparing anti-racist ideational work in two distinct racial projects, we can gain a better sense of how situational factors can influence the confrontation of institutional racism. A comparison of two cases will highlight aspects that individuals do not acknowledge in particular situations. Accordingly, this article follows Bonilla-Silva's mandate to explore how race can go unseen. Goffman's concept of laminations will facilitate this endeavor.

### **Laminations of Acknowledgement**

There are numerous approaches to the ways that people construct reality in the public sphere, for example, narratives (Somers 1994; Jacobs 1996; Maines 2001), discursive repertoires (Steinberg 1999), critical discourse analysis (van Dijk 1992). This study operates in the Goffmanian tradition of frame analysis. The concept of framing has proven to be a very useful tool for examining how individuals construct reality, particularly in contentious situations (Ben-

ford and Snow 2000; Snow 2004). Frames are shared cultural schemata that actors use to organize their cognitions and conduct (Goffman 1974). For example, the color-blind ideology includes the frames of abstract liberalism, naturalization, cultural racism, and the minimization of racism (Bonilla-Silva 2006). Whites use the abstract liberalism frame when drawing on "ideas associated with political liberalism (e.g., 'equal opportunity,' the idea that force should not be used to achieve social policy) and economic liberalism (e.g., choice, individualism) in an abstract manner to explain racial matters" (Bonilla-Silva 2006:28). With the naturalization frame Whites argue that the racial status quo is inevitable. Whites employ the cultural racism frame to maintain that racial inequality is a function of Whites and minorities having different values and lifestyles. The two questions asked in this article will allow us to build on Bonilla-Silva's scheme by uncovering the generic laminations of racial discourse.

Situations often have multiple levels or laminations (Goffman 1974). Laminations occur when actors add new framings of reality on top of existing frames. For example, a situation where two people discuss an investment opportunity while attending a baseball game, the business conversation lamination sits atop the game lamination. The two might switch between laminations during the game—during a high leverage situation in the game the discussion of business is interrupted, the conversation resumes between innings. Recently, sociologists have begun to employ the concept of laminations to the study of political disputes (Hedley and Clark 2007; Silva 2013). Our analysis will uncover the laminations of color-blindness. Individuals may acknowledge

certain laminations and unacknowledge others. Regardless of whether or not such unacknowledgement is intentional, the patterned absence of a lamination is meaningful. The use of a comparative analysis helps to elucidate how speakers variably address a particular lamination in the public sphere.

People do not frame reality in a vacuum. Context or “discursive field” influences framing (Steinberg 1999; Snow 2008). Contextual factors include cultural norms (e.g., color-blindness) and by the alternative framing of reality given by one’s adversaries. As Esacove (2004) demonstrates, combatants dialogically frame reality in relation to the counter frames of their opponents. This paper seeks to document how discursive fields influence how institutional racism is confronted by pro-immigrant and anti-Indian mascot authors. We expect that nativist framings shape pro-immigration discourse and justifications for Indian mascots affect criticisms of the practice. We now will outline the contextual features of each case.

## Cases

In previous research, the lead author examined how individuals discuss immigration and Indian mascots (Silva 2007; 2013; 2015). Upon reflecting on these separate studies, a question that emerged (see: Charmaz 2014) was how color-blind ideology operates in each case. The two cases examined in this study provide an interesting contrast. The opposition to the Native American imagery that symbolizes certain athletic teams and the support for unauthorized immigrants are both instances where individuals confront institutional racism. These cases

also involve very different factors. Indian mascots discriminate against Native Americans, while punitive immigration policies primarily affect Latinos. Additionally, these issues have a differing mix of status and class interests. Following Weber’s (1968) lead, sociologists have distinguished between “class politics,” which are based on struggles over *the allocation of material resources* and *status politics* that involve *political conflict over the allocation of prestige* (Gusfield 1963; Marshall 1986; Lio, Melzer, and Reese 2008). The mascot controversy is largely a symbolic status dispute and immigration policy has a mix of class and status dimensions. Additionally, actors use color-blind ideology to defend punitive immigration policy (Douglas, Sáenz, and Murga 2015). By contrast, the use of Native American imagery by sports teams is not color-blind, but overt (Robertson 2015). Although defenses do include color-blind justifications of it as a matter of “self-expression” or “democracy” (Silva 2007). Therefore, these two cases provide an opportunity for a comparison that should elucidate the general and situation-specific ways actors challenge color-blind ideology.

