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Elizabeth Korver-Glenn

2014
RICE UNIVERSITY

Color-Blind Racism among Non-poof Latinos in a Redeveloping Houston Barrio

by

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

Master of Arts

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HOUSTON, TEXAS
January 2014
ABSTRACT

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Accounts of urban inequality, which often focus on the urban poor, have also highlighted the centrality of non-poor minority actors in shaping poor inner-city neighborhood outcomes. This research suggests that non-poor minority actors may be particularly influential in the process of poor neighborhood redevelopment given their greater access to social, cultural, and political capital. Redevelopment in poor neighborhoods reproduces existing inequalities, at least in part through the legitimating power of color-blind racial ideology. Color-blind ideology privatizes inequality by silencing structural explanations for disparities. Additionally, color-blind ideology has also been shown to influence how minorities themselves explain inequality. Yet to date, no research has examined how non-poor minorities, redevelopment, and color-blind ideology may be linked in a single context. Relying on a year of ethnographic research and 38 in-depth interviews with non-poor Latinos, I ask whether and how these actors frame neighborhood inequality using color-blind ideology in a poor, redeveloping Houston barrio. I find widespread use of the cultural racism frame. I also ask what the implications of this finding may be, and theorize that widespread cultural racism among non-poor Latinos supports the conditions under which redevelopment stakeholders can pursue their projects without obstruction. I conclude by exploring what these findings
may mean for issues such as socioeconomic integration, and offer suggestions for future research.
Acknowledgments

While it is impossible to acknowledge everyone who has helped shape this project, I do want to acknowledge and thank several people who have had a particularly important impact on this thesis project. First, I would like to thank my committee, Sergio Chávez (chair), Erin A. Cech, Elaine Howard Ecklund, and Ruth N. López Turley. The committee has given truly invaluable feedback throughout the process of constructing the thesis and I am very thankful for their guidance. Second, I would like to thank my colleague and fellow graduate student Junia Howell, who has listened to numerous ideas and given helpful critical feedback at several points along the journey. Finally, I would like to thank the Northsiders who opened up their lives and their homes to me over the year I spent listening to their stories and attempting to understand the massive changes their neighborhood is undergoing. Without their input, this thesis would not exist. It is my hope that this work can stimulate discussion among Northside leaders about what neighborhood redevelopment means, what participation in redevelopment may look like, what vision neighborhood leaders have for the future of the Northside, and how they plan to go about constructing that vision.
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Color-Blind Racism among Non-Poor Latinos in a Redeveloping Houston Barrio

Much research on poor urban neighborhoods has focused on the lives and experiences of poor minority residents (Bourgois 2003; Duneier 1999; Massey and Denton 1993; Venkatesh 2002; Wilson 1987). These studies have shown the depths of inequality faced by the disadvantaged and marginalized people living within ghetto or barrio borders, while also demonstrating their adaptability and resiliency (Bourgois 2003; Duneier 1999; Venkatesh 2009). Other research has illuminated the importance of examining minority actors who are non-poor, that is, working- or middle-class (Wilson 1987; Massey et al. 1994), in these neighborhoods (Dávila 2003, 2004; Freeman 2006; Hyra 2006; Pattillo 2007). While non-poor minorities tend to make up a small proportion of urban neighborhoods relative to their poor counterparts, non-poor minority actors—by virtue of their greater access to social, cultural, and political capital—exert influence disproportionate to their relative representation in these areas. They may, for example,
influence policy decisions, such as where to build public housing units, or transform a poor neighborhood’s social controls (Pattillo 2003, 2007).

Non-poor minority actors may be even more important in the context of poor inner-city neighborhood redevelopment (Pattillo 2003, 2007; Dávila 2003, 2004; Hyra 2006). Poor inner-city neighborhoods, which are subject to baseline structural and racial inequalities (Massey and Denton 1993; Jargowsky 1997), are particularly vulnerable to redevelopment schemes. Whether private, public, or some combination of the two, neoliberal, or apparently rational, free market-driven (Mele 2013), redevelopment schemes further reify existing urban and racial inequalities (Wilson 2007; Rodríguez 2012; Elwood 2002), at least in part through structural racism (Diaz 2005) and color-blind racial ideology (Mele 2013).

Color-blind racial ideology is a set of discourses or frames generated by whites (Bonilla-Silva 2006) to explain structural and racial inequality as a result of individual—not societal—failings (Mele 2013). In other words, if inequality persists, it is because individuals (or groups of individuals), for example, are responsible for their choices about where to live, lack positive cultural traits, such as morality or a hard-work ethic, or are ‘naturally’ wired to be separate from others not like them (Bonilla-Silva 2006; Mele 2013; Myers 2005). Color-blind racial ideology legitimates harmful redevelopment schemes because it silences structural explanations of inequality and promotes privatized explanations that strip society of its responsibility for inequity (Mele 2013). Importantly, it is not only whites who employ color-blind racial ideology when explaining or justifying inequality (Bonilla-Silva 2006); minorities themselves have also been shown to
utilize color-blind rationales when explaining inequality (Bonilla-Silva 2006; Bonilla-Silva and Dietrich 2011; Kalscheur 2009; Neville et al. 2005).

Yet while we know that non-poor minorities may be particularly influential in poor, redeveloping neighborhoods (Pattillo 2003, 2007; Dávila 2003, 2004; Hyra 2006), that neoliberal redevelopment schemes are legitimated through color-blind racial ideology (Mele 2013) and that minorities, in addition to whites, rely on color-blind explanations of inequality (Bonilla-Silva 2006; Neville et al. 2005), to my knowledge no prior research has examined whether and how these dynamics may be linked in a single context. Given the inequality-reproducing capabilities of redevelopment as well as the potential for non-poor minorities to influence redevelopment, exploring the possibility that color-blind racial ideology links these two strands of research may provide important insight into the conditions under which redevelopment can be further legitimated, or perhaps contested.

Therefore, I ask whether and how non-poor Latinos in a poor, redeveloping Houston barrio utilize color-blind racism frames to explain neighborhood inequality. I also ask what the implications of color-blind rationale among these actors may be in this particular redeveloping context. Relying on a year of ethnographic research in Houston’s Northside barrio and 38 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with non-poor Latino barrio actors, I find that respondents often utilized the color-blind frame of cultural racism to

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1 While Latinos have often been categorized as ethnics with the option of choosing among established racial categories (e.g. white, black, other) (Schuman et al. 1997), more recently researchers have differed in their portrayal of ‘Latino’ as an ethnic or racial category (Rodriguez 2000). I think the evidence points towards viewing Latino as a racial category (e.g. Golash-Boza and Darity 2008; Roth 2012), and thus treat ‘Latino’ as a racial category in this paper.
provide rationale for neighborhood problems. This frame, which was widespread among non-poor Latinos, may provide enhanced legitimacy for redevelopment schemes and therefore support the conditions under which inequality-producing redevelopment can proceed uncontested. I conclude by exploring how my findings may relate to issues such as socioeconomic integration. I also offer suggestions for future research, including the need for more extensive investigations of non-poor actors in vulnerable inner-city neighborhoods.

