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Keywords

narrative; speech chains; racialization; Mexican migration

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RACIALIZATION IN PAYDAY MUGGING NARRATIVES

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Abstract

As Mexican immigrants move to areas of the United States that have not been home to Latinos, both longstanding residents and newcomers must make sense of their new

neighbors. In one East Coast suburb relevant models of identity are sometimes communicated through “payday mugging” stories about African American criminals mugging undocumented Mexican victims. These narratives racialize African Americans and Mexicans in different ways. As payday mugging stories move across narrators from different communities, the racialized characterizations shift.

[narrative; speech chains; racialization; Mexican migration]

“For a long while Latinos couldn’t set up savings accounts, because they were sure that that would get them shipped out, so they carry cash. And as soon as the Blacks realized that, they relieved a lot of Mexicans of their cash.” (A White clergyman)

“A lot of Blacks are robbing Mexicans because they figure they carry money. You see, Mexicans don’t believe in going to the bank. They carry big lumps of money on them. They do have good lumps of money....It’s young people, crack heads...They need money to get dope...They robbing you, me, the church, anybody. They don’t care. They doing their business.” (A Black parishioner)

“Agreden casi a la mayoría, pero a los señores más grandes cuando recién reciben su cheque y todo eso. Como *an example*¹, este- uno de mis amigos que vive en mi casa la otra vez casi le cortan la oreja. ¿Por qué? Porque le quería- lo querían asaltar y- luego...okay, ya sabemos que nosotros cuando nos ven por la calle, si va uno o dos nos van a agarrar, ¿me entiendes? So nosotros tenemos que andar trayendo algo como *knives, gun* o *something like that* para defendernos, *you know? It’s not- it’s not good* porque ellos luego *take guns and everything.*”

[They assault almost the majority, but the older guys when they’ve just received their check and all that. Like *an example*, um- one of my friends who lives in my house the other day they almost cut off his ear. Why? Because they wanted to assault him and then...okay, we already know that when they see us on the street, if it’s one or two of us they are going to grab us, you understand me? So we have to walk around carrying something like *knives, gun* or *something like that* to defend ourselves, *you know? It’s not good* because then they *take guns and everything.*] (A Mexican high school student)

Many Marshall² residents tell stories about “payday muggings.” Narrators describe a Mexican victim who carries cash because he is presumed to be undocumented and unable to open a bank account, and they describe African American criminals who mug the Mexican. Police and community leaders claim that actual muggings have declined in recent years, because banks have arranged to accept Mexican identification cards and undocumented immigrants now have bank accounts. In our corpus of interview and fieldnote data, however, payday mugging stories are frequently told by Marshall residents. We argue that the stories are so common—even with muggings declining and even when many narrators do not themselves know anyone who has experienced a mugging—because these stories help Marshall residents make sense of each other at a time of rapid demographic change. We describe how payday mugging stories in Marshall

¹ The italics indicate that these words were spoken in English.

² All names of people and places are pseudonyms.

racialize African Americans and Mexicans differently, positioning these groups with respect to each other and with respect to Whites.

Models of the dispositions, typical behaviors and life prospects of groups are created and presupposed in all communities. People rely on these models to make sense of themselves and others. Various characterizations are always available, with different ones moving through overlapping networks, at different temporal and spatial scales and with diverse mechanisms of circulation (Agha 2007; Urban 2001). Narratives are one powerful means of communicating models of identity, through the “voices” assigned to characters and through narrators’ positioning with respect to these voices (Bakhtin, 1935[1981]; De Fina, Schiffirin, and Bamberg 2006; Wortham 2001). Recurring narratives are one mechanism through which relatively stable models of identity can emerge and become robustly associated with particular groups (Krupa 2009; Wertsch 2002). In Marshall, payday mugging stories allow narrators to assign racialized models of identity to stereotypical Black and Mexican characters.

Most accounts of racialization describe how White colonizers or majorities attribute racial otherness in order to maintain their own position (Silverstein 2005), but in contemporary multiethnic societies racialization can involve more than two relevant groups. Payday mugging stories position Blacks and Mexicans differently with respect to Whites and with respect to each other. The voicing of racialized characters also shifts as the stories move across communities and are recontextualized by different narrators. We follow payday mugging narratives through police reports, media and person-to-person storytelling, as they are told by Mexican, White and Black narrators in Marshall. We describe the racialization that these narratives do as they move across groups in Marshall, as immigrants and established residents struggle to identify themselves and each other.

Racialization and Intergroup Relations

Silverstein (2005) defines racialization:

Race is defined as a cultural category of difference that is contextually constructed as essential and natural—as residing within the very body of the individual—and is thus generally tied, in scientific theory and popular understanding, to a set of somatic, physiognomic, and even genetic character traits. Racialization correspondingly refers to the processes through which any diacritic of social personhood—including class, ethnicity, generation, kinship/affinity, and positions

within fields of power—comes to be essentialized, naturalized, and/or biologized...into fixed species of otherness. (p.364)

Many extend this definition, describing how racialization dehumanizes these others and presents them as threatening (Hall 2002; Urciuoli 1996). Although such racial othering is often publicly condemned, Americans continue to presuppose the natural origins of group differences and a natural hierarchy among racialized groups (Foner and Fredrickson 2004). Speakers often do this work tacitly, through talk that is not explicitly about race. As described in the introduction to this special issue, such tacit racializing discourse provides plausible deniability and allows speakers to avoid social censure.

Racial distinctions seem fixed to those who presuppose them, but racialized value judgments nonetheless change dramatically across space and time (Alcoff 2006). Communities often develop local models of racialized groups which vary from place to place within a society (Camarillo 2004). Members of culturally and economically similar groups—in the South Asian diaspora, for example—can occupy very different positions, racialized to varying extents, depending on the community that they join (Shukla 2001). Over historical time, racialized models also change and groups' positions shift (Silverstein 2005; Roediger 2005). An adequate account of racialization must, as Phoenix (2005) argues, account both for fluidity in racial characterizations and for the continuing significance of race across many societies.