### Indian Mascots

Sports are a site of the re-production of racial and gender inequality (e.g., Hoberman 1997; Messner 2011). For more than a century high school, college, and professional athletic teams have symbolized themselves with Native American imagery which includes nicknames (e.g., Redskins, Braves, Indians, Chiefs); mascots dressed as “Indian warriors” who “represent” the team along the sidelines of a contest; logos depicting feathers, caricatures of Indians, tomahawks, et cetera; fan behavior such as the

“tomahawk chop” where fans of the Florida State University “Seminoles,” in unison, simulate a chopping motion by extending and flexing an arm while chanting “ohhhweehweoh.” Over the past two decades critical scholars have launched a furious attack on Indian mascots. This work has demonstrated the negative effects of the imagery (Fryeberg et al. 2008; Kim-Prieto et al. 2010), as well as the racism, colonialism (Fenelon 1999; King and Springwood 2000; Pewewardy 2001; Baca 2004; Farnell 2004; Williams 2007; Callais 2010; Gamache 2010; Steinfeldt et al. 2010), and hegemonic masculinity (Davis 1993; Williams 2006) that motivates it.

Both critics and defenders have had significant victories. Hundreds of high schools and colleges have retired Indian symbolism (Pember 2007). Notably, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) has forced a number of college teams to do so (Pember 2007; Staurowsky 2007). But, while many teams have changed, many, including some of the most prominent, remain (e.g., Atlanta Braves, Cleveland Indians, Florida State Seminoles, and Washington Redskins). The end of this cultural battle is not in sight.

In general, mascot supporters account for the practice of using Indian symbolism by denying injury (e.g., claiming that a mascot is harmless), asserting benefit (e.g., arguing that it honors Native Americans), claiming authority (e.g., stating that one has expertise as a fan), or rejecting the challenge (e.g., attacking the character of the critics) (Silva 2007). This defense is informed by color-blind ideology (Callais 2010). The analysis that follows will be of recent (2007-2014) attempts to challenge these color-blind defenses of the practice.

Given the symbolic nature of the dispute, many parties to the issue have sought to establish Native American opinion of the practice. The opinion of local Native Americans is an influential factor in mascot controversies (Davis-Delano 2007). The rationale, presumably, is that because the interpretation of the imagery is subjective, Native Americans have enhanced authority to evaluate it. The NCAA policy allows for colleges who secure the support of relevant Indian tribes to retain their Indian mascot (e.g., Florida State University), while colleges that fail to do so, have been forced to relinquish it (e.g., Arkansas State University) (Staurowsky 2007). No uniform Native American position on the symbolism exists, however (Peroff and Wildcat 2002; Jacobs 2014). Nonetheless, mascot supporters have taken to making tenuous claims to Indian identity to bolster their position (Springwood 2004).

The conflict over Indian mascots is primarily an instance of Weberian status politics. The public debate provides an opportunity to construct the definition of Native Americans in the public sphere. Correspondingly, much of the discourse on mascots focuses on whether Native Americans are honored or denigrated by the practice. American discussions of immigration, by contrast, are a mix of class and status struggles.

### **Immigration Policy**

Immigration is a continuing feature of American society and nativist sentiments have long been bound up with hostility towards racial and ethnic minorities (Feagin 1997; Lippard 2011; Schueths 2014). Much scholarship has uncovered how nativist discourse

depicts immigrants as threats to the well-being of American communities, economy, and culture (Feagin 1997; Mehan 1997; Cacho 2000; Ono and Sloop 2002; Santa Ana 2002; Lakoff and Ferguson 2006; Chavez 2008; Lio, Melzer, and Reese 2008; Dove 2010; Kim et al. 2011; Fryberg et al. 2012; Brown 2013; Luque et al. 2013; Bloch 2014; Kil 2014). These studies show that nativists address both class interests (e.g., concerns about the economic effects of immigrants) and status issues in their discourse (e.g., defending the primacy of the English language in American public life). Despite the severity of the claims leveled against (predominantly non-White) immigrants, many nativists draw on color-blind ideology which marginalizes immigrants without explicit appeals to white power (Moras 2010; Bloch 2014; Kil 2014; Douglas, Sáenz, and Murga 2015). The degree of color-blindness, however, can vary significantly (Brown 2013). How, then, do the challengers of racist-nativism contend with color-blind norms?

This analysis focuses on discourse that occurred between June 16, 2012 and July 16, 2012. There were two especially salient events that occurred during this time. First, U.S. President, Barack Obama, initiated the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program on June 15, 2012. DACA as a substitute for the stymied Dream Act, which proposed legislation that sought to provide legal status for young undocumented immigrants (Miranda 2010; Preston 2012). DACA grants a work permit and two year delay of deportation to undocumented immigrants under 31 years of age who arrived in the United States before age 16, spent a continuous 5 years in the U.S., are in school, high school graduates, or honorably discharged veterans, with relatively unblemished crim-

inal records (Napolitano 2012; Preston 2012). DACA was billed as “prosecutorial discretion” (Napolitano 2012), but critics argued that it was an unconstitutional overreach by a President who is eager to win the favor of Latina/o voters (Preston 2012). More than a half million DACA applications were accepted by the U.S. government (Svajlenka and Singer 2014). With the election of Donald Trump to the U.S. Presidency, the program is in jeopardy<sup>1</sup> (Harlan and Markon 2016). A second noteworthy event occurred during the period we observed, on June 25 the American Supreme Court ruled on *Arizona v. United States*. The court upheld the portion of Arizona’s punitive 2010 law that calls on local police to inspect the immigration status of suspicious detainees. The court rejected the law’s creation of criminal penalties for unauthorized immigrants who seek employment (Liptak 2012; also see: [Scotusblog.com](http://Scotusblog.com)).