1.1. Theoretical Background

1.1.1. Poor and Non-poor Actors in Poor Neighborhoods

Numerous urban sociological accounts over the 20th and early 21st centuries have provided compelling insights into the experiences of the impoverished people who populate poor inner-city neighborhoods as well as the mechanisms that reproduce systematic class, race, and gender inequalities in these neighborhoods over time (Bourgois 2003; Desmond 2012a; Duneier 1999; Gans 1962; Jacobs 1961; Sampson 2012; Venkatesh 2002, 2009). The inner-city poor, who are most often black or Latino (Massey and Denton 1993), have borne the full force of urban inequality, which persists in many forms: segregation (Massey and Denton 1993), social isolation and unemployment (Wilson 1987), eviction (Desmond 2012a), policing (Goffman 2009), displacement (Gans 1962), redevelopment (Diaz 2005), and appalling housing conditions (Venkatesh 2002). Many of these studies have also portrayed the adaptability and
resiliency of the urban poor in coping with the many forms of inequality (e.g. Bourgois 2003; Desmond 2012b).

In addition to highlighting inequality through a focus on poor minorities in inner-city neighborhoods, other research has begun to illuminate the importance of examining non-poor minorities who may live or work in these places (Dávila 2003, 2004; Freeman 2006; Pattillo 2003, 2007; Sampson 2012). While non-poor actors may comprise a relatively small proportion of the population in poor neighborhoods, they wield a disproportionately large amount of influence in these areas (Dávila 2003, 2004; Freeman 2006; Hyra 2006; Pattillo 2003, 2007). Pattillo’s (2003, 2007) research uncovered the growing presence of black gentrifiers in the poor, black neighborhood of North Kenwood-Oakland on Chicago’s South Side. These black professional newcomers—most of whom were homeowners—were clearly in the minority relative to their poorer counterparts. Yet as Pattillo (2007:15) notes, black middle- or upper-class homeowners “dominate[d] the community organizations…[and were] also disproportionately represented at most community meetings.” In North Kenwood-Oakland, non-poor homeowners—particularly those new to the neighborhood—exerted tremendous influence in a local public housing debate. These residents also effected the implementation of social controls through an increased police presence and the enforcement of acceptable “lifestyles, values, tastes, and behaviors” (Pattillo 2007:295). Even as non-poor and poor North Kenwood-Oakland residents often demonstrated racial solidarity in opposition to outsider whites (Pattillo 2003), this solidarity was often undermined by the privileged class position and related neighborhood demands of non-poor black gentrifiers (Pattillo 2003, 2007).
Dávila (2003, 2004) has also examined the ways in which non-poor actors impact poor neighborhoods and poor coethnic neighbors. In her research in New York’s El Barrio (East Harlem) neighborhood, Dávila (2003, 2004) found that upwardly mobile Puerto Ricans supported redevelopment and gentrification processes because they had strong aspirations of “cleansing and diassoci[ating]...the area from its marginal past” (Dávila 2004:3). Upwardly mobile Puerto Ricans, though uneven in their support of these processes, nevertheless backed the implementation of homeownership programs, for example. Their presence in El Barrio had a real material impact on the neighborhood and the changes it underwent. Thus, while research on non-poor coethnic or coracial minorities in poor neighborhoods is limited (Hyra 2006; Pattillo 2003), its theoretical and practical importance in explaining trenchant urban inequality in poor inner-city neighborhoods is clear.

1.1.2. Non-poor Actors and Poor Redeveloping Neighborhoods

The relationship between non-poor minorities and poor neighborhoods undergoing redevelopment may be especially crucial to examine (Pattillo 2003, 2007; Dávila 2003, 2004). Redevelopment in poor inner-city neighborhoods has been repeatedly documented as a pernicious mechanism responsible for reproducing urban inequality (Diaz 2005; Rodríguez 2012; Mele 2013; Logan and Molotch 1987; Wilson 2007; Lehrer and Laidley 2008; Wacquant 2008). Redevelopment schemes and projects reinforce race- and class-based segregation (Wilson 2007; Lehrer and Laidley 2008), and deliver promises to all residents and stakeholders while delivering only to a few—who are generally “real estate speculators and corporations” (Rodríguez 2012:93). Redevelopment multiplies the
baseline levels of marginalization experienced by poor, minority neighborhood residents (Logan and Molotch 1987; Rodríguez 2012). It masks the ways developers’ appeals to diversity end up reproducing the U.S. racial order through the implementation of exclusionary redeveloped enclaves (Mele 2000, 2013).

Further, redevelopment stakeholders and practices tend to be immune or deaf to the requests, needs, and desires of poor neighborhood natives (Logan and Molotch 1987; Pattillo 2007; Rodríguez 2012; Diaz 2005). Federal urban renewal programs, for instance, have historically destroyed more public housing than they created (Goetz 2011) and have potentially inflated rents through housing vouchers (Logan and Molotch 1987). Even community redevelopment organizations, intended as grassroots empowerment programs, may indirectly exacerbate urban inequality. Elwood (2002:121) found that a local community redevelopment organization, or what she calls a “neighborhood-level revitalization [initiative],” in some ways offered challenges to the influence of exclusionary neoliberal policies and practices; however, she also found that this initiative institutionalized neoliberalism at the local level. Neoliberal policies and practices, which favor a free market rationale and steer away from social welfare support (Mele 2013), further marginalize the already-disadvantaged urban poor (Mele 2013; Wacquant 2008). It is important to note, however, that redevelopment stakeholders are not as dismissive of non-poor minority residents, who can function as efficient though perhaps unintentional brokers or carriers of redevelopment in their poor neighborhoods (Dávila 2003, 2004; Hyra 2006; Pattillo 2003, 2007).
1.1.3. Urban Redevelopment and Color-Blind Racism

One of the primary ways that contemporary neoliberal redevelopment schemes are legitimated is through color-blind racial ideology (Mele 2013). Color-blindness is the racial ideology generated by whites to explain racial inequality in terms of privatized or individualized market, natural, or cultural forces (Bonilla-Silva 2006; Bonilla-Silva and Dietrich 2011; Mele 2013; Myers 2005). That is, rather than blaming racial disparities on other racial groups’ perceived biological inferiority, whites rationalize racial inequality by emphasizing individuals’ or groups’ choices, by arguing that separation of groups is ‘natural,’ or by blaming disparities on an individual’s or group’s cultural deficiencies. Bonilla-Silva (2006) posits four color-blind racial ideology frames: abstract liberalism, naturalization, minimization of racism, and cultural racism. These frames are general types of color-blind reasoning whites employ to explain racial inequality or “justify…the racial status quo” (Bonilla-Silva 2006:9). Together, these color-blind racial ideology frames (outlined below) silence structural explanations for inequality in the context of redevelopment and, through their privatization of inequality, buttress free market-driven, individual-centered neoliberal practices (Mele 2013).