Mexicans in the United States have been racialized for centuries, often cast as violent, poor, unskilled and potentially dangerous (Acuña 2000). The most salient contemporary manifestation is the racialized category “illegal immigrant,” which is stereotypically associated with Mexicans and authorizes government and civilian violence against them (DeGenova and Ramos-Zayas, 2003; Dick, this volume). Keeping Mexicans “illegal” and racializing them as “other” has material consequences, like allowing American employers to sustain an inexpensive, easily exploitable source of labor (Cardoso 1980; Cockcroft 1986). It also has symbolic consequences, allowing Americans to characterize Mexicans as hapless, unintelligent and childlike (Hill 2001) and to exercise paternalistic, “benevolent racism” by encouraging them to replace their own functional practices with mainstream White ones (Villenas 2002).

Jaynes (2004), Lowe (1996) and Silverstein (2005) argue that we must focus not on race as a fixed category but instead on the processes through which racial othering is accomplished. Trouillot (1991) argues that such othering establishes what he calls a “savage slot,” a group characterized as naturally lower, as “savages” were said to lack “civilization.” Jaynes (2004) applies a similar account to contemporary American society, arguing that we characterize some people, especially African Americans, as members of an “underclass” prone to violence, poverty and illiteracy, which we position outside the rights and responsibilities of ordinary citizens. Contemporary Americans who want to claim social rights—especially members of minority groups prone to being racialized—work to distinguish themselves from this underclass (Waters 1999). As Jaynes (2004) argues, “across groups, tensions are...strained as other minorities seek to avoid association with the most stigmatized group” (104). In the contemporary United States, intergroup relations have thus become an important site for struggles over racialization (Camarillo 2004; DeGenova and Ramos-Zayas 2003; Orfield 2009).

Previous research on Black/Latino relations has focused almost exclusively on California and other states with longstanding Latino populations. Oliver and Johnson (1984) and Bobo and Johnson (2000) describe some stereotyping and ethnic tension between these groups in Southern California, but they find no deep polarization between them. African Americans often express resentment when Latinos and other immigrants make claims on economic or political resources that Blacks only recently acquired through civil rights efforts (Camarillo 2004; Morawska 2001). Latinos overwhelmingly resist being categorized as Black—sometimes thinking of themselves as “White” but more often claiming a different identity, outside the Black/White dichotomy (Flores-Gonzalez 1999; Hirschman, Alba, and Farley 2000). In his study of intergroup relations in a Southern California suburb dominated by African Americans and Mexican immigrants, Camarillo (2004) finds many stories of Black/Mexican conflict in the media, increasing in recent years. He finds evidence of stereotyping by each group against the other, particularly among community leaders, but he also finds evidence of cooperation and amicable relations among ordinary people across group lines.

We know little about the semiotics of intergroup relations and struggles over racialization, especially in areas experiencing Mexican immigration for the first time

(Orfield 2009; Zúñiga and Hernández-León 2005). Payday mugging narratives are a rich site for studying these processes because they foreground relations between African Americans and Mexicans. Mexican, African American and White narrators both create and resist the racialization of themselves and others that can be accomplished through such stories, and retellings of the stories carry racialized models across social space and time. In this article we describe the semiotic mechanisms that diverse narrators use as they circulate racialized models of identity through payday mugging stories, illustrating the heterogeneity of racialization as different groups position themselves with respect to each other as communities are transformed in contemporary America.

Narrating Models of Personhood across Events

We know what different people are like because they exhibit signs of identity or others attribute signs of identity to them. Signs of identity are any perceivable aspect of a person (an accent, a piece of clothing, a gesture) that can be read as emblematic of a certain type of person. These signs can be denotatively explicit, characterizing a person or group through reference and predication. More often, however, signs of identity are indexes that point to characteristics of a group by drawing on images of people that speakers and hearers presuppose. Signs of identity only have meaning as they are construed by socially shared images about types of people (Goffman 1974; Silverstein 1976). Following Agha (2007) we call these images “models of personhood,” characterizations of the dispositions, moral strengths and weaknesses, typical behaviors and life prospects of a person or group. Models of personhood move throughout a community as they are indexed by signs of identity and people use them to make sense of themselves and others. Signs of identity and models of personhood depend on each other: signs have no meaning until they are construed using models, and models have no existence apart from signs that index them (Silverstein 1992).

Any model has had a certain extent of circulation and thus what Agha (2007) calls a “social domain”—the group of people who recognize and can interpret signs with respect to that model. By tracing the movement of signs and models empirically, we can determine the extent of a model’s influence and how it changes as it moves across speakers and hearers (Agha and Wortham 2005; Urban 2001; Wortham 2005, 2006). We

can also document how people position themselves with respect to signs and models, how they evaluate models and take stances with respect to them (Agha 2007; Wortham 2001). In order to understand the process of racialization as it occurs through payday mugging narratives in Marshall, we must trace the models of personhood that are indexed by these narratives as they move and change across space and time (Agha 2007; Agha and Wortham 2005). In doing this, we focus on the “congealing” (Silverstein 1992) or “enregisterment” (Agha 2007) that occurs when signs of identity and the models of personhood that they index become durably associated with some group. Models can stabilize in this way across interactional, ontogenetic or historical time, as work done across contexts allows a model of some group to become presupposed. Such an approach allows us to study the emergence and solidification of racialized models as they are constructed and revised over time.

Racialization links signs of identity with models of some definable other as naturally distinct and inferior. Such linkages emerge across events, as speakers and hearers associate signs with the models they come to index and as this linkage is recognized by an expanding group of people. Various mechanisms can move such linkages across social space and time. Krupa (2009), Phoenix (2005) and Wertsch (2002) have argued that discursive events involving history are important mechanisms for propagating racialization. In telling stories about the past and describing relations between one’s own and other groups, people often delineate others and assign racialized identities to them. Bakhtin (1935[1981]) describes how, in placing words into a character’s mouth, a narrator associates that character with a recognizable social type—the words assigned to the character index a salient model of personhood. This process of “voicing” is one important mechanism through which individuals and groups can be racialized. Because payday mugging narratives contain regular slots for African American and Mexican characters (and no obvious slots for Whites), they are a rich site for assigning racialized voices. Sometimes the signs of identity deployed in payday mugging and other narratives suggest multiple models of potentially relevant identity and listeners must infer unexpected, hybrid or provisional models of identity for characters and their social groups. In Marshall some stable racialized models of personhood are

communicated through payday mugging narratives, but the characteristic voicing of racialized characters in these narratives shifts as stories travel across communities.