## Data and Methods

The analysis presented below emerged from other studies of discourse over Indian mascots (Silva 2007; 2013) and immigration (Silva 2015). Insights from this previous work allowed us to draw a theoretical sample (see: Altheide and Schneider 2013; Charmaz 2014) of letters to the editor. That is, I sought to collect data that would allow me to identify theoretical categories (how individuals frame their arguments), and I was less concerned with finding a representative sample. Letters to the editor are an interesting place to examine discourse over race. Although newspaper readership is declining, they are still read by mil-

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<sup>1</sup> The 2016 U.S. Presidential Campaign of Donald Trump, however, resulted in not-so-color-blind framings of immigration.

lions of Americans (Kohut et al. 2012) and letters are among the more well-liked sections of the newspaper (Wahl-Jorgensen 2007). People define reality by considering how others do so (Mead 1934) and letters allow one access to others' views (Wahl-Jorgensen 2004). Letters are authored by non-media professionals, so they differ from elite dominated venues in the mass media (McFarland 2011; Young 2011). Unlike comments made online, however, letters pass through a gatekeeping process, which excludes hate speech and defamation (Wahl-Jorgensen 2004). The fact that letters are filtered, so to speak, allows us to understand public political culture (Perrin 2005:171). That is, we can see what counts as appropriate. For a variety of reasons, letters to the editor do not offer a pure reflection of what people are privately thinking (Reader, Stempel, and Daniel 2004). The letters section, then, provides a range of publicly acceptable opinions. Letter writers operate within a cultural context, accordingly the way partisans frame the support for their opinion will reflect this milieu.

For this study, letters were collected from the Lexis-Nexis academic database. Pro-immigrant letters were obtained using the search terms "immigrant," "immigration," "dream act," and "letter" for the dates June 16, 2012 to July 15, 2012. Due to the complexity of the issue, we used a relatively short time period. That is, we wanted the majority of the letters to be focused on similar current events. An immigration letter was selected for further analysis if it directly supported policies that would decriminalize unauthorized immigration (e.g., praising President Obama's decision to implement DACA) or if it provided arguments that indirectly supported unauthorized immigrants (discussing how immigrants are good for the United

States without also offering any negative framings of immigrants). Anti-Indian mascot letters were drawn using the search terms "Indian," "Redskin," or "Native American," paired with "logo," "symbol," "mascot," or "nickname." There are fewer letters published about Indian mascots, so we have a larger time frame (between January 01, 2007 and July 18, 2014). The longer time frame is acceptable because the issue is relatively stable. A mascot letter was included in the sample if it argued for or defended the retirement of an Indian mascot or otherwise casted Indian mascots as problematic. For the time period, 18 anti-mascot letters were published in 2007, four in 2008, two in 2009 and 2011, 21 in 2013, and 11 in 2014. We examined the material that was collected and agreed that 58 letters on mascots and 111 letters on immigration were sufficient to capture their discursive options and to make a comparison between cases. There are myriad Indian mascots in the United States. The three frequent topics were the Washington Redskins of the National Football League (19 letters), Indian mascots in general (16 letters), and the imagery formerly used by the University of Illinois (11 letters). These anti-mascot letters were written by 46 authors, 40 authors wrote one letter, four authors wrote two letters, one author wrote three letters, and another wrote four, three letters did not include authorship. The letters were published in 20 newspapers from 12 states and Washington, DC. The pro-immigrant letters come from 36 newspapers in 18 states and were written by 106 distinct authors (author information for one letter is missing). Immigration is an exceptionally complex issue, but given the short time frame, the letters were somewhat focused. The top three topics were DACA (59 letters), immigration in general (32 letters), Arizona's immigration law (12 letters).

**Table 1. Anti-mascot letters published by newspaper.**

NEWSPAPER	STATE	NUMBER OF LETTERS
Bismarck Tribune	North Dakota	1
Buffalo News	New York	2
Capital Times	Wisconsin	1
Chico Enterprise-Record	California	1
Christian Science Monitor	National	2
Columbian	Washington	1
Contra Costa Times	California	6
El Paso Times	Texas	1
Herald News	New Jersey	1
Monterey County Herald	California	1
Pantagraph	Illinois	4
Salt Lake Tribune	Utah	1
San Jose Mercury News	California	1
Spokesman Review	Washington	3
St. Louis Post-Dispatch	Missouri	1
State Journal-Register	Illinois	9
USA Today	National	3
Vallejo Times Herald	California	4
Washington Post	Washington	4
Wisconsin State Journal	Wisconsin	11