---

2 Bonilla-Silva and Dietrich (2011:191) distinguish color-blind racism from other new theories of racism such as ‘laissez-faire racism’ (Bobo et al. 1997) in the following way: “The concept of color-blind racism is related to these concepts but differs substantively and theoretically from them. Substantively, the examination of the ideology has uncovered the existence of frames, stylistic components, and racial stories that, given their reliance on surveys, most survey researchers have not addressed. Theoretically, color-blind racism is not regarded as 'prejudice' grounded in individual-level or affective dispositions but rather as the collective expression of whites' racial dominance (Bonilla-Silva 1997)."
Abstract liberalism appeals to notions of equal opportunity, individualism, and meritocracy to explain inequalities related to residential segregation or affirmative action, among other race-related topics (Bonilla-Silva 2006). Whites may, for example, oppose affirmative action because they reason that those most qualified for the position should be hired, regardless of race (Bonilla-Silva 2006); society’s role in unequal employment was, in their minds, eradicated during the civil rights movement (Mele 2013). Naturalization appeals to notions of apparently ‘natural’ differences between groups to rationalize persistent residential segregation and low levels of interracial contact and dating (Bonilla-Silva 2006). In other words, it is ‘natural’ for groups that are alike to stay together and not mix with others from unlike groups. The minimization of racism frame explains persistent inequality as related to other, non-racial differences, such as socioeconomic status or education levels (Bonilla-Silva 2006). Whites who use this frame may directly deny the ongoing salience of racial discrimination in contemporary society. Finally, the cultural racism frame identifies inferior cultural values and practices and assigns them to individual racial minorities and groups. ³ For example, whites may attribute disparities in income, jobs, and housing between whites and blacks to “[blacks’] lack of motivation or willpower to pull themselves out of poverty” (Bush 2004:184). In another example, whites may attribute Hispanics’ rates of infant mortality, which are lower than both blacks and whites (even though Hispanics have similar levels of school completion compared to blacks), to “cultural differences…believing, for instance, that Hispanics

³ While Latinos have historically been categorized as ethnics with the option of choosing among established racial categories (e.g. white, black, other) (Schuman et al. 1997), more recently Latinos have been viewed as an emergent racial group (Golash-Boza and Darity 2008).
typically enjoy large, close-knit extended families that provide good support for
expectant mothers, explaining their low figures for infant mortality” (Hill 2008:3).

The pervasiveness of color-blind racial ideology throughout contemporary U.S.
society, seen through its presence in whites’ justification of racial disparities or
differences in public education (Lewis 2003), the criminal justice system (Alexander
2010), religion (Emerson and Smith 2000), housing (Bush 2004), and exclusionary
redevelopment strategies (Mele 2013), is perhaps most striking when utilized by racial
minorities themselves. While color-blind racism was generated by whites to explain and
continue justifying racial inequality after the collapse of the Jim Crow system (Alexander
2010), racial minorities—including blacks and Latinos—may also utilize color-blind
racial ideology to explain racial inequality (Bonilla-Silva 2006; Bonilla-Silva and
Dietrich 2011; Neville et al. 2005). Neville et al. (2005), for example, found that greater
adherence to color-blind racial beliefs among their sample of African American college
students was related to

increased…blame of African Americans themselves for economic and social
disparities…belief in a social hierarchical system that is justified by the existence
of inferior and superior social groups; and…internationalization of racist
stereotypes of Blacks (39-40).

They argue that African Americans’ affirmation of color blind racism could lead to the
development of a false consciousness, which

…reflects an internalized, culturally sanctioned belief that encourages individuals
in a stratified society to adopt the viewpoint of those in power. Acceptance of the
dominant viewpoint, in turn, serves to keep minorities in a subjugated position by justifying their oppression and thus encouraging inertia (31).

Color-blind racial ideology—because it strips white-dominated society of responsibility for persistent racial inequality and assigns responsibility for inequality to minority individuals or cultures (Mele 2013)—can also operate covertly among minorities, who may then participate in their own oppression (Neville et al. 2005). Thus, color-blind racial ideology legitimates the exacerbation of further inequality through redevelopment schemes (Mele 2013) and it may also lessen collective minority resistance to the influence of color-blind racial ideology (Bonilla-Silva 2006) and to the ways in which color blindness may help produce further structural inequality. While we know that color-blind racial ideology and redevelopment, redevelopment and non-poor minorities, and minorities and color-blind racial ideology are linked, to my knowledge, no prior study has examined how these linkages may play out together in a single context. This gap is an important one to fill, as poor, minority neighborhoods undergoing redevelopment and their residents are particularly vulnerable to rapidly increasing marginalization (Logan and Molotch 1987; Rodríguez 2012; Mele 2013) and this process may be either attenuated or augmented by non-poor minorities (Pattillo 2003, 2007).

Therefore, I ask whether and how non-poor Latinos in a poor, redeveloping Houston barrio utilize color-blind racism frames to explain neighborhood inequality. I also ask what the implications of color-blind rationale among these actors may be in this particular redeveloping context. Relying on a year of ethnographic research in Houston’s Northside barrio and 38 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with non-poor Latino barrio actors, I find that respondents often utilized the color-blind frame of cultural racism to
provide rationale for neighborhood problems. That is, respondents generally framed neighborhood inequality as a result of other Latino neighborhood residents’ cultural failings—their perceived laziness, apathy, or ignorance. I argue that widespread use of this frame among non-poor Latinos, who are more active in neighborhood redevelopment than their poor counterparts, legitimates outsider-directed redevelopment and therefore supports the conditions under which inequality-producing redevelopment can proceed with little or no obstruction. In this setting, the legitimation of redevelopment schemes appears to be enhanced because non-poor Latinos themselves reproduce this discourse, albeit unintentionally and unevenly. I conclude by exploring how these dynamics may influence issues such as socioeconomic integration and by offering suggestions for future research, including the need for more extensive investigations of non-poor actors in vulnerable inner-city neighborhoods.

1.2. Methodology

1.2.1. Overview

This paper is based on my ethnographic and interview-based research in Houston’s redeveloping Northside barrio. I chose this barrio as a research site because it is “in danger of being displaced by urban redevelopment projects” (Rodríguez 2012:94). That is, it meets three conditions that place it at risk of being subsumed into outsider redevelopment interests: 1) most of its residents are politically marginalized and “remain disenfranchised from the centers of power in mainstream institutions” (Rodríguez 2012:95), 2) it has a strong working-class presence, and 3) it is adjacent to Houston’s
downtown business district (Rodríguez 2012). At the same time, the Northside also has a small middle-class—about five percent of Northsiders have a bachelor’s degree or higher, and approximately 30% of households have an annual income greater than $50,000 (American Community Survey 2011). As such, the Northside provides a unique place to study the intersections between redevelopment efforts and non-poor minority actors’ understandings of these processes. Additionally, the Northside is almost exclusively populated by racial minorities, the vast majority of whom are Latino, and this, alongside its ongoing redevelopment, provide an important context in which to explore the dynamics of color-blind racial ideology. I draw from ethnographic field notes and 38 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with non-poor, later-generation Latino barrio actors. I investigate actors’ perceptions of their neighborhood and the changes it is undergoing through narrative dialogue because it is in the context of “communicative interaction” (Bonilla-Silva 2006:11), or the process of verbal communication, that their underlying explanations and justifications emerge. It is also in this context that color-blind ideology is “produced and reproduced” (ibid). Additionally, I rely on ethnographic field notes collected at neighborhood council and community development meetings, for example, to illustrate the implications of color-blind ideology among non-poor Latinos in the neighborhood. Table 1.2.1 provides a synopsis of the 38 non-poor Latino respondents and their basic demographic characteristics, including information regarding whether they are U.S.- or foreign-born, and whether the interview was conducted in Spanish or English.
Table 1.2.1—Non-Poor Latino Respondent Demographics

Compared to the demographic makeup of the neighborhood as a whole, my sample possesses higher education and owns homes at disproportionately high rates (see