A few previous studies of Mexican immigrants in areas of nontraditional Latino settlement describe storytelling as an important site for group identification. De Fina (2000) describes the ubiquity of ethnic labels as explicit signs of identity in narratives told by immigrant Mexicans. When describing their position in American society, in stories elicited by De Fina, Mexican narrators cited their own ethnicity and contrasted it with other ethnic groups in two-thirds of the stories. She also found many stories about ethnic conflict, often between Blacks and Mexicans. “The idea that Blacks are often hostile to Hispanics is openly discussed in interviews”, as in the following quote: “Y el moreno, pues no, la raza morena siempre nos ve feo ¿verdad? Porque como ellos fueron esclavos, ahora nos quieren ver como esclavos a nosotros” [And the Blacks, the black race always thinks poorly of us, right? Because, just as they were slaves, now they want to see us as slaves] (De Fina 2000:150-151). Smith (2006) reports that gang members explain the origin of Mexican gangs in the US by citing the need to defend themselves against Blacks and Puerto Ricans. Puerto Rican crack dealers corroborated these stories, including some that described payday muggings, telling Smith how “youths...waited outside bars where Mexicans drank, mugging them when they left, especially on Friday—payday” (215).

Media reports also give accounts of payday muggings. Cebreros (2007) describes such muggings in Oakland, California, where young people refer to these events as “amigo checking.” Police report that young African Americans tend to be the perpetrators, although Latinos sometimes commit the crimes as well. Londono and Vargas (2007) report that young criminals in Washington, D.C. use the term “amigo shopping” for similar crimes. As in Oakland, most of the perpetrators are African Americans, but police have also charged Latinos and Whites with the crimes. Matza (2009) describes similar muggings in Philadelphia, characterizing Mexican immigrants as “easy prey” and “vulnerable” because of their presumed undocumented status and lack of resources. He quotes residents who expect a “gang war” to result from the muggings, implying that Mexicans will defend themselves against Black perpetrators.

In the analyses below we present narratives told in Marshall about payday mugging events, showing how these stories associate different racialized models of personhood with African Americans and with Mexican immigrants. We also follow these narratives and the models of personhood that they index across groups in Marshall, showing how stories and racialized models of personhood change across retellings as diverse narrators position themselves and others in different ways.

Marshall and the New Latino Diaspora

According to the U.S. Census American Community Survey, between 2000 and 2006 the number of Mexican-origin residents in Marshall almost tripled. Similar rapid growth is happening in what have been called “New Latino Diaspora” towns across the country (Villenas 2002; Murillo 2002). Fast-growing areas outside major metropolitan areas, traditionally attractive to White, middle-class families, are also attracting Latino immigrants who are drawn by an expansion in retail, service, and construction jobs (Frey 2006; Puentes and Warren 2006). Though spread across the United States in places as geographically diverse as Nebraska, Georgia, Pennsylvania and Maine, the small rural and suburban towns that have become new destinations for Latinos have much in common, both in their attractiveness to immigrants and in the way residents react to the new arrivals. These communities are often home to agricultural or manufacturing industries with labor demands unmet by long-term residents (Grey and Woodrick 2005; Shutika 2005). Sometimes the new immigrants are perceived as hard-working contributors to the town, while at other times they are seen as undesirable neighbors who have brought with them the social ills of the big city (Murillo 2002; Zúñiga and Hernández-León 2005; Rich and Miranda 2005). In general host communities are ambivalent about the growth of the Mexican population in their midst, and internal conflicts over education, social services, local public policy and general neighborliness surface in public discourse.

Marshall is a suburban community of about 30,000 in a large East Coast metropolitan area. The African American segment of the population began with some arrivals at the end of the 19th century, but most Black residents or their ancestors arrived in the 1960s and 1970s. Foreign-born immigrants also form an important part of

Marshall's history. Irish immigration in the 1800s preceded an Italian immigration that lasted through the first half of the 20th century. Smaller groups of Puerto Rican, South Asian and Caribbean newcomers have settled as well, though most moved on by the end of the 20th century. The population changed significantly between 1990 and 2006—from about 70% White, 25% African-American and 3% Latino to about 40% White, 40% African-American, and 20% Latino (the vast majority of whom are Mexican). Marshall is significantly poorer than surrounding suburbs, with almost 20% of documented residents living below the poverty level. It faces high rates of crime and relatively low educational achievement. In many ways, Marshall faces changes and concerns more often associated with big cities but now increasingly challenging other locales.

The analyses presented in this article are based on five years of ethnographic observations and the collection of payday mugging narratives from a variety of Marshall narrators. Members of our team—which includes two Latino, one African American, one Asian American, and two Anglo researchers—have done participant observation, collected documents and conducted both informal and recorded interviews with Marshall residents in schools, social service agencies, churches, coffee shops, restaurants, libraries and government agencies. For this article we have gathered a corpus of payday mugging narratives drawn from fieldnotes, interviews and local media. We have recorded spontaneous payday mugging narratives, on tape or in notes, and we have asked many interviewees if they have witnessed or heard of such events in order to elicit their stories.

Our early ethnographic work focused on the educational experience of Mexican immigrant youth in Marshall, and so our early corpus of narratives drew primarily from institutions such as schools and churches frequented by Mexican immigrants and their teachers. We also talked extensively with teachers, clergymen and social service providers in these institutions, most of whom were White. After we decided to focus on payday mugging narratives, we began to approach African American narrators. We have been able to gather some stories from African American narrators, but our corpus includes more payday mugging stories from Mexican and White narrators. Another factor affecting this imbalance is Black narrators' hesitation to tell these stories because of the way that they typically racialize African American characters. White narrators often tell

payday mugging stories spontaneously, and they seem to relish doing so. Many Mexican narrators tell the stories readily, but African Americans do not.

