DEMOGRAPHIC KNOWLEDGE, LATINO/A GROWTH, AND THE POLITICS OF THE "BROWNING OF AMERICA"

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Recent demographic projections have placed the "future" of the United States on the horizon of the present. Demographers forecast that Latinos, African Americans, and Asian Americans are on track to *numerically* surpass the white "majority" within a few decades. The mass circulation and consumption of this projection (and others) has generated the widespread belief that the country is on the cusp of a seemingly unprecedented, irreversible, and altogether inevitable demographic and cultural transformation. Seizing the imagination of politicians, policymakers, social movements, and the general public, this narrative has fueled growing anxieties and anticipations over the ethnoracial, political, socioeconomic, and cultural future of the "nation." Differing perspectives on the meaning and consequences of population trends, as well as competing strategic agendas and interests, have led to diverse, conflictive, and often contradictory reactions and responses to projected futures. As a consequence of the limited interest in the social and cultural life of statistics, these emergent controversies have thus far escaped scholarly scrutiny.

In this paper, I analyze the public translation of demographic findings and track the diverse political valences given to "demographic change" in the wake of the 2010 census. As part of a broader research project on the intersection of demographic futures, political imaginaries, and ethnoracial identities among U.S. national Latino civil rights organizations and spokespersons, I focus on public representations and emergent controversies about Latino population growth. Regularly described as the "largest" and "fastest-growing" minority group, the U.S. Latino/a population have been framed as the driving force behind the so-called "Browning of America" (c.f. Huntington 2004). As widely reported in the press, the 2010 census indicates that one in six U.S. residents is "Latino," or perhaps, even more astonishingly, one in four children. Now totaling an unprecedented 50.5 million, this population is credited with 58% of the national population growth since over the last decade.

Scholars have noted that Latino demographics have fueled the recent resurgence of white conservatism and its decidedly anti-immigrant politics, as well as stimulated strategic efforts by major political parties and corporations to respectively capitalize on new 'voting blocs' and 'commercial markets' (Chavez 2008; Dávila 2008). Though often described as a politically passive "sleeping giant," some members of this putative 'population on the rise' have also begun to draw upon "Latino demographics" to make claims and organize constituencies. The paucity of social scientific research on these dynamics and their consequences, however, has left in the shadows the concrete, contextual, and conflictual movement and mobilization demographic statistics and projections of the future. As a consequence, we know little how statistical knowledge and discourses are shaping and transforming ethnoracial politics and identities in the era of "demographic change."

This paper builds upon and contributes to the growing interest in a growing body of work concerned with understanding the impact of statistics on social life, identity, and consciousness (e.g. De Santos 2009; Emigh 2002; Espeland and Sauder 2007; Loveman 2009; Morning 2008;

Zuberi 2001). With respect to the census – a knowledge source key to the analysis I undertake – past scholarship has tackled a number of critical topics, included but not limited to state formation and colonial administration (e.g. Carroll 2006; Curtis 2001; Starr 1987), national imaginaries and race-making (e.g. Anderson 2006 [1983]; Hirschman 1987; Jung and Almaguer 2006; Lee 1993; Loveman and Muñiz 2007; Morning 2008), citizenship and political representation (e.g. Anderson and Fienberg 1999; Nobles 2000; Prewitt 1987; Scott 1999), social movements and policymaking (Choldin 1986; e.g. Hattam 2005; Hochschild and Weaver 2010; Paschel 2013; Skerry 2000), and numeracy and the popularization of statistical knowledge (e.g. Cohen 1999; Desrosières 1998; Hacking 1990; Porter 1996).

A major insight proffered by the existing literature is the fact that statistical knowledge does not simply reflect reality, but rather helps to enact it (Law 2009; Loveman 2005). As the philosopher of science Ian Hacking (1990, p.3) once remarked, "The systematic collection of data about people has affected not only the ways in which we conceive of a society, but also the ways in which we describe our neighbour. It has profoundly transformed what we choose to do, who we try to be, and what we think of ourselves." In her recent work, historian Sarah Igo (2007) documents the construction of the "average American" through surveys and opinion polls during the 1940s and 1950s. Igo insists that polls did not just reflect the opinions and perspectives of the broader public; rather they actually created the "public" and transformed how individuals viewed themselves, others, and the country. The scholarship on racial categorization and citizenship shows how these effects have not only engendered new sources of social solidarity, but also new exclusions and inequalities (Leibler and Breslau 2005; Mezey 2003; Nobles 2000; Scott 1999).

The paper proposed here goes beyond the existing research in three major ways. First, it concentrates on the contemporary life of demographic statistics, in contrast with the historical orientation of the extant scholarship. Second, researchers tend to focus on aspects of "production," and as a consequence have rarely documented the dissemination and consumption of statistics (De Santos 2009). In particular, with the exception of Urla (1993) and few others, scholars have been largely inattentive to the ways in which political actors concretely mobilize statistics in political and public campaigns. Third and finally, my analysis sheds light on the complicated intersection between statistical knowledge and racial projects (Omi and Winant 1994 [1986]). It reveals that racial projects do not merely consume statistics. They also infuse statistics with particular racial meanings and ideologies, contest the racialized interpretations of other projects, as well as mobilize statistics to maintain or reconfigure the racial order.

Ultimately, this paper presents a timely and detailed account of the meanings and politics of "demographic change." It demonstrates that demographic statistics and projections have come to exercise a major influence on the content and contours of contemporary U.S. politics and public discourse.

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