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mexican American 4</th>
<th>Mexican</th>
<th>Central American</th>
<th>Total/Overall</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Homeowner</td>
<td>24 (0.75)</td>
<td>2 (1.00)</td>
<td>2 (0.50)</td>
<td>28 (0.74)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northside Resident</td>
<td>24 (0.75)</td>
<td>2 (1.00)</td>
<td>3 (0.75)</td>
<td>29 (0.76)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northside Employee</td>
<td>9 (0.28)</td>
<td>0 (0.00)</td>
<td>2 (0.50)</td>
<td>11 (0.29)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grew up in Northside</td>
<td>22 (0.69)</td>
<td>0 (0.00)</td>
<td>2 (0.50)</td>
<td>24 (0.63)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate’s Degree or Higher</td>
<td>18 (0.56)</td>
<td>0 (0.00)</td>
<td>3 (0.75)</td>
<td>21 (0.55)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School/GED or Higher</td>
<td>29 (0.90)</td>
<td>2 (1.00)</td>
<td>4 (1.00)</td>
<td>35 (0.92)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview in Spanish</td>
<td>0 (0.00)</td>
<td>2 (1.00)</td>
<td>1 (0.25)</td>
<td>3 (0.08)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>18 (0.56)</td>
<td>1 (0.5)</td>
<td>4 (1.00)</td>
<td>23 (0.61)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Age</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>28.5</td>
<td>48.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4 Note: Mexican American here denotes 2nd- or later-generation, or a combination thereof.
Research Context below). Yet this theoretically advantageous sample was an intentional strategy pursued to understand the relationship between non-poor minority actors and a redeveloping inner-city neighborhood.

1.2.2. Research Context

The Northside barrio is embedded within the larger urban context of Houston, Texas, which has a long history of sustained migration from Mexico and an increasingly large population of later-generation Mexican Americans (Esparza 2011). Houston is also the most diverse metropolitan area in the U.S., having surpassed New York City in the 2000 Census (Emerson et al. 2012). Latinos now represents the largest race/ethnicity in the city of Houston, at 43.8% of the total population (City of Houston). The Northside barrio, directly north of Houston’s central business district (CBD), is approximately 83% Hispanic or Latino and contains approximately 36,000 people. Ninety-one percent of the Northside’s Hispanic population is of Mexican origin, with the remaining 9% consisting of Central Americans and Other Hispanics (American Community Survey 2011). Of Northside Hispanics, 64% are U.S.-born (ACS 2011).

The boundaries of the neighborhood to the east and west roughly correspond to US Highway 59 and Interstate 45, respectively. University of Houston-Downtown is the southernmost tip of the neighborhood, while Houston Community College-Northline Campus is its northern boundary marker. The Northside has undergone extensive

5 These boundaries correspond to an area smaller than the Greater Northside Super Neighborhood, which extends farther north; however, the Houston Community College-Northline Campus is a natural marker for
restructuring over the past five years with the installation of a transit rail extension that will connect the barrio to Houston's downtown, museum, and medical districts. In addition to millions of dollars of public funding—much of which is coming from the Federal Transit Authority (Begley 2013)—non-profit community organizations have a strong presence in the Northside. One of the most prominent of these is Avenue Community Development Corporation (Avenue CDC). Avenue CDC, who also directs the revitalization initiative GO Neighborhoods, primarily focuses on affordable housing and homeownership. Other major non-profit actors include the MD Anderson YMCA and Wesley Community Center, in addition to numerous churches. But unlike these public and non-profit initiatives, private capital has yet to make its way across Interstate 10 from Houston’s CBD or Interstate 45 from the white, gentrified Heights neighborhood.

The Northside is a poor neighborhood; 29.7% of families live below the poverty line and 53.8% of adults over 25 do not have a high school education. Yet early on in my research, I discovered non-poor Latinos, most of whom had at least a high school education and many who had an associate’s or bachelor’s degree. The vast majority of my contacts were also homeowners, even though only half (54%) of the Northside’s housing stock is owner-occupied (ACS 2011). I returned to the American Community Survey (ACS) (2011) and discovered that approximately 30% of households had an annual income greater than $50,000 and about 13% of adults over 25 had some college or an associate’s degree and 5% had a bachelor’s degree or higher. Reasoning that this

the purposes of this study because it is the point at which the new rail extension stops. Additionally, I rarely interacted with people who lived farther north than the HCC campus at Super Neighborhood council meetings.
group would exert influence disproportionate to its size in the neighborhood and that this was important due to redevelopment efforts underway there (Dávila 2003, 2004; Freeman 2006; Hyra 2006; Pattillo 2003, 2007), I intentionally pursued interviews and interactions with non-poor Latinos, most of whom were Mexican American.

1.2.3. Gaining Access and Overall Research Strategy

I pursued an ethnographic and interview-based study because I wanted to be able to rely on extensive observations and informal interactions, providing a broader analytical lens, as well as on in-depth, more formal conversations with respondents, probing details and nuances (Rubin and Rubin 2012). As a home-owning resident of the Northside, I embedded myself in barrio life, taking extensive field notes at a variety of local events and gatherings, including community development meetings, little league baseball games, church gatherings, and Parent-Teacher organization meetings. I have also taken notes on visits to Moody Park, a neighborhood 4th of July parade, riding a Metro bus, and attending a neighborhood block party, for example. In my field notes, I recorded numerous details, including the number of people I observed, racial and demographic composition, verbal and behavioral interactions, and neighborhood insider-outsider dynamics. Part of my 12 months of ethnographic research in the neighborhood, which began in January 2013, included actively seeking out participants to interview. In order to gain access to non-poor Latino actors, I used my participation in the above-mentioned activities and also visited or volunteered at local businesses, civic club events, community centers, a daycare, and public parks. As a result, I was able to meet numerous actors who often introduced me to others after agreeing to be interviewed themselves.
While I am a racial ‘outsider’ to the neighborhood, my status as a homeowner in the neighborhood provided me an ‘insider’ advantage; together, my outsider-and-insider status formed the combination of distance and trust necessary for thorough ethnographic work (for a helpful discussion of the benefits of insider-outsider status in ethnography, see Desmond (2007), pp. 283-291). My sampling strategy combined snowball and theoretical sampling, the former at the beginning of my research and the latter once recurring themes began to emerge. That is, once I began to realize the theoretical importance of non-poor Latinos in the context of the Northside, I started to intentionally pursue non-poor respondents in hopes that they would help answer my research question (Rubin and Rubin 2012). I stopped interviewing when saturation had been reached—when “no new information [was] forthcoming” (Rubin and Rubin 2012:63).

After I recruited a respondent for participation, we agreed upon a time and public meeting place (often a local taqueria or restaurant) for the interview. I began each interview by informing respondents of human subjects’ protection, in which confidentiality was assured. All respondents kept a signed copy of the human subjects consent form; I kept the original in a locked research office. The interviews were semi-structured, meaning that respondents were given baseline questions (e.g. “How do you think outsiders view your neighborhood?”) but were allowed great freedom in directing the course of the conversation, allowing me to pursue theoretically interesting and important questions as they arose. Perceived neighborhood problems or inequalities, such as disorder and a lack of community involvement, came up throughout interviews in respondents’ descriptions of the neighborhood, in their opinions about neighborhood redevelopment, in their descriptions of neighborhood change, and so on. In other words,
it was not just in response to one or two interview questions that my findings emerged; instead, my findings are based on responses to several interview questions: the framing that emerged was not limited to a specific subset of interview questions. At times, respondents offered explanations or justifications of neighborhood problems on their own, but if they did not offer explanations, I asked them why they thought these problems existed. It was in this space of explanation or justification of neighborhood problems that the color-blind frame of cultural racism emerged.