Two Narrative Chains

As Agha (2007) describes, signs and discursive forms like narratives move across “chains” or branching networks of communicative events, as participants in one event use similar signs in subsequent ones. It is across such chains that signs of identity and associated models of personhood move and change. We organize our presentation of payday muggings in Marshall into two heuristic chains, represented in Figure 1. Both chains start with the event of mugging itself. In the chain on the left, the police file a report. Subsequently, police officers and witnesses speak with community members about the crime, or reporters read the police reports and write stories about them. The newspaper articles are read by White and Black residents, who repeat the story among themselves, and they are read by non-residents who sometimes write about them in Wikipedia entries and elsewhere. In the chain on the right, the victim tells the story to family and friends, and Mexican immigrants speak about it among themselves. They also tell the story to outsiders, like teachers, clergy and researchers. These outsiders then repeat the story among themselves and in discussions with others in the community. We do not claim that these two are the only pathways along which payday mugging narratives move, and the line connecting the two chains indicates that they are not separate, but they provide a useful heuristic for presenting the data.

INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

White and African American Narrators

Witnesses often report payday muggings to police and to others, as described in the following fieldnote.

Melinda tells a story about a Mexican man who was stabbed or shot in the municipal parking lot kitty corner to the community center. An African American woman stayed to report the incident. Melinda called 911. The man didn’t want the ambulance to come and didn’t want to report anything, but the African American woman reported what happened. Four African American men got out of a car and threatened the man, demanding his money (Melinda adds that there is a check cashing place across the street and people know that Mexicans can’t have bank

accounts so they carry cash) and he wouldn't give it to them, so they shot or stabbed him.

Melinda, a White woman, explains something about the motivation for the mugging by describing how undocumented Mexicans cannot have bank accounts and thus have lots of cash on payday. This detail about presumed documentation and access to bank accounts appears in most payday mugging stories told by Whites and Blacks, but it never appears in the stories told by Mexicans. It racializes Mexicans by ascribing them undocumented status and indexing the category of "illegal alien", marking them indirectly as criminals themselves (see Dick, this volume). Note also that Melinda says the Mexican man did not want to report the crime—she implies that he preferred to stay anonymous and just be a victim without prosecuting the perpetrators, probably because he did not want to attract the attention of authorities. This version of the story, then, presents the Mexican as passive and victimized, a common type of voicing in tellings by White narrators.

Once the police become involved, they file reports and speak with others about the crime. This fieldnote describes a White police officer speaking with a White researcher.

He says there is a lot of African American crime on Latinos. Latinos don't have social security cards so they can't get bank accounts and have to take their money with them wherever they go. "They know you're out there with money" (apparently referring to African American criminals as 'they' and Mexicans as 'you'). It's "like lions on lambs. Four to five African Americans on one Mexican." I ask if the crimes generally turn violent and he says, yes, very violent.

Like almost all other narrators, this police officer identifies the perpetrators as African American. Like many other narrators, especially Whites and Mexicans, he characterizes the perpetrators as violent and predatory. This racializes the Black criminals, because of the connection between such violence and the pre-rational primitive (Krupa 2009; Pandey 2006). Two-thirds of all narrators in our corpus mention that the perpetrators of payday muggings are African American, and many White and Mexican narrators voice these perpetrators as dangerous and violent. In contrast to such African American criminals, the officer characterizes Mexican victims as and as outnumbered—as "lambs," with "for the slaughter" implied. Mexicans live close enough to the criminality of racialized others to fall victim to it, and they are apparently unable to avoid it.

After payday muggings came to the attention of police several years ago, they reached out to the Mexican community. In the following excerpt from an interview at a church with a sizable Mexican congregation, a White priest describes to a Latina researcher how an officer came to the church and spoke to Mexican parishioners.

The police have been very good....Officer Smith came from the police and he spoke with them one Sunday at the end of Mass....Just to let them know- he was very, very nice. He- first of all he came in his suit so as not to intimidate and he basically wanted them to know that they are members of the community. If anything should happen they shouldn't be afraid to report it, that they need to know that the police's job here is not to turn anyone in to immigration, and that they're here to help the residents and that as people of Marshall, they have a right to a good quality of life, to safe living.

Later in the interview this priest repeats the explanation we saw above, about Mexicans not being able to get bank accounts. "They haven't been able to get a bank account because of lack of paperwork, lack of papers. You know, they were getting their paychecks cashed and they were getting mugged; some of the people in the neighborhood figured out that it was payday."

Once the police file a report describing a payday mugging, reporters read it. One White reporter for the local paper made a practice of reading such reports, as described in the following fieldnote.

He says that there is "a lot of racial tension" in Marshall. "It's a gang war waiting to happen." Many of the Latinos do not have access to banks so they carry around large sums of money and credit cards. People form gangs not because they want to commit crimes but for protection. It tends to be Mexican people who are robbed and African American perpetrators...Earlier in the conversation I say we are interested in the stories that people tell about each other, and he says "you mean like they're urban myths?" and then adds, "they're not, I see the police records."

This version of the story includes the common explanation about presumed undocumented immigrants' lack of access to banks, and it introduces the idea of racial tension. Many narrators mention the racial tension that is manifested in and results from payday muggings. Whites seem particularly concerned about this, often mentioning the "gangs" that allegedly form in response. Most White people who tell these stories characterize Blacks as violent and Mexicans as passive victims, but many also fear that Mexicans might themselves turn to violent "gang" activity to defend themselves.

After reading police reports about payday muggings, reporters write stories for the local paper. These include statements like the following.

Problems associated with illegal immigrants include...being targeted by robbers who know illegal immigrants often carry large amounts of cash, since they don't have proper identification to open a bank account, and the reluctance of immigrants to cooperate with police as victims or witnesses due to fear of deportation.

This version describes Mexicans' lack of access to banks, their illegal status, as well as Mexicans' unwillingness to cooperate with police. This newspaper article was cited by Wikipedia, in its description of Marshall, which includes the following: "The local government accepts Mexican [identity] cards as valid identification, in an effort to prevent immigrants from being marginalized in the community or becoming the victim of criminals who know that the undocumented have no legal recourses." Thus Marshall payday mugging narratives are now available worldwide and may be traveling along other chains.

