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Land of the Cosmic Race: Race Mixture, Racism, and Blackness In Mexico (Book Review)

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Books, 1966), as well as reflections by Jacques Barzun, Ashley Montagu, Karen Fields, and others on the similarity between racial and magical thinking, there is a body of sociological literature that could have lent greater support to Obasogie's arguments. However, he is impatient with our discipline, declaring that "race scholarship is in a moment of crisis" (p. 6) and that "existing race discussions have become . . . dull and not useful. It is past time to reboot race, in terms of developing new approaches to thinking about, examining, and remedying the enduring problem of substantive inequalities across the life spectrum in light of formal equality by law" (p. 180). *Blinded by Sight* indeed takes us in an important new direction, but we should not discard the guideposts that earlier generations have left us.

Land of the Cosmic Race: Race Mixture, Racism, and Blackness in Mexico. By Christina A. Sue. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013. Pp. xii+234. $24.95.

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In *Land of the Cosmic Race: Race Mixture, Racism, and Blackness in Mexico*, Christina A. Sue takes on the intricate task of unraveling meanings about race and color in Mexico. The text is a well-researched and well-written ethnography, broad in its scope and implications.

   Sue begins the text by situating contemporary discourse on race and racism in Mexico within the country's historical landscape. She points out that Mexican national ideology developed following the Mexican Revolution in the early 20th century remains a "powerful conceptual backdrop" in the everyday negotiation of race and racial identity. This nationalism, intended to create racial unity in a postwar, racially divided country, relied on three "ideological pillars": *mestizaje* (race mixture), nonracism, and nonblackness. The discourse of mestizaje, which reframes race mixture as a positive thing (in contrast to prevailing scientific racism at the time), provided a sense of national unity and identity. This emphasis on mixed-race identity also supported the elites' claim that Mexico was not divided by race, that racism could not exist in a racially mixed society, thereby removing any need to actually document race. This mestizo identity and the claim of nonracism works exists in tandem with the minimization of blackness from the Mexican national image (blackness having been absorbed through race mixing).

   While this official discourse is well established in the national Mexican ideology and seems ever present in participant narratives, Sue is able to move beyond this official discourse, using extensive observations and qualitative

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interviews to make the discussion more nuanced. For instance, in chapter 2, Sue guides the reader through the "race-color terminological terrain," speaking to the methodical issue of whether race or color should be used in the Latin American context. Using both, Sue says, "In Veracruz, social norms regulating race talk are distinct from those that govern color discourse. Any mention of race oftentimes connotes discrimination and hierarchal relationship. Consequently there is a social taboo against race discourse; talking about race or classifying someone racially is perceived as racist. Color, on the other hand, is seen as individual physical descriptor, devoid of explicit social connotations of inequality" (p. 30). This discomfort in talking about race is obviously not unique to Mexico. In the United States, for instance, the color-blind racism that scholars suggest dominates post–Civil Rights movement discourse is accompanied by an explicit discomfort in talking about race among white Americans. The use of color as a related term, however, is more specific to Mexico and other parts of Latin America. It was common, for instance, for participants to use what Sue calls race-color terms (blanco, moreno, or negro) as both a physical descriptor of color but also implying some larger group membership as a result.

Sue suggests this discussion of race-color, however, is connected to larger meanings such as class and physical attractiveness: "Lightness and European features signify wealth and beauty, whereas darkness and indigenous or African heritage are markers of poverty and unattractiveness" (p. 40). A distinct conflict exists between an official ideology that promotes race mixture and one that privileges whiteness, a conflict that was often negotiated in participant's narratives regarding interracial or intercolor relationships and mixed-race families. On the one hand, many Veracruzanos seemed willing to cross these boundaries under certain circumstances; on the other, there was a distinct emphasis on "whitening" or "staying white." Interviews with individuals from mixed-color families or in interracial relationships revealed experiences of prejudice and discrimination in the course of navigating race-color hierarchies in regard to children, family members, and partners. Far from the popular notion that mixed race or mixed-color families are part of a race- or color-blind future, Sue points out that in some cases "inter-color relationships and mixed-color families can actually be sites of *increased* race-color salience where whiteness is hypervalorized and practices of distinction making and discrimination abound" (p. 112).

The negotiation of blackness is likewise reflected in these narratives as participants "manage" black identities in ways that both challenge and solidify national discourse. This process that remains the most foundational contribution of the text—the way in which race and color are constantly negotiated ideologies moving between and reconciling individual experience and nationalist belief systems and identities. Sue's connection

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between individual identity politics and institutional discourses is made even stronger by the richness of her data. As a qualitative researcher I am particularly struck by both the breadth and depth of this data, as well as the way in which Sue presents the narratives. Her ability to move beyond surface-level conversations regarding race and color and the detail in which she presents her participants speaks to the methodological excellence of this work.

Just Who Loses? Vol. 2 of *Discrimination in the United States*. By Samuel Roundfield Lucas. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013. Pp. xviii+ 350. $85.00.

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Research on racial and gender inequality in the United States is vast and covers a dizzying array of specialty areas addressing key areas of life chances including education, employment, and health. For many sociologists, documenting, understanding, and explaining inequality lies at the heart of the discipline.

One aspect of this previous research that sociologists have done well over the past few decades is social accounting—in other words, confirming racial and gender discrepancies. In statistical terms, social scientists often compare groups who have historically faced greater disadvantage against those who have experienced greater privilege, controlling for important factors that may explain the outcome of interest. Net of controls, social scientists often attribute mean differences between groups, or differential returns to assets (e.g., education and skills), to discrimination. From this "traditional" perspective, analysts tend to conflate discrimination and inequality.

In stark contrast to the traditional perspective, Samuel Roundfield Lucas, in his recent book *Just Who Loses*, suggests that we often assume that discrimination has winners and losers; however, Lucas argues that social scientists need to interrogate discrimination more fully. He convincingly argues that the traditional approach to understanding discrimination is misguided. Rather than center attention on inequality, Lucas pushes scholars to examine discrimination, which may or may not produce inequality and may not always be a zero-sum game.

Lucas provides examples of how the traditional approach to studying inequality may sometimes demonstrate no statistically significant differences between social groups, when, in fact, discrimination may be prevalent. This result is possible because discrimination may have negative effects on targets and nontargets alike. For instance, the effect of women entering male-dominated jobs may have negative effects on the earnings of both.

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