The average length of interviews was one hour and 12 minutes. All interviews were transcribed and then coded; all field notes and interviews were coded using ATLAS.ti software. To ensure the validity of my codes, I coded all interviews and field notes in two stages: the first stage involved the generation of new codes; once I stopped generating new codes, I continued applying the codes to the remaining data in the second stage (Friese 2012) and cycled back through all of the data again with the full list of existing codes to ensure the coding process was complete. I approached my coding and data analysis using a grounded theory method (Corbin and Strauss 2008; Rubin and Rubin 2012), or the identification of “theoretical constructs derived from qualitative analysis of data” (Corbin and Strauss 2008:1). This meant that during the coding process, I identified themes, patterns, and processes emerging from my field notes and interviews with no reference to existing research literature (Rubin and Rubin 2012). As Rubin and Rubin (2012:2014) explain, “using [the grounded theory] approach, you don’t select your codes in advance, define and refine them, and then mark up the text; you find and, if necessary, modify your concepts and themes as you go along.” The coding process yielded one major category, neighborhood problems, and several minor categories of
specific neighborhood problems, such as neighborhood disorder, and the explanations that accompanied these problems. Respondents’ explanations of neighborhood problems became the theoretical constructs examined in this paper. After the coding process was complete, I turned to literature that would provide insight into the patterns I was observing, specifically noting the utility of color-blind racial ideology. Additionally, after the coding process was complete, I examined codes across categories of respondents’ self-identified race (Hispanic, white, nationality, other)\(^6\) because Twine and Gallagher (2008) have suggested that some Latinos are being recruited into whiteness and this may indicate a stronger influence of color-blind racism among Latinos who perceive themselves as white (Bonilla-Silva and Dietrich 2011). Not finding any systematic differences across these categories, or across age, gender, or generation-since-immigration status, I grouped all respondents together in the final analysis. Finally, I use pseudonyms and generalize or change potentially identifying information for all of my respondents in the sections that follow. It is to their narratives and the Northside redeveloping context that I now turn.

1.3. Findings

1.3.1. Cultural Racism and Neighborhood Disorder

A trip through the Northside reveals striking juxtapositions in the (dis)ordered appearance of houses, businesses, streets, and parks. Graffiti and litter coexist alongside a

\(^6\) See Appendix, Table A.0.1 for a chart of respondent self-reported race.
brand new, gleaming rail line; stray dogs and feral cats roam the streets near the
completely renovated Moody Park Recreation Center—which sits next to the trash-lined
banks of the Little White Oak Bayou. While there are a few blocks here and there
displaying signs of development or featuring homes with maintained exteriors and
manicured lawns, the overall ‘feel’ of the neighborhood is one of dilapidation and
disorder. One way that this disorder is manifested is in the accumulation of major yard or
junk trash, which is only collected once a month by the City of Houston. Since large
public trash receptacles are few and far between—and those that exist seem to be
irregularly emptied—tree limbs, sofas, old television sets, and worn-out clothing are
discarded in ditches or sidewalks lining residential blocks. The accumulation of trash
adds to the disorganized appearance of blocks and homes where trash happens to be
stored.
One of the primary ways in which cultural racism emerged throughout my research was in the context of explaining neighborhood disorder as a problem that differentiated and negatively marked Northside in comparison to other ‘good’ neighborhoods. Perceptions of disorder often included descriptions of neighborhood crime, structural (i.e. property) decline, and disorganization. For example, respondents often explained or justified housing decay by implicating the perceived cultural values or practices of Latino tenants and other residents: these residents were perceived as not caring, transient, or morally lacking.  

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7 Importantly, even though Latino residents or tenants were not always explicitly implicated as the source of these problems, the color-blind frame of cultural racism still holds as the overwhelming majority of Northside residents are racial minorities (83% Hispanic or Latino; 11.4% black; ACS 2011). For example, some respondents who did not specify Latino Northsiders as apathetic or transient may have been referring to black Northsiders; if so, they were still explaining neighborhood disorder as a result of minorities’ perceived cultural failings (Bonilla-Silva 2006; Picca and Feagin 2007). Throughout my research,
When I asked Mariana, a middle-aged, college-educated Mexican American, about how she had seen the neighborhood change over time, she replied:

Well, people started moving out of the neighborhood, people who had owned their homes, and so now there were more renters in the neighborhood. …And so then I started seeing, later in life…more rental people, more people from Mexico, whereas when I was growing up, most of the people were Mexican American…. And then later it became where there was more renters, people weren’t keeping up with their property because they were rentals and the people who were renting were just out for making money, but they didn’t really care that the property was going down and stuff. And then, there were drugs in the neighborhood. It got to…where it wasn’t safe to walk in the neighborhood anymore.

Mariana identifies the increasing number of renters in the neighborhood as foreign-born Mexicans and links them to what she perceived as the increasingly disordered appearance of Northside property. In her view, a major reason properties began to deteriorate is that these renters did not care, thus pointing to Mexicans’ perceived cultural inferiority as they “didn’t really care that the property was going down.” Further, she indirectly links the increased presence of Mexican renters to the increased presence of drugs and a lack of safety in the neighborhood, blaming this group for other forms of neighborhood disorder.

respondents repeatedly emphasized that the neighborhood is Latino, with some blacks living on the neighborhood outskirts. Most respondents were very surprised when they learned that I, a white female, was a homeowner in the neighborhood, reinforcing the minority racial identity of the neighborhood as a whole.
Another middle-class Latino woman, Jenny, conveyed a similar sentiment during our interview late one afternoon at a local restaurant. It was when Jenny answered a question about community development in the neighborhood that she explained her rationale for disordered property:

I mean, it’s true, like Hispanic people—and I’m being very [respondent emphasis] general here, and being very biased here, too—but like from what I know, from what I see, people here have money. They work really hard, they work in construction, you know, they work 12 hours a day but they can provide for their families. So the fact…that their houses are run-down—it’s not really so much a money issue, it’s more of a, I guess they don’t care, maybe ‘cause it’s not their property, or they don’t care because they always think of going back to Mexico, of going back to Latin America. But money is— I don’t think it’s that big of an issue. I mean, it’s an issue, but it’s not, you know, it’s not an issue for everyone. I mean, there’s— I think there’s a lot of money here in the community.

Here, Jenny juxtaposes a favorable stereotype of Hispanic culture—being hard-working—with what she sees as inferior cultural traits of apathy and transience, and uses these perceived negative traits to justify the run-down appearance of neighborhood homes. Jenny thinks that money is not the root issue of disorderly property in the neighborhood; rather, it is the cultural traits of Mexican and Latin American residents who she believes do not care or will not put down roots in the community.

In the final example of a cultural racism-centered justification of neighborhood disorder, I turn to the narrative of Juan, a middle-aged Mexican American lawyer. During our interview, I tried to get a sense of whether and to what extent Juan and his family
spend time at neighborhood places. When I asked him whether they go to Northside parks, Juan told me that they avoid the park closest to their house because it is unsafe. He continued,

And there are people who do stand there- …but I know that that little park, I mean there’s [drug] deals that are going on through the fence. They got kids in the park playing, and there are pushers coming up, you know, pushing their stuff. That’s every day [respondent emphasis]. That’s some of the stuff that [neighborhood non-profits were] trying to battle. But it’s a battle they’re gonna lose unless the values are staying at the homes.