Once witnesses and police speak to others about the muggings, and once newspaper stories are written, community members repeat the stories among themselves. Many residents have told versions of the stories to us. Here are two characteristic examples taken from interviews with White narrators. The first comes from a clergyman who does not have Mexican parishioners. "For a long while Latinos couldn't set up savings accounts because they were sure that that would get them shipped out so they carry cash, and as soon as the blacks realized that they relieved a lot of Mexicans of their cash." The second comes from a local White resident who was interviewed at church.

Narrator: But ah, they also- maybe from where they came from because in Mexico everything's run by the state.

Interviewer: uh huh.

N: And I don't think there's a lot of confidence in the legal system down there.

I: Ah, yeah.

N: So, ah, consequently, they get taken advantage of quite a bit; they get mugged or whatever and they won't go to the police. We had a case recently where they had to put a Spanish person in jail just to keep them until they caught the person that did it and get him to court so he would testify. He was afraid to testify. He was afraid something would happen to him. But in the end...

I: They caught the guy.

N: They caught him and he was put away and now this guy can go along and live a normal life.

These segments show several of the features noted above. White (and Black) narrators describe how a presumed lack of bank accounts and lack of documentation makes Mexicans vulnerable to payday muggings and reticent to report crimes. They describe Mexican victims as passive, “easy prey” who “get taken advantage of” and do not want to involve the police because they are “afraid something would happen” to them. This echoes the stereotypical characterizations of Mexicans reported by DeGenova and Ramos-Zayas (2003), who describe how Mexicans are often racialized as gullible, submissive and easily victimized. Their victimhood here is specifically linked to what is seen as their essential status as illegal aliens.

A recurring grammatical pattern in payday muggings reinforces this voicing of Mexican immigrants as timid and easily victimized. Several White narrators use the “get-passive” construction—like “they get mugged” in the last narrative above. Carter and McCarthy (1999) argue that the get-passive is generally used to report adversative or problematic events and that the construction focuses on the consequences for the patient or grammatical subject of the construction. Ochs and Capps (2001) agree, arguing that “the verb ‘got’ is typically used to make a protagonist look like a victim in a situation that calls for accountability” (49). The lack of an explicit agent highlights the stance of the speaker toward the patient and the often-regrettable events described. Other uses in our corpus include the following from a White teacher: “These people are walking around with pay packets and getting knocked over the head.” Or, from a priest, “they were getting their paychecks cashed and they were getting mugged. Some of the people in the neighborhood figured out that it was payday.” Use of the get-passive construction helps White narrators characterize Mexicans as victims for whom we should have sympathy.

As payday mugging stories move into the Black community, however, they change. Black narrators do tell stories about payday muggings, although they have to be prompted more than Whites and Mexicans. African American narrators characterize perpetrators and victims differently.

N: And uh, it’s always the first of the month every week. Wait for all the people to go in the bank, get money, come out, they rob them. There’s a lot of that.

- I: Oh, okay. And who was doing that?
 N: Well, everybody. Blacks, Mexicans, Whites, you know, whoever needs the money.
 I: So they're all-
 N: So they're all doing it.
 I: So they're mugging each other? So the Blacks mugging-
 N: Mugging each other. The Mexicans taking their money. The Whites, you know, I guess they figured well you take my money, I'm going to take his.

This elderly African American man repeats the claim that payday is the stimulus for such muggings. But he describes the perpetrators as being from all three groups—Black, Mexican and White—and he gives an explicit explanation of the perpetrators' motivation: they need the money. Victimhood is not specific to Mexicans, and it has nothing to do with one's lack of a bank account or immigration status.

Another African American narrator describes how the perpetrators are drug addicts.

- N: A lot of Blacks are like robbing Mexicans because they figure they like carry [money]. You see, Mexicans don't believe in going to the bank. They carry big lumps of money on them. They do have good lumps of money, but they ain't really been no real big conflict, not yet. I think sooner or later it might.
 I: Okay, so do you think that it's young people that's doing the- that are robbing the-
 N: Of course it's young people, young people, crack heads. They ain't got...they need money to get dope, sure. They not robbing- they robbing you, me the church, anybody. They don't care. They doing their business. See Satan is like the preacher. Let me tell you something. Satan is out there to destroy and kill and believe me and he's doing it. If you weak minded, he get in your mind, you can forget it. He'll take you right with him.
 I: So when you think, like you say, they they'll rob the Mexicans, that that's just trying to get what they think what the Mexicans are taking away from them
 N: No, it ain't that. It's for dope.

This narrator describes how drug addicted criminals do not single out Mexicans, claiming that they would take money from anyone. In this account the criminals are Black—which is characteristic of most African American narrators' payday mugging stories—but the victims are not always Mexican and intergroup relations are not at issue. He rejects the (African American) interviewer's idea that racial tension is relevant to these crimes. The criminals just "need money to get dope." He does not mention lack of documents as the

reason why Mexicans carry a lot of money, but he does claim that “Mexicans don’t believe in going to the bank.”

One last example comes from an interview between an African American researcher and an older Black female narrator, an executive at a social service agency whose family has been in Marshall for generations.

- N: Well I know among the young people, they [Blacks and Mexicans] probably fight. Well, they do fight. Every once in a while somebody will rob one of them.
- I: Okay.
- N: Uh.
- I: Rob one of the young people?
- N: Rob one of the Mexicans.
- I: Oh okay.
- N: Because they don’t, I don’t know. They sometimes carry large amounts of money.
- I: So who is “somebody,” though? Who?
- N: Young black people. They live in our community. See, that’s the thing, they allow them over here, they give them all the privileges, and they dump them in our community.
- I: Umm hmm. And so that’s how, so young Blacks are robbing them?
- N: Sometimes. Not a, it goes on. I mean they rob their own, so why wouldn’t they rob them?
- I: Okay. And so that’s causing conflict?
- N: No.
- I: No.
- N: What’s causing conflict is they’re overcrowding our neighborhoods.

Like most other Black narrators, this woman acknowledges Black-on-Mexican payday muggings, though she says that they happen only “every once in a while.” She also gives the familiar explanation that Mexicans “carry large amounts of money.” But she argues that the Black perpetrators also rob “their own”—that is, other Blacks—and so she denies that Mexicans have been singled out because of their ethnicity. She also denies that payday muggings indicate racial tension, arguing that tension comes from misguided immigration policies and immigrants’ encroachment into Black neighborhoods. White people, she claims—the “they” who “dump” immigrants in black areas—deserve some of the blame that payday muggings narratives deflect to Black perpetrators and Mexican victims. This is the only narrative in which White residents appear at all.