Source: *Self-elaboration.*

**Table 2. Pro-immigrant letters published by newspaper.**

NEWSPAPER	STATE	NUMBER OF LETTERS
Atlanta Journal Constitution	Georgia	1
Austin American Statesmen	Texas	3
Berkshire Eagle	Massachusetts	2
Buffalo News	New York	6
Chicago Daily Herald	Illinois	6
Columbian	Washington	1
Contra Costa Times	California	7
Daily News of Los Angeles	California	1
Dayton Daily News	Ohio	1
Deseret Morning News	Utah	1
Herald News	New Jersey	3
Houston Chronicle	Texas	2
Las Cruces Sun-News	New Mexico	2
Las Vegas Review-Journal	Nevada	5
Lebanon Daily News	Pennsylvania	1
Lewiston Morning Tribune	Idaho	2
Marin Independent Journal	California	1
New York Times	New York	5
Palm Beach Post	Florida	6
Philadelphia Daily News	Pennsylvania	3
Philadelphia Inquirer	Pennsylvania	2
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette	Pennsylvania	2
Public Opinion	Pennsylvania	1
Record	New Jersey	2
Richmond Times Dispatch	Virginia	3
Roanoke Times	Virginia	1
San Antonio Express-News	Texas	5
San Bernardino County Sun	California	1
San Francisco Chronicle	California	7
San Jose Mercury News	California	4
Spokesman Review	Washington	1
St. Louis Post-Dispatch	Missouri	5
St. Paul Pioneer Press	Minnesota	3
Star Tribune	Minnesota	4
Tampa Bay Times	Florida	6
Tampa Tribune	Florida	2
Virginian-Pilot	Virginia	3

Source: *Self-elaboration.*

**Table 3. Findings.**

LAMINATIONS OF ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	EXAMPLES OF FRAMES USED BY OPPONENTS OF INDIAN MASCOTS	EXAMPLES OF FRAMES USED BY SUPPORTERS OF DACA	RACE ACKNOWLEDGED?	DISCRIMINATION ACKNOWLEDGED?	CONTEXT PROVIDED?
ABSTRACTION	“humans not mascots”	“politics” “contributing Americans” “blameless”	No	No	No
PIGMENTATION	“Native American”	“Latina/o”	Yes	No	No
DISCRIMINATION	“blatant racism”	“show me your papers”	Yes	Yes	No
CONTEXTUALIZATION	“history of colonization” “comparisons to discrimination against African Americans” “perspective of Native Americans”	“economic history” “comparisons to non-Latina/o immigrants” “perspective of Latina/o immigrants”	Yes	Yes	Yes

Source: *Self-elaboration.*

As noted above, this study is an ethnographic content analysis (Altheide and Schneider 2013), meaning we are interested in examining media (in this case, letters) to uncover the processes by which people construct meanings. The analysis of anti-mascot letters was conducted by the first author and the second author, while the analysis of the pro-immigration letters was conducted by the first author and the third author. Aided by the Nvivo qualitative software program, codes were developed by exploring the data in multiple rounds. In general, our approach to the coding follows suggestions laid out by Lofland and colleagues (2006) to move from open-ended initial coding to

focused coding. The open-ended coding began in the aforementioned studies of Indian mascots and immigration. Based on these previous studies and Bonilla-Silva’s scholarship on color-blind ideology, we coded the letters for whether or not they acknowledged race. We also open-coded the new set of immigration letters. The development of a focused coding scheme from our open-ended coding emerged by examining these initial open codes, comparing the coding for mascot and immigration discourses, and by using the concepts of laminations and color-blind racism as sensitizing concepts. For instance, we found that the claims of discrimination varied drastically when compared

against each other. We also discovered that in the mascot discourse, race was nearly always acknowledged, but it was often ignored in the immigration letters. We also noticed that Native American subjectivity was much more likely to be considered than was the worldview of immigrants. Following Goffman (1974), we conceptualized these differences as distinct laminations in the discourse. Once a focused scheme was established, we independently re-coded the letters and then discussed cases where we had different codes.

### **Laminations of Color-Blindness**

In this section, we present our answers to our two research questions. These findings are outlined in table one. In answer to our first question (*How do anti-racists navigate norms of color-blindness in the public sphere?*), those who oppose institutional discrimination address one of four levels of laminations of color-blindness. We conceive of these four options as levels along which individuals confront race and racism. In the abstraction lamination, actors discuss the institutional practice without acknowledging race or ethnicity. Next, in the pigmentation lamination, authors acknowledge race or ethnicity, but not discrimination. The third option is to speak to the discrimination lamination. In the final lamination, they add context to their criticisms. The second question (*How does context influence how people confront institutional discrimination?*) is answered by comparing the degree to which racism was acknowledged by supporters of DACA and opponents of Indian mascots. Namely, the specific ways that mascot opponents are more likely to acknowledge racism.