The park Juan is referring to in his narrative is Robertson Park, one of the two main public parks in the Northside. Robertson Park is used almost exclusively by local Latinos and blacks. At one point in my research, a respondent told me that there was a YouTube video of a fight between Latino and black young male basketball players at Robertson Park. As of this writing, that video, entitled “Rumble at Robertson Park,” is still posted and accessible on YouTube and has received over 220,000 views. The introductory slide to the fight video states “Another day in the ‘hood!!!” (BigAngel713 2012). Though Juan does not directly implicate Latinos or blacks in his rationale for avoiding Robertson Park, it is probable that he is referring to Latinos or blacks when he describes the drug deals going on there each day (see endnote 8). Juan’s explanation of these drug deals and the difficult task facing a struggle against drugs in the neighborhood is that moral anti-drug values are apparently not being taught at home. Juan does not need to blame neighborhood disorder in the form of drugs and feeling unsafe on the inherent biological inferiority of Latinos or blacks. As per color-blind racial ideology, Juan can
explain that he believes certain groups—in this case the Latinos and blacks who (mis)use Robertson Park—do not have the right values or do not teach these values to their children, who play at the park while drug deals are carried out. In this way, a supposedly nonracial justification for neighborhood disorder is offered, even as race is central to its logic.

1.3.2. Cultural Racism and Community and School Involvement

In addition to neighborhood disorder, a lack of community involvement emerged repeatedly across my research as a nagging neighborhood problem that differentiated it from other ‘good’ neighborhoods. A lack of involvement, whether seen in terms of neighborhood event or organization participation, proactive engagement with children’s education, or the like, was often explained in terms of Latino residents’ perceived laziness or ignorance, though other apparent cultural deficiencies were identified, too. Sal, a semi-retired Mexican American accountant, spent several hours with me over the course of my research, meeting with me to tell stories about the neighborhood at a favorite taqueria or driving around the neighborhood and pointing out important landmarks. During one conversation with Sal and his friend Manuel, Sal mentioned several times the importance of Hispanics ‘speaking up’ so that their ‘voice’ could be heard but that this often does not happen. Sal specifically lamented the lack of parental engagement in Northside public schools:

Now, I’m not happy with [Houston Independent School District] at all [respondent emphasis]. I mean, I’m finding out every day more and more that the school system isn’t what it should be, but it’s gonna take time, but now we’re
learning where we stand, and...when I say we, we the community, so the
Hispanic community, and...changes are gonna come. Because what has happened
is, when my daddy went before the school board, back in the day, back in the late
20s, and he asked for his kids to get the same education, he came to Houston for
that. It’s still not there yet. And unfortunately it’s because parents don’t come to
PTA meetings, parents never get involved.

In this exchange, Sal blames the slow pace of change in the Houston Independent School
District (HISD) on the lack of Hispanic parental involvement, which connected back in
his narrative to multiple mentions of Hispanics not ‘speaking up’. Shortly after, I asked
him why he thought Hispanics don’t speak up. First, he explained that Hispanics do not
speak up because they were brought up that way:

...but like I said earlier, and then there’s...the fact that we [Hispanics] were
brought up- you speak, you know- ...out of respect, you just don’t speak. ‘Oh, no,
no, no, okay. I understand, I’d rather not say anything that’s gonna rock the boat,’
you know, they’re just afraid to speak up.

Similarly to Jenny, Sal identifies what he sees as a positive Hispanic cultural trait—
respect—that is juxtaposed to the larger problem of not ‘speaking up’. Sal’s explanation
of this problem continued, this time blaming a perceived negative cultural trait:

...of course, you know, like I said, just like [Manuel] said, they’re lazy.

Sometimes, people are just plain lazy. They’re...too lazy to get up and just take
care of...their own problems. ...and if you don’t take care of it, guess what,
somebody else is gonna take care of it for you. And...they don’t get that
sometimes. They don’t get it through their heads. But…that’s what’s gonna happen.

Thus, while Sal at first offers a defense rather than a critique of Hispanic culture, which he sees as the explanation for the problem of not ‘speaking up,’ the defense eventually gives way to a strong critique of what he perceives to be laziness among other Hispanics, again explaining a problem of inequality by relying on an explanation built on perceived cultural deficiencies.

The problem of community involvement also emerged in my interview with Cassandra, a young professional of Central American descent. At one point in our interview, Cassandra told me that she thinks outsiders pass up the neighborhood. When I asked her why outsiders would pass up the neighborhood, she began to think out loud, eventually citing a lack of community involvement, which she believed could be traced back to a language barrier, an apathy marked by giving up, and a lack of initiative among neighborhood Hispanics:

That’s the reason I say language barrier. It still exists, especially here in this area. Sometimes it seems like the- the Hispanic community might have…kinda, like, given up, like, well you haven’t helped me, you’re not gonna help me tomorrow. So, you know, even when you try to offer them something, it’s like, mm, really hesitant about [it]….and then like I was saying, as far as school…the young leaders, where are they at? But who do we blame? Do we blame the schools? Or what do we blame? And- ‘cause they’re not taking initiative anymore. ‘Cause I know I [respondent emphasis] did and I’m sure you did, too, you started your own
organizations, or you were part of your own organization, but are...these kids now doing the same?

While Cassandra sees the Spanish-English language barrier as a legitimate problem facing community involvement, this explanation is closely intertwined with two more critical justifications—an apathetic ‘giving up’ and a lack of initiative that she believes characterize the Hispanic community more broadly in the former and youth specifically in the latter. In her narrative, Cassandra demonstrated genuine concern for the welfare of the neighborhood and its future not only throughout our interview but through all of our interactions. However, her concern is also marked by an almost-invisible cultural racism.

The theme of community involvement also threaded its way into my conversation with Bruce, a thirty-something Mexican American nurse. During our conversation, it quickly became apparent that Bruce had a great deal of passion for Hispanic and Mexican American history in the U.S. One of the problems Bruce identified in his narrative was the lack of a Hispanic movement paired with Hispanic oppression: “People don’t educate themselves about the history. Hispanics have been oppressed since they came here. Not to make us just victims. But as a race we’re not able to do things until black people do it. It’s hip to act black these days.... They have a fear of speaking up because of past oppression, but also because they don’t have an education. ...they have a family member in jail, and they get this attitude, like ‘Look where I am now,’ it’s this old-school

8 While a perceived lack of initiative could be interpreted as part of the abstract liberalism frame, which includes meritocratic explanations of inequality, I do not think this is the case because Bonilla-Silva (2006) identifies the defense of white privilege—not the critique of other racial groups—as key to this frame.
Hispanic mentality. There aren’t any Hispanic role models. Youth aren’t taught to go to school—‘You’re not going to school, you’re going to work’—they’re feeding many mouths.”