As payday mugging stories move from witnesses and the police through

newspapers and word of mouth into White and Black communities, the stories along these chains have some common features. Many narrators presume that immigrants are undocumented, lack access to banks and subsequently need to carry large amounts of cash. Almost all narrators characterize Mexican victims as passive, like “lambs” for the slaughter, who get taken advantage of and who do not want the police to be involved. White narrators characterize undifferentiated Black perpetrators as predatory and often violent, and they often worry about “eruptions” of racial tension and gang wars. Black narrators, however, present the perpetrators as a small subset of the community motivated by drugs or greed, as equal-opportunity muggers who target any victims with money. As the narratives move into these two communities, then, they change. Black narrators do not racialize all blacks as violent and dangerous. They either distinguish a small set of “underclass” criminals (who are often Blacks but sometimes include Whites and Latinos), or they do not racialize the perpetrators at all. Black narrators do not blame the victim, and they surely regret what happens to Mexicans who are mugged, but they do not emphasize Mexicans’ passivity and victimhood in the same way as White narrators.

Mexican Narrators

The second chain of payday mugging narratives begins with the Mexican victim and moves into the Mexican community. We have recorded conversations among Mexican immigrants in two different settings where they have told payday mugging stories to other Mexicans and to a researcher, one in an interview setting where a Mexican mother and her daughter talked to an Asian American researcher and another at school where several Mexican male adolescents spoke among themselves with a Latina teacher and a Latina researcher. The following story from the mother and daughter is typical.

- D: Como si una persona va caminando en la calle y es mexicano, a lo mejor, lo asaltan, le sacan su dinero, les pegan
- M: O sí, le pegan, por ejemplo, ah, un cuñado que tengo acá, iba caminando por la calle Main. Eran chamaquillos o sea muchachillos, de doce o catorce años
- D: Nada más iba caminando
- M: Y no más de pronto ellos empezaron a pegar a él. O sea sin motivo sin
- I: por el din-
- M: No, no, no

- D: No, nada, porque era mexicano
M: Cuando él quiso reaccionar con, por, por defenderse, empezaron a correr
I: Y pasa frecuente-
M: frecuentemente. He oído que, a otras personas también pasan frecuentemente
- [D: Like if a Mexican person walks in the street, maybe they assault him, take his money, hit him
M: Oh yes, they hit him, for example, ah, a brother-in-law that I have here, he was walking on Main Street. They were little kids, little boys, 12 or 13 years old
D: He was just out walking
M: And suddenly they began to hit him, for no reason
I: For mon-
M: No, no, no
D: No, not at all, because he was Mexican
M: When he tried to react, to defend himself, they began to run away
I: And that happens frequent-
M: frequently. I've heard that it often happens to others too.]

This mother and daughter describe unprovoked and sudden violence on the part of muggers, who are understood to be African American because the two were talking about relations between African Americans and Mexicans prior to this excerpt. The African American criminals are characterized as violent and unpredictable despite their young age. Other female Mexican narrators we have interviewed also emphasize the capriciousness of the attacks, even though they often involve robbery: “Sólo en caminar o por caminar por molestarnos...No hay ningún motivo, sólo por molestarnos o quitarles el dinero,” [Just out walking and they bother us...without any reason, just to bother us or take our money] and “Como si una persona va caminando en la calle y es mexicano, lo asaltan, le sacan su dinero, le pegan” [If someone is walking on the street and is Mexican, they assault him, they take his money, they hit him].

The voicing of African American criminals in Mexican narrators' payday mugging stories is thus similar to the racialized voicing used by White narrators. Both groups characterize the muggers as violent and dangerous, and some of the Mexican narrators add unpredictability as another characteristic. But Mexican narrators do not usually characterize Mexican victims in the same way as white or Black narrators. The first narrative in this section described a Mexican victim turning on the criminals and defending himself. The following series of narratives, recorded during an informal

conversation among several male Mexican high school students, a bilingual teacher and a bilingual researcher, also describes Mexicans defending themselves. At the beginning of the conversation one young man describes the lack of respect between Mexican and African American youth.

S1: Hace muchos problemas porque, este ellos no nos respetan y tampoco nosotros no los respetamos, ¿me entiendes? *So* no se puede así no se puede hacer nada porque no tienen respeto contra nosotros y nosotros no tenemos respeto contra ellos, ¿me entiendes? Y aunque hay muchas cosas que ellos dicen que de los mexicanos que están aquí porque les quitan el trabajo y cualquier cosa y nosotros venimos aquí *okay* los que no tienen sus padres aquí venimos aquí para trabajar y para tener un mejor futuro, *right*? Porque nosotros en nuestro país no lo podemos tener. Pero ellos no piensan así, como yo en Marshall veo que hay muchos morenos que venden drogas, hace lo que quiere, que anda, anda robando a los- a los mexicanos

Ss: A los mexicanos

S2: Hace poco me acaban de robar el *stereo* del carro

T: ¿De qué?

S2: Del carro

S3: A mí me robaron los discos y todo eso y a ver

T: ¿Por qué?

S3: Por simple gusto

[S1: It causes a lot of problems because um they don't respect us and we don't respect them either, you understand? So you can't like that you can't do anything about it because they don't have respect towards us and we don't have respect towards them, you understand me? And even though there are a lot of things that they say that about Mexicans, that they are here because they take jobs away from them and whatever and we came here- okay those who don't have their parents here, we came to work and to have a better future, *right*? Because we couldn't have it in our own country. But they don't think of it like that, like I see in Marshall that there are a lot of blacks who sell drugs, do whatever they want, who go around, go around robbing Mexicans

Ss: Mexicans

S2: Not long ago they stole the stereo from my car

T: From what?

S2: From my car.

S3: They stole my CDs and all that, see

T: Why?

S3: For kicks]

These young Mexican men describe African American criminals in ways familiar from other narratives, as victimizing others and as unpredictable. They also consistently

separate “us” and “them,” Mexicans and Blacks, and describe racial tension. Blacks, in their characterization, hang around, sell drugs, steal, are violent and sadistic, do not work hard and resent hardworking Mexicans. Mexicans work hard and are just trying to get ahead under difficult circumstances. As the conversation continues, these young Mexicans describe some muggings as violent.