### **Abstraction Lamination**

In the abstraction lamination, the victims of the discriminatory practice are constructed without reference to their racial or ethnic identity—one does not even acknowledge racial or ethnic distinctions. The abstraction lamination represents a more extreme version of the abstract liberalism described by Bonilla-Silva (2006). Such unacknowledgement of color occurred much more frequently in letters defending immigrants (75 percent, 80/111) than in letters opposing Indian mascots (5 percent, 3/58).

### ***Immigration Letters***

Beyond the numerical differences, pro-immigrant letters had a richer vocabulary of abstract characterizations than did anti-mascot letters. Frames of politics, criminality, and productivity allowed for letter writers to construct unraced immigrants.

### ***Politics Frame***

Some authors would focus on legal and political matters to the exclusion of race. For example:

President Obama's critics were quick to decry his immigration initiative as election-year politics. Of course it was. That's one of the important reasons we have elections: to induce political leaders to carry out the will of the electorate. [Margolis 2012]

This author discusses campaigning and the accountability of elected leaders. A focus on democratic theory provides a level of abstraction that

elides race. In another letter, after mentioning that President Obama is a legal scholar, the author challenges a nativist:

How about it: The president and you mano a mano in a debate on the fine and esoteric points of constitutional law. That could get embarrassing for you quite quickly. [Dillon 2012]

Again, a political frame, referencing constitutional law, provides a means to un/intentionally justify Obama's immigration policy *without* including the fact that most immigrants are minorities.

#### *Contributing Americans Frame*

Pro-immigrant authors also developed the abstraction lamination by framing immigrants as economic and social contributors:

Most of these dreamers are extraordinary young people who have excelled, graduating from universities with high honors, some with multiple degrees. Others are entrepreneurs who have created jobs. They have a strong work ethic and a love for this country. [Gutierrez 2012]

The above excerpt casts immigrants as industrious, accomplished, job creators. Such descriptors are abstractions that facilitate the unacknowledgement of race or ethnicity.

#### *Blameless Frame*

Likewise, others unacknowledge race by describing young unauthorized immigrants as blameless:

There are an estimated 50,000 to 65,000 undocumented students who graduate from our high schools each year...Many came to the U.S. at a young age, have grown up in American schools, developed American values and are American in every sense except their citizenship. [Czarlinsky 2012]

This letter emphasizes both the Americanness of unauthorized immigrants and also argues that they are not responsible for any legal violations. For another example:

President Barack Obama...did the right thing by issuing an order to stop the deportation of children who were brought here illegally through no fault of their own and who have worked hard and lived by the rules. [Bottone 2012]

While this letter supports unauthorized immigrants, it does so without acknowledging race and ethnicity. That is, the charges of racism and discrimination go unused in this lamination. The author casts certain unauthorized immigrants as untarnished. Of course, this framing indirectly implicates the parents of these children. The author does not strengthen the accusation with contextual information about how and why immigrants came to the United States.

#### *Indian Mascots*

By contrast, the complete unacknowledgement of race by mascot opponents was very rare. It was possible, however:

Bottom line—human beings are not mascots. [Dambrauskas 2007]

Here, the author uses a common framing of Indian mascots, but does not include any racial frames. In this context, the abstraction lamination is unusual. The data cannot tell us why authors have not acknowledged race or the consequences of having done so. Comparisons with other laminations that will follow, however, will demonstrate that authors have the option of addressing other laminations.

### **Pigmentation Lamination**

The second way that anti-mascot and pro-immigrant authors would negotiate norms of color-blindness was to contribute to the pigmentation lamination. Here, race and ethnicity are acknowledged, but, as the label suggests, such recognition is only skin deep. Those who take this option do not recognize discrimination against racial and ethnic minorities. We found the pigmentation lamination in 7 percent (8/111) of pro-immigration letters and 10 percent (6/58) of anti-mascot letters.

### ***Immigration Letters***

For example, the following author recognizes the ethnicity of immigrants without acknowledging the discrimination they face in the United States:

many Muslims come to the United States to flee from persecution they face in their lands...for instance...the Pakistani government has stripped the Ahmadi Muslims of all basic human rights. [Saifa 2012]

The letter identifies immigrants as a racial and ethnic minority. And while it relates discrimination that they face in Pakistan, it does not suggest that Amer-

icans are guilty of any wrongdoing. Likewise, in another letter:

Thank you, President Obama, for giving young people like Alberto the opportunity to pursue their dreams. [Terry 2012]

The immigrant being named Alberto suggests ethnicity, but the letter does not mention institutional discrimination against Latina/os. The author stages America as providing opportunity. Charges of American complicity in creating both push and pull factors go unmade.