Bruce explains that Hispanics have been oppressed and this acts as an externally imposed constraint on the development of a new Hispanic movement as well as on parental encouragement of education. However, Bruce also identifies three perceived negative Hispanic cultural traits that he believes explain this lack of a movement: the lack of initiative to self-educate, the need to follow or be like black people, and the low value placed on education. In his narrative, Bruce both distances Hispanics from blacks and uses a color-blind cultural racism frame as a rationale for why an effective Hispanic movement or involvement has not occurred to defend Hispanic interests in the neighborhood and more broadly. He does this by identifying what he perceives to be Hispanic cultural attributes—the lack of initiative to self-educate and the low value placed on education—and using these attributes to justify what he sees as Hispanic inertia.

The above narratives show the presence of cultural racism among Latinos in my sample. While this color-blind frame was widespread throughout my research, it did not always emerge in the course of explaining neighborhood problems and, when it did emerge, it did so to varying degrees. Some respondents, like Sal and Bruce, also blamed neighborhood problems on broader structural issues such as HISD or Hispanic oppression

9 Bruce and his relative told me that I could take extensive notes on our conversation but did not want to be audio recorded. Thus, this quote should be considered a close paraphrase.
more broadly in addition to perceived Hispanic cultural deficiencies. Mariana, while critiquing the apathy of Mexican renters, also reflected on her own personal journey of feeling and trying to overcome prejudice towards Mexicans. Cassandra identified a persistent Spanish-English language barrier as a contributing problem to community involvement, although this was closely intertwined with perceived lack of initiative on the part of Hispanics. In other words, the cultural racism frame was not all-encompassing or static across respondents, although it was frequent. Thus, while most respondents’ narratives or responses seemed influenced at least in part by the cultural racism frame, there seemed to be some space for opposition against color-blind racial ideology (Bonilla-Silva 2006; Collins 2000). That is, respondents demonstrated some resistance to an all-encompassing color-blind racial ideology; this resistance may play an important role in catalyzing Latino self-definition, rather than definition by dominant whites (see Collins 2000 for a discussion of self-definition among blacks).

One respondent, Anna, a twenty-something physician’s assistant, contrasts with those who relied on the cultural racism frame to explain neighborhood disorder and a lack of community and educational involvement. In fact, her explanation is directly counter to the privatized explanations of others’ narratives (seen above) and illustrates the possibility of resistance to color-blind racial ideology among minorities: Anna explained education-related neighborhood problems as a result of structural inequality: “And you see parents…helping, but our education system isn’t just giving them money.” Anna, in contrast to other respondents, specifically argues that parents are involved in the community and education specifically and that the education system itself is to blame for apparent educational problems. Anna’s example is only one of a small handful of
respondents who explained one or more neighborhood problems purely in terms of broader structural issues.

1.3.3. The Implications of Non-Poor Latino Cultural Racism in the Context of Redevelopment

Overall, the widespread influence of color-blind cultural racism among non-poor Latinos in the Northside seemed to provide enhanced legitimacy for redevelopment in the Northside, which has the goal of ‘correcting’ the neighborhood problems that emerged so frequently in respondent narratives. In other words, I found that redevelopment’s exclusionary, marginalizing practices are masked or guarded not only by its own color-blind discourses (Mele 2013) or institutionalized neoliberalism (Elwood 2002) as previous scholars have pointed to, but also by the color-blind cultural racism frame of the barrio’s influential, non-poor minority actors. The implications of cultural racism among non-poor Latinos in the redeveloping Northside were illustrated throughout my field work, though I will highlight only two examples here. These problems, which had to be overcome for the neighborhood to ‘progress’, were also explained using a cultural racism frame. I chose to highlight both of these examples because they arose in the context of outsider community-redevelopment narratives of neighborhood problems at neighborhood council meetings. The neighborhood council, which is run by GO Neighborhoods through the Avenue Community Development Corporation (Avenue CDC), has bi-monthly meetings. These meetings are attended not only by community development stakeholders (most are white, with some non-poor Latinos), but also by
several non-poor Latino residents, most of whom I met and interacted with over the course of my research. Neighborhood council meetings are attended by some of the most active Latino neighborhood residents and actors; all of them could be considered community leaders. In other words, these examples will provide insight into the relationship between neighborhood redevelopment and non-poor Latino actors—who have arguably more influence than most other Northside stakeholders, including other non-poor Latinos that are uninvolved in neighborhood leadership.\textsuperscript{10}

In the first example, the problem of stray animals in the neighborhood was on the neighborhood council meeting agenda. Several people in attendance asserted or assented to what seemed to be common knowledge: our ZIP-code—77009—has the highest number of stray animals in the entire city of Houston. The discussion quickly became heated, with various attendees expressing strong opinions about who was to blame for the persistence of this problem. At one point, a non-Hispanic white male government official, explained his take on the problem: “there’s no doubt about it, this is an educational problem. It’s a real educational problem. Anywhere south of here, it’s an educational problem.” Interestingly, ‘anywhere south of here,’ is shorthand for the southern part of Northside, downtown, the 3\textsuperscript{rd} Ward, and southeast Houston. With the exception of downtown, which cannot be considered a residential area and does not have a problem with stray animals, the neighborhoods south of the Northside are almost exclusively Hispanic or black. This man appeared to blame the problem of stray animals on

\textsuperscript{10} I interviewed some, but not all, of the most active non-poor Latino neighborhood leaders who are active on the neighborhood council and neighborhood non-profit boards.
minorities’ lack of education, thus utilizing a cultural racism frame. That is, he tied the proliferation of dogs and cats in a neighborhood and linked this to race while not explicitly invoking racial inferiority. While he did not propose any concrete solutions for neighborhood redevelopment in this setting vis-à-vis stray animals, none of the 10 non-poor Latinos also present at the meeting objected to his explanation of stray animals, either verbally or with body language. The representative’s explanation of the problem seemed to be authoritative, even as there was a flurry of discussion surrounding what to do about the problem. Some of the most active non-poor Latinos in the Northside were strikingly inactive in opposing the cultural racism frame.

Secondly, at another neighborhood council meeting several months apart from the former example, the problem of neighborhood disorder in the form of trash was present on the meeting agenda. One of the community development representatives, a white female, told those present that one of her affiliates had informed her that the 77009 ZIP-code has “the worst trash behavior” in the city of Houston. A non-poor, college-educated Latina woman responded by saying that “people aren’t following instructions.” An elderly Latino man corroborated: “People are putting trash out early, and residents are not aware of days to pick-up. They’re violating really bad.” He went on to complain about what he perceived to be residents’ ignorance about how to take care of trash. The white community development representative then asked, “I know we have a big illegal dumping problem. But if we also need to be educating the residents about how to take care of household trash, is that something the Super Neighborhood Council should work on?” Again, because the Northside is populated almost exclusively by Latino, black, and other minority homeowners and renters, the use of the ‘77009 ZIP-code’ is a stand-in for
minority residents, or for the Latino identity of the neighborhood, which respondents repeatedly affirmed throughout my research. Here, both white and Latino community leaders trace the trash problem to individuals’ perceived cultural deficiencies: a lack of education or unwillingness to follow the ‘rules’ of trash behavior. Their remarks contrasted sharply with another non-poor Latino resident, Pablo, at yet another council meeting, who chastised the City of Houston trash collection service for not properly accommodating Northside residents. Yet Pablo’s explanation of trash problems was virtually singular; in most cases, community development stakeholders explained neighborhood problems as (Latino and/or black) residents’ perceived cultural failings. These were framed as privatized—and not structural—inadequacies that needed to be overcome in the process of neighborhood redevelopment. My ethnographic work in the community redevelopment context suggests that in this neighborhood, color-blind, neoliberal redevelopment schemes may benefit from enhanced legitimacy through the widespread influence of color-blind racism among non-poor Latino actors, who are in a position to influence the ideation and implementation of these projects.