S4: A mí me dijeron (ahí), no tienes un dólar y por solamente no traía dinero, le digo, no. Incluso me quitaron la cartera, me revisaron; le digo no tengo, y comenzaron a pegarme, pero en eso llegó mi papá y se me los quitó

Ss: ((excited overlapping talk...One student keeps trying to insert “La migra” repeatedly, finally getting out something like “La migra (se salió a) todos los negros en el verano”))

I: ¿Ah, sí? ¿Por qué?

S2: Porque- Dile que en el verano ganan más dinero los mexicanos.

S1: No, no no lo que pasa es que, *okay*, no a los chabos, no, porque a los (yambos) saben defenderse y todo; me entiende, pero casi más siempre lo agarran los-

S5: Los (tíos)

S1: Con lo, aha, agreden casi a la mayoría pero a los señores más grandes cuando recién recibe su cheque y todo eso. Como *an example*, este- uno de mis amigos que vive en mi casa la otra vez casi le cortan la oreja. ¿Por qué? Porque le querían lo querían asaltar y- luego

S6: That’s not good, you know?

[S4 They said to me (there) don’t you have a dollar and just because I didn’t bring any money I say to them, no. They even took my wallet, they searched me; I say to them, I don’t have [anything] and they started to hit me, but in that [moment] my father arrived and he got them off of me.

Ss: ((excited overlapping talk...One student keeps trying to insert “La migra” repeatedly, finally getting out something like “La migra (se salió a) todos los negros en el verano” The INS (went out to) all the Blacks in the summer))

I: Oh yeah? Why?

S2: Because- tell her that in the summer Mexicans make more money.]

S1: No no no what happens- not to the young guys no because the (young guys) know how to defend themselves and all, you understand, but almost more often they grab the

S5 The (older guys)

S1: With the, uhuh, they assault almost the majority but the older guys, when they’ve just received their check and all that. Like an example, um- one of my friends who lives in my house the other day they almost cut off his ear. Why? Because they wanted to assault him and- then

S6: That’s not good, you know?]

These African American criminals, like those described by white narrators above, are violent and dangerous. They want people's money, but they also act violently toward Mexican victims in unpredictable ways.

Note that these young men describe "older guys" as the victims of the payday muggings. As the conversation continues they make clear that young men like themselves will not be passive victims.

S1: *okay, ya sabemos que nosotros cuando nos ven por la calle, si va uno o dos nos van a agarrar, ¿me entiendes? So nosotros tenemos que andar trayendo algo como knives, gun o something like that para defendernos, you know? It's not- it's not good porque ellos luego take guns and everything so I mean*

S6: *Oh man*

[S1: *okay, we already know that we when they see us on the street, if it's one or two of us they are going to grab us, you understand me? So we have to walk around carrying something like knives, gun or something like that to defend ourselves, you know? It's not- it's not good because then they take guns and everything so I mean*

S6: *Oh man]*

Unlike older Mexican men and women, these young men will be assertive and defend themselves against violent payday muggers. This characterization of (some) Mexicans as assertive contrasts sharply with the voice presupposed by White and Black narrators, who portray Mexican victims as passive. Some Mexican youth, at least, dispute the characterization of Mexicans as submissive and easily victimized. These are almost always males, who resist the gendered aspect of payday mugging narratives that places male Mexicans in a passive, vulnerable role. As many have described, Mexican men in the United States face threats to their traditional gender privilege (Hirsch, 2003; Smith, 2006), and young men resist this in their versions of payday mugging narratives.

Not all Mexican narrators present victims as assertive, however. Others emphasize different aspects of the story. In narrating how his father was robbed of three thousand dollars by two Black men, one male youth focused on the amount of money lost. In a subsequent interview, this young man emphasized the danger from the violent perpetrators of payday muggings.

Bueno para mí Marshall no es el mejor lugar para vivir. Es peligroso- yo pienso que para mí es peligroso porque a mi papá lo han asaltado. Igualmente a mí; me han quitado la cartera, mi celular una vez, me pusieron una pistola en la cabeza y

me dijeron que les diera yo el dinero. Sí a él también le pusieron una pistola en la cabeza. Le pegaron, a él sí le pegaron. Le quitaron tres mil dolares que, el dinero era para pagar a sus trabajadores sí, y de él- para él.

[Well for me Marshall isn't the best place to live. It's dangerous- I think that for me it's dangerous because they've assaulted my father. The same with me; they took my wallet, my cell phone one time, they put a gun to my head and they told me to give them the money. Yeah they put a gun to his head too. They beat him, they sure beat him. They took \$3,000 dollars that, the money was to pay his workers, it was, and it was his- for him.]

Female Mexican narrators also tend to emphasize the danger, as described in the following: “todo el mundo pues tenemos nosotros como hispano, no, miedo de salir a la calle pues porque nos topamos con unas personas de éstas y nos roban o nos agreden” [well, as Hispanics all of us fear going out in the street because we run into some of these people and they rob or attack us]. Payday mugging narratives sometimes blend into accounts such as this, of unpredictable muggings that are not motivated by the desire for money but by animosity and unpredictability. Another Mexican woman describes it this way:

- N: De mucha violencia de umm de que ah en la calle los agreden, ya sea verbalmente o físicamente. A veces con, por un motivo in- insignificante, a veces sin motivo. Entonces, sí, historias de ese tipo han contado.
- I: Pero como “sin motivo” quiere decir no por su dinero o
- N: No, simplemente me siento yo por su forma de ser o de que no nos quieren tal vez, no sé.
- [N: Lots of violence, um, they assault us in the street, whether it's verbally or physically. Sometimes for an insignificant motive, sometimes without a motive. Yes, then, I've heard stories like that.
- I: But what do you mean “without a motive,” not for money?
- N: No, I feel it's simply for being who you are or because they don't like us perhaps, I don't know.]