### ***Indian Mascot Letters***

This lamination was occasionally formed by critics of Indian mascots. After mentioning problems with education, infrastructure, public pensions, and taxes, the author sarcastically chastises a State Senator who fought to defend the University of Illinois mascot:

Don't worry about all those other issues. They'll work themselves out in the long run. But this Chief Illiniwek. Now that's an important issue. [Pearce 2007]

The use of the word "Chief" serves to address the pigmentation lamination by acknowledging race. But, the contention that the matter is simply a waste of time unacknowledges the discussion of discrimination that is often attended to the debate on the Indian mascots.

### **Discrimination Lamination**

The third option for confronting institutional racism was to align with the discrimination lamina-

tion. Authors achieved this lamination by issuing de-contextualized charges of institutional discrimination or prejudice. We found it in 4 percent (4/111) of pro-immigration letters and 16 percent (9/58) of anti-immigration letters.

### *Immigration Letters*

For example, in a pro-immigrant letter:

The Supreme Court has upheld the most damaging element of SB 1070, Arizona's cruel anti-immigrant law. The "show me your papers" provision allows law enforcement to profile people based on the color of their skin. A community in which racial profiling is permitted—even invited—is a community deprived of its basic right to safety and dignity. [Flinchum 2012]

This author identifies racism, but does not acknowledge the context in which racial discrimination occurs. That is, it does not include the sort of frames that would lend depth to the charge of discrimination.

### *Indian Mascot Letters*

This lamination also exists in the discourse on Indian mascots. For example:

This issue is not about being politically correct. It is about removing blatant racism. [Reid 2013]

The author explicitly criticizes Indian mascots as racist and thus forms a lamination that stands atop the mere acknowledgement of race. The author does not, however, provide a wider framework that could

support the claim. It is in the subsequent lamination that authors provide a more extensive framing of racial discrimination.

### **Contextualization Lamination**

The final possibility for navigating color-blind ideology was to contribute to the contextualization lamination. It is at this level of the discourse where authors placed discrimination within a larger, multidimensional environment. In both cases, actors build this lamination with framings of history, comparisons to other racial and ethnic groups, and the perspective of the racial and ethnic minorities towards the allegedly institutionally racist practice. It occurred much less frequently in pro-immigrant letters (14 percent, 15/111) than in anti-mascot letters (69 percent, 40/58).

### *History*

One way to construct the contextualization lamination is through the use of historical frames that situate the challenged institutional practice in relation to other, unambiguously and now widely discredited racist practices.

### *Indian Mascot Letters*

Such framing was common in anti-mascot letters (31 percent, 18/58). For instance:

The name is a painful reminder of the atrocity that American Indians had to endure since the arrival of the white settlers in this country several centuries ago, and the massacre of the American Indians by those

settlers who felt that they were standing in the way of expansion. [Trice 2014]

More than 100 million Native Americans were killed by North American settlers in what has become known as the “American Holocaust.” The conscious and purposeful dehumanization of Native Americans to the level of animals allowed Europeans and the American colonists to kill Native Americans with a clear conscience for their land and resources. [Valenti 2007]

Examples of terrible atrocities, as the above excerpts demonstrate, come effortlessly in the discussion of sports team mascots. They pair the current institutional practice as not merely offensive but another link in a chain of oppressive acts.

### *Immigration Letters*

As in the discussion of Indian mascots, authors characterize the current situation as a function of past events. Interestingly, however, such framing is quite uncommon (5 percent, 5/111).

[They] didn’t sneak across the border; they were permitted—maybe even encouraged—to walk across freely in order to perform menial agricultural and service tasks that many Americans, even in our recession, are unwilling to do. In this light, our current outrage over the presence of illegal residents rings a bit hollow. [Crisp 2012]

immigrants...confront a military-level response to the trade policies that have made it impossible for South American neighbors to sustain native agricul-

ture in the face of United States subsidies and “fair trade” policies that impoverish both our peoples. [Burrows 2012]

Both authors use an “economic history” frame to remind readers of how American policies create both push and pull factors for immigrants. Such framing shifts the focus from defending unauthorized immigrants to placing blame on the U.S. political and economic leaders. Despite their infrequency, these excerpts show that it is possible for immigration advocates to use historical frames.

### *Comparisons*

Letter writers would also use comparison frames to add to the contextualization lamination. These frames associate the experiences of unauthorized immigrants and Native Americans with other indisputable instances of discrimination. Pro-immigration letters had comparison frames 9 percent (10/111) of the time and anti-mascot letters had them in 40 percent (23/58) of cases.

### *Indian Mascot Letters*

Anti-mascot authors offered numerous comparisons between mascots and discredited practices. For example:

Identifying a group of people by the color of their skin is not a show of respect. We no longer refer to Asians as yellow-skinned or Hispanics as brown-skinned for the same reasons we no longer refer to Native Americans as Redskins. [Edgerton 2014]

Institutional stereotypes like Little Black Sambo, Jim Crow and the Ku Klux Klan also had long traditions. [Haukoos 2007]

The hypocrisy of racial discourse in this country is confusing. On one hand, the public is so outraged over the racist comments made by Los Angeles Clippers owner Donald Sterling, with justice coming swiftly and the NBA banning him for life. On the other hand, why is it we do not make that same connection when professional sports continues to ridicule Native Americans? [DeOcampo 2014]

The above excerpts draw a comparison between mascots and other racialized imagery. In so doing, they direct attention to the norms of American racial and ethnic relations. If a practice is unacceptable in one setting, it should also be deplorable in similar situations. Such analogies add dimensionality to the assertion that mascots are discriminatory. Likewise, the following letter creates the contextualization lamination by pointing out that the Washington, DC professional football team also had a history of discriminating against African Americans.