1.4. Discussion and Conclusion

Asking whether and how non-poor Latino respondents utilize color-blind racial ideology to explain inequality, I found widespread use of the cultural racism frame among respondents and in my field work. Cultural racism emerged in the context of respondents’ explanations of neighborhood problems, which they often traced back to Latinos’ perceived cultural deficiencies (e.g. lack of initiative). I also asked what the implications
of color-blind racial ideology among these actors may be, and found that widespread adoption of cultural racism among non-poor Latinos in the Northside may support the legitimacy of redevelopment schemes. This enhanced legitimacy may facilitate the current or future production of material inequality in the Northside, as redevelopment schemes rely on the ideological cover of color blindness to pursue their projects with little or no impediment (Mele 2013).

The implications of color-blind racism among non-poor Latinos in the Northside can be further outlined by two important insights. First, at the local neighborhood level, the presence, prevalence, and reproduction of the color-blind cultural racism frame has the effect of generating symbolic distance between the non-poor Latino Northsiders in my sample and the Latinos they perceive as possessing culturally deficient traits such as apathy, laziness, or ignorance. Importantly, this cultural racism cannot be reduced to moralistic class-based judgments—that is, my respondents, most of whom were working- or middle-class, were not condemning poverty or a lack of upward mobility. They most often explained cultural deficiencies in the context of Hispanics, Mexicans, or Latin Americans—not as true of poor people in general or as a result of structural constraints. For example, instead of attributing the dilapidated state of housing for some Mexican or Latin American tenants to a lack of money, renter rights, or landlord regulation, some respondents (e.g. Mariana and Jenny) explained housing decay in terms of perceived cultural limitations that were true of other Latinos who did not care about the property. This symbolic distancing via the cultural racism frame may weaken the development of a neighborhood Latino consciousness. This differentiates Northsiders in my study from Pattillo’s (2007) North Kenwood-Oakland respondents, who experienced black solidarity
in the midst of gentrification and redevelopment processes. Nevertheless, there is a social class element in my findings, as these non-poor respondents do live and work near many poor Latino residents, although their contacts with poor residents were often very limited. These findings should not be interpreted as a case against socioeconomic neighborhood integration; rather, they should be interpreted as perhaps presenting a virtually invisible obstacle to integration. As Myers (2005:25) notes, “Colorblind racism allows racism to hide in plain sight. It renders racism invisible even when it is thriving, leaving its victims impotent to critique it” (25). Similarly to Collins’ (2000) aim, which is to render color blindness visible to black women so that they can resist it, my findings indicate that in the process of socioeconomic integration of this Houston barrio, non-poor and poor Northsiders need to first see the obstacle of color blindness before it can be overcome.

Second, the influence of color-blind cultural racism among my respondents overlays and reinforces the apparent legitimacy of redevelopment stakeholders and their projects. Color-blind racial ideology alone

...provide[s]...the underlying basis of legitimacy for the planning, implementation and promotion of neoliberal urban policies and practices that reproduce and enhance sociospatial inequality. In turn, color-blindness also provides the requisite discourses that construct exclusionary urban development as defensible, desirable, and essential to the improvement of the urban condition (Mele 2013:599).

But together with the color-blindness present among the non-poor Latinos in my study, the legitimacy of redevelopment is doubly masked. My respondents, who are almost
without exception better off than the average Northside resident along measures of
homeownership, education, and occupational status, are also more influential because of
their relatively privileged position within the neighborhood. Yet their influence is
preparing the way for practices and policies that may, in the end, undermine them
(Bonilla-Silva 2006; Neville et al. 2005; Collins 2000).

Given the strong possibility of Northside gentrification in the near future as well
as continued efforts to redevelop the neighborhood by white outsiders, fracturing among
the Latino community along non-poor/poor lines as well as the reinforced legitimation of
redevelopment stakeholders and policies by influential Latino actors may further ease the
entry of redevelopment moving forward. Importantly, these implications are
unintentional on the part of my respondents—my respondents repeatedly demonstrated
affection for their neighborhood and its less fortunate residents, as well as a desire to help
this place and these people. Yet the strength of color-blind racial ideology lies in its
invisibility, particularly to those oppressed by it (Bonilla-Silva 2006; Myers 2005).

One of the limitations of my research is that it relies on snowball and theoretical
sampling rather than random sampling and it does not make comparisons across racial
groups, unlike Bonilla-Silva’s (2006) work and others (e.g. Kalscheur 2009) that examine
color-blind racial ideology. However, due to the saturation of the cultural racism frame
among the largely non-poor, later-generation Northside Latinos in my sample, I am
relatively confident in its validity in this context (Small 2009). Another limitation of my
research is that my results cannot be ‘generalized’ to other settings, and it is unknown
whether and to what extent the relationship between non-poor minority actors and other
poor, redeveloping inner-city neighborhoods in other cities may generate similar insights.
However, the influence of the color-blind cultural racism frame among the Latinos in my study fits within the purview of a conditional approach (Small 2004). The conditional approach, *contra* universalistic and particularistic strategies for neighborhood research, “tends to focus on those conditions at least theoretically capable of manifesting themselves in different settings” (Small 2004:184). In other words, the cultural racism frame among non-poor Latinos and its implications in my study are at least possible in other poor, redeveloping inner-city neighborhoods. Further research should continue to probe non-poor Latinos’ adoption of color-blind racism, particularly investigating other frames (abstract liberalism, naturalization, minimization) that did not emerge from my data. Additionally, future research should continue examining how the adoption of cultural racism and other color-blind frames by minorities may influence processes such as redevelopment, gentrification, displacement, and social control (e.g. reporting crime). The extent to which key minority actors in marginalized urban contexts are influenced by contemporary racial ideology has real implications for the reproduction of urban inequality—facilitating enhanced legitimacy of destructive development on the one hand, or space for opposition on the other.
References


City of Houston. “Houston Facts and Figures.”


Appendix A

Non-Poor Latino Respondent Self-Reported Race

<table>
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<th></th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Nationality&lt;sup&gt;11&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mexican American</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexican</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central American</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>11</strong></td>
<td><strong>11</strong></td>
<td><strong>12</strong></td>
<td><strong>1</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table A. 0.1—Non-poor Latino Respondent Self-Reported Race<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Note: The ‘Nationality’ category indicates respondents who reported their race in terms of a national identity (e.g. Mexican, Mexican American). Rather than giving respondents a list of U.S. Census race categories and asking them to choose which category they see themselves fitting in, I asked “How would you describe your race if you were filling out a Census? How would you describe your ethnicity?” This strategy elicited categories that were the most meaningful for respondents at the time of the interviews—clearly, this table indicates that those meaningful categories often did not align with U.S. Census race categories. Most respondents replied with a race (“Hispanic”) and ethnic category (“Mexican American”); however, some respondents only provided one response (“Mexican American”). I have classified these self-reported identities under the column ‘Nationality’. See Roth (2012) for a discussion of how nationality can be folded into Latino understandings of race.

<sup>12</sup> Note: Self-reported race data are missing for three respondents (one Mexican, one Mexican American, and one Central American).