Other women offer different explanations for why African Americans assault Mexicans, when robbery is not the motive: “Los morenos son más racistas...no quieren a los Mexicanos porque nos ven muy por debajo” [Blacks are more racist...they don't like Mexicans because they see us as really low]. In this way Mexican narrators sometimes voice African American criminals differently than White and Black narrators, who consistently cite money as the motive. Without a logical motive, the African American perpetrators are not just criminal, but also essentially irrational and indiscriminate.

Mexican residents go on to speak with people outside their community about payday muggings, and these advocates or community members then retell the stories among themselves. One longstanding Puerto Rican resident named Ricardo, director of a local social service agency, described muggings he had heard about, as recorded in the following fieldnote.

Bank accounts are difficult for migrant workers to obtain. This being common knowledge, many workers are assaulted for the money they are carrying. Ricardo mentions the possibility of using the bank vault as a savings bank for these people [the agency is located in a former bank], but worries what the negative consequences would be for the agency if criminals got wind of the new stash, and he is not certain that the workers would utilize it in any case.

This account mentions Mexican immigrants' difficulty obtaining bank accounts, although we did not hear this from any Mexican narrators. Mexicans sometimes mentioned that victims had just received paychecks, but none mentioned bank accounts or lack of documentation as a factor.

Mexican students also told payday mugging stories to their teachers. The teachers sometimes repeated them to researchers and to others, and then the stories entered public discourse in the White and Black communities—where they intersected with versions that came down the first chain described above. We have tried to collect versions that seemed to come through Mexican tellings by approaching teachers in the school who work directly with Mexican students. It is not possible to argue that teachers' stories derive solely from what their students tell them, however, without input from what they hear in town or read in the newspaper. These teachers tended to tell stories like one mentioned above: “These people are walking around with pay packets and getting knocked over the head.”

Payday mugging stories told by White teachers and White (or longstanding resident Latino) service professionals differed from Mexican narrators' in three ways. They often included reference to bank accounts and Mexicans' presumed illegal status as an explanation for the events. They sometimes made specific reference to “gangs” and the potential for racial tension that might spring from these muggings. And they cast Mexicans as passive victims instead of people who might actively defend themselves. Either because White service providers changed the stories that they heard from

Mexicans, or because they combined these stories with versions that they read in the newspaper or heard in town, the stories in the second chain changed as they left the Mexican community. The Mexican victim in the story went from active to passive, and the racial tension went from a conflict over specific issues—like jobs and housing—to a general dread about gangs and eruptions of violence.

Conclusions

By following payday mugging stories as narrators create new versions of them, we can see how the stories change across social space. Mexican narrators present the muggings as motivated by discrimination, violence and greed. They generally claim that Black attackers target them because they are Mexican, sometimes with the intent of robbing them but in many cases simply because they don't like Mexicans. Although a few Mexican informants offered reasons for this animosity—including resentment over lost jobs—many described the attacks as “sin motivo” [for no reason] other than the Mexicanness of the victims. When told by Mexicans, then, payday mugging narratives help racialize Blacks as violent and predatory in ways that fit with the images described by Jaynes (2004), Waters (1999) and Urciuoli (1996), ways that relegate Blacks to the “savage slot” (Trouillot 1991) and establish Mexicans above them the racial hierarchy.

White narrators racialize Blacks in similar ways, but they also cast Mexicans as passive, submissive and scared. As the stories move from Mexican to White narrators, Mexican victims shift from active to passive and their undocumented status is foregrounded. This emphasizes their tenuous social position and presupposes a model of the quiet Mexican who takes whatever people dish out and who is in need of help—thereby securing the dominant position of Whites and establishing a need for the paternalistic help described by Villenas (2002). On the other hand, some payday mugging narratives told by Whites transform the kind of self-defense described by Mexican youth into “gang” violence and transform the young Black and Mexican people who might engage in it into “gang members”. The presumption that Mexicans are undocumented in these accounts further criminalizes them. These racialized characterizations reveal White fears about the dangerousness of ethnic “others.”

Black narrators change the stories in other ways. Victims become more generic. Their Mexicanness is not relevant and they are portrayed as less sympathetic than the victims in White or Mexican tellings. In African American narratives, Mexicans are not likely to be victimized more than other community members. Perpetrators also become just a small group of Blacks—most often young drug dealers, not churchgoing or professional Blacks like the narrators. Black narrators sometimes allude to tensions between Mexicans and African Americans over housing and overcrowding, but they deny that payday muggings are related to these tensions. On their account the muggings are not a Black-Mexican issue.

Narrators from different groups thus use payday mugging stories to portray themselves and others in contrasting, often racialized ways. These stories are particularly good vehicles for presenting accounts of the other because they circulate easily and facilitate highly presupposing characterizations of racially-typed protagonists. As is happening in many New Latino Diaspora towns in the Northeast, South and Midwest, rapid demographic changes confront Marshall residents with a symbolic challenge. Longstanding Marshall residents react to the rapid growth of the Mexican immigrant population in part by creating accounts of who the newcomers are and what their presence means for their own identities, and immigrants react to these characterizations. These accounts of self and other influence immigrants' pathways in the US—creating, for example, warrants for anti-immigrant policies (Dick, this volume)—and they contribute to the unequal distribution of resources across groups (Blanton, this volume). Racialized accounts of self and other cast differences as natural, which can increase their potency, and payday mugging stories are one important vehicle that Marshall residents use to do this work.

We must keep in mind, however, that both the stories and the community are in motion. Narrators from different groups do often use payday mugging stories to characterize others in predictable ways, as we have summarized. We have shown how characterizations sometimes vary among narrators within ethnic groups, however, and we have tried to evoke a sense of movement as the stories travel from event to event inside and outside of Marshall. New Latino Diaspora communities are changing rapidly as immigrants arrive from various locations, as longstanding residents relocate and as a new

generation of Latinos grows up in the United States. The new generation is positioning itself differently with respect to longstanding residents and with respect to their parents, groups within of the host community are reacting differently to emerging segments of the immigrant community, and it is too early to tell what factions may develop and what socioeconomic directions they may travel in. As these changes occur, semiotic vehicles of racialization like payday mugging narratives will surely continue to be important tools for positioning self and other, but the character and circulation of these stories will shift as variously positioned narrators use them in new struggles.

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Figure 1. Two chains of payday mugging narratives.