Here is a fun fact: In the 1960s, Washington was also the very last NFL franchise to desegregate. [Reising 2013]

The author compares discrimination against African Americans a half century ago to imagery that is offensive to many Native Americans today. This framing enhances claims of discrimination. Indian mascots are not merely offensive; they are a part of a more complex system of racial domination.

### *Immigration Letters*

Pro-immigrant letters writers occasionally advanced comparison frames. For example:

I wonder how many individuals with fair complexion and light eyes or hair would be thought of by the police as having sneaked across the Rio Grande? [Marquez 2012]

Most people who write in are fairly transparent in that their issue is not with “the borders,” but rather with one border in particular. Recent analyses find that immigration from Mexico has gone down, if not reversed, so I’m confused why you never hear these people complain about immigration from Asia. [Turpel 2012]

The above letters go beyond the discrimination lamination by comparing the experience of victims to non-victims. The author confronts color-blind discourse by claiming that immigration policy will not influence Whites, but will affect Latina/os. The second letter undermines color-blind justifications by suggesting that nativists are focused on immigration from Mexico but not Asia. Additionally, she asserts that nativists’ racism is belied by their relative silence about Asian immigration.

### *Perspective*

Letter writers also constructed the contextualization lamination by considering the subjective experiences of racial and ethnic minorities. To demonstrate this version of the contextualization lamination, we will provide a counter-example where it is absent:

Try not to confuse “freedom of speech” with exclusion and perpetuating hate and intolerance in our country. [Alexich 2007]

This author does not make any claims about how actual Native Americans feel about Indian mascots. The frames of hate, intolerance, and freedom direct attention to defenders of the imagery and away from Native Americans. By contrast, in both debates, a lamination developed where authors present the perspective of racial and ethnic minorities. This framing occurred in 6 percent (6/111) of immigration letters and 50 percent of (29/58) anti-mascot letters.

#### *Indian Mascot Letters*

As noted above, the constructed opinion of Native Americans is frequently a deciding factor in disputes over a particular team’s imagery. Correspondingly, critics of Indian mascots often claim that Native Americans are offended by the practice:

My relatives have been dehumanized since the Colonists “founded” this nation and we are 1 percent of the population. However, we are humans, just like you, and deserve the same respect and rights as everyone else. [Swenning 2013]

In this excerpt, the author presents herself as Native American. By claiming to be Indian, the author is providing an example of a Native American who seeks to eliminate Indian mascots. In doing so, she presents a claim of authority to define the practice (see: Silva 2007).

#### *Immigration Letters*

Much less frequently pro-immigration letters constructed the perspective of Latina/os. After identifying the Arizona’s immigration law as targeting non-Whites, the author explains:

Under the constant threat of police harassment and possible detention, even simple daily outings—running errands, driving to work, grocery shopping, taking your child to the doctor—become fraught with fear and very real risk. In Alabama, mothers drop their children off at school not knowing if they’ll be back to pick them up. [Dutt 2012]

Here, depth is added to the criticism of nativist policies towards unauthorized immigrants by describing the subjective experience (fear and uncertainty).

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

We add to the literature on how color-blindness shapes responses to discrimination (Every and Augoustinos 2007; Goodman 2010; Rojas-Sosa 2016) with a comparative analysis that examines how anti-racists confront institutional racism in two separate contexts. This study answers two questions: *First, what general options do anti-racists have for navigating norms of color-blindness in the public sphere? Second, how does context shape their rhetorical choices?* Our answers to these two questions provide important contributions to our understanding of the social construction of race in the public sphere. Theoretically, this article offers a new way to conceptualize racial discourse. To answer the

first question, we drew on Goffman's underused concept of laminations to demonstrate the basic options anti-racists have for confronting institutional racism. By uncovering these laminations, we now have a framework with which to examine cultural norms. The answer to our second question also furthers our theoretical understandings of color-blindness. While we already knew that anti-racists have difficulty acknowledging race, we show that the avoidance of race is uneven. Race is avoided or lightly applied in pro-immigrant discourse, but it is more thoroughly acknowledged in anti-mascot discourse. This finding reveals the variability of the power of color-blindness. We will now elaborate on the significance of our answer to each question and conclude with a discussion of the limitations of this project.

The answer to our first question allows us to see anti-racist discourse in more detail. Uncovering the laminations that appear in different contexts allows us to observe features that are less salient in a particular case. For instance, we discovered the existence of the abstraction lamination. Were we to only have focused on the discourse over a particular case of institutional racism, we would not have detected it. The abstraction lamination is exceptionally fragile. It only takes a bit of framing—just a word or two—to reach the pigmentation lamination. Moreover, the abstraction lamination would seem untenable; how can it be that actors can discuss instances of racial and ethnic conflict with no acknowledgement of these characteristics? Nonetheless, many of those who speak on behalf of immigrants avoid any mention of race and ethnicity. Perhaps, they do not want others to accuse them

of “playing the race card.” Maybe Americans are so uncomfortable with racial and ethnic relations that they will evade it whenever possible? Regardless of the motive, the prevalence of such an objectively tenuous lamination speaks to the strength of the norms of color-blindness in the American public sphere.

Authors can easily transform the abstraction lamination into the pigmentation lamination. The potential power of the pigmentation lamination is that it recognizes the obvious issue that racial and ethnic dynamics are involved in the discussion without acknowledging discrimination against a particular group. Regardless of authorial intent, it unacknowledges discrimination without straining reality as thoroughly as the abstraction lamination. The pigmentation lamination is more stable than the abstraction lamination. It is simple to add in the frames that acknowledge race and comparatively difficult to discuss the discrimination that is based on racial and ethnic differences.

To create the discrimination lamination, one needs to claim that an issue is discriminatory (or directly address claims to the contrary). The contextualization lamination is more developed than the discrimination lamination. Some research suggests that framings of reality that include evidence are more effective than those that do not do so (Cress and Snow 2000; McCammon 2009). One practical implication of this study is that anti-racists should try to construct the contextualization lamination rather than the discrimination lamination. The contextualization lamination requires the use of frames that build on such claims. Greater knowledge is needed to contribute

to the contextualization lamination than to the discrimination lamination. A second practical implication, then, is that more educational work needs to be done for racists *and* anti-racists.

Second, we consider the importance of our answer to the second question in more detail. The willingness to move from the abstraction or pigmentation laminations to the discrimination or contextualization lamination is quite variable. We found that pro-immigrant authors are far more hesitant to acknowledge race than are anti-mascot letter writers. This finding suggests that topics vary regarding their *acknowledgeability*, that is, *the relative ease with which the contextual lamination is developed in racial discourses*.<sup>2</sup> Acknowledgeability, from this comparison, would appear to be connected to material interests, or the interpretation of material interests. The discontinuation of an Indian mascot will not *directly* affect the earnings of most Native Americans or non-Native Americans. That is, the relationship between an athletic team's symbolism and class interests is, at best, unclear. Moreover, actors do not typically frame it as a financial struggle. Immigration, however, certainly has economic effects. And, while those economic consequences are likely neutral or positive for most Americans (Ottaviano and Peri 2006; Peri 2011; 2012), many Americans believe that immigration jeopardizes their financial interests. Correspondingly, individuals frequently frame immigration as an economic matter. By

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<sup>2</sup> We derived the acknowledgeability from Armstrong and Cragé's (2006) concept of "commemorability," which refers to an event's potential for being collectively remembered. Similarly, certain issues have properties that more readily lend themselves to the development of pigmentation, discrimination, and contextual laminations.

contrast, status conflicts often lend themselves to considerations of subjectivity. As we saw here, the conflict over Indian mascots pushes individuals to consider how Native Americans interpret this imagery. Based on this analysis, we hypothesize that acknowledgeability will be more likely in disputes over matters of collective identity and representation than in economic conflicts. That is, Weberian status politics (1968) will lend themselves to the development of the discrimination and contextualization laminations. Conversely, acknowledgeability is inhibited to the extent that actors perceive disputes as conflicts over economic or class interests. Economics, with its emphasis on abstract formal models, provides a convenient means for the unacknowledgement of race.

An alternative or supplemental interpretation of these findings is that the American collective memory of crimes against Native Americans is more developed than the collective memory of American influences unauthorized immigration. Interestingly, American contributions to unauthorized immigration are chronologically closer to the present than are the worst atrocities against Native Americans. Perhaps it is easier to collectively "remember" more distant atrocities. Further comparative analyses should help to establish the ways in which selective collective memories are variably formed.

This study does have some significant limitations. While the quantitative differences between the laminations found in pro-immigration and anti-mascot letters are striking, they are discovered by way of qualitative coding. Thus, the reliability of

these findings has not yet been established. Future studies should address this matter. Second, letters to the editor are but one arena of the public sphere. Other forums, such as blogs or comments made on Internet message boards, should also be explored. Perhaps, the forum influences acknowledgeability. Finally, these findings should be compared with the acknowledgeability of the discourse over other instances of institutional discrimination. Further research should identify the factors that strengthen or weaken color-blindness. It is our hope that

the conceptualization of laminations developed here will improve how we understand how individuals construct race and ethnicity in a variety of contexts.

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