

# Racism, the Immigration Enforcement Regime, and the Implications for Racial Inequality in the Lives of Undocumented Young Adults

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Elizabeth Aranda<sup>1</sup> and Elizabeth Vaquera<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

The current immigration enforcement regime embodies a colorblind racial project of the state rooted in the racial structure of society and resulting in racism toward immigrants. Approaching racism from structural and social process perspectives, we seek to understand the social consequences of enforcement practices in the lives of undocumented immigrant young adults who moved to the United States as minors. Findings indicate that although legal discourse regarding immigration enforcement theoretically purports colorblindness, racial practices such as profiling subject immigrants to arrest, detention, and deportation and, in effect, criminalize them. Further, enforcement practices produce distress, vulnerability, and anxiety in the lives of young immigrants and their families, often resulting in legitimate fears of detention and deportation since enforcement measures disproportionately affect Latinos and other racialized immigrant groups in U.S. society. We conclude that policies and programs that exclude, segregate, detain, and physically remove immigrants from the country reproduce racial inequalities in other areas of social life through spillover effects that result in dire consequences for these immigrants and their kin. We argue that immigrant enforcement practices reflect the nation's racial policy of our times.

## Keywords

racism, immigration enforcement, racial inequality, undocumented immigrants, deportations and detention

As part of the Civil Rights Movement, in 1965 the U.S. Congress overhauled the immigration system that was based on well-recognized racist country quotas of 1924 (Ngai 2005). After the 1965 Hart-Cellar Act, immigration rates increased dramatically and the composition of immigration flows became more racially diverse compared with before 1965. Alongside these changes were growing measures to regulate the immigrant population. In the context of retrenchment of the Civil Rights Movement, the last quarter of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century witnessed a surge in practices that criminalize immigrants (Dowling and Inda 2013) through arguments for their exclusion and expulsion from the United

States, akin to the arguments used to justify the exclusion of Chinese immigrants in the 1870s and 1880s (Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882; Page Act of 1875).

While U.S. federal law stipulates that entering the country without authorization is a criminal misdemeanor, which can be enforced by a witnessing officer at a border or port of entry, the very act of living in the United States without lawful status is

<sup>1</sup>University of South Florida, Tampa, FL, USA

## Corresponding Author:

Elizabeth Aranda, University of South Florida, 4202 E. Fowler Ave., CPR 107, Tampa, FL 33620, USA.  
Email: earanda@usf.edu

only a civil offense since immigration law is civil law (Eagly 2010; Martin 2011; Noferi 2012). Nonetheless, undocumented immigrants have become associated with criminality. Thus, immigrants become victimized by state practices that sanction “illegality” with tactics used to deal with sex offenders and murderers (e.g., use of ankle monitoring devices, detention in prison, etc.) (Little and Klarreich 2005).

The criminalization of immigrants has been exacerbated by three factors. First is the Clinton Administration’s investment in programs that emphasized “prevention through deterrence” through the fortification of the U.S.–Mexico border and the dramatic increase in resource allocation to the Border Patrol in the 1990s and the 2000s, resulting in the militarization of the border area (Massey, Durand, and Malone 2002). The second factor is the 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA), which expanded the basis upon which immigrants could be deported, disregarding most grounds for deportation appeals, eliminating much judicial discretion in cases, and expediting deportations (Golash-Boza and Hondagneu-Sotelo 2013). The third, more recent factor, is the approach of “attrition through enforcement” in the post-9/11 era to curb “illegal” immigration (Plascencia 2013), particularly through home and worksite raids in which undocumented immigrants are arrested, taken to detention centers (often for prolonged time periods), and, when these are not available, housed in jails with criminal populations (Bosworth and Kaufman 2011).

The consequences of the post-1996 and, in particular, post-September 11, 2001, immigration enforcement regime (Gentsch and Massey 2011) have been devastating, not just because they engender fear and vulnerability in immigrant communities (Aranda, Hughes, and Sabogal 2014; Dreby 2014; Szkupinski Quiroga, Medina, and Glick 2014) but because they also negatively affect the socioeconomic and occupational outcomes of immigrants (Gentsch and Massey 2011). The combination of this new enforcement regime and the lack of legal rights for undocumented immigrants deteriorates their life chances and criminalizes their presence in the United States (Dowling and Inda 2013; Gentsch and Massey 2011).

As the lives of immigrants increasingly become marked by social suffering due to immigrant enforcement measures often considered forms of legal violence (Menjívar and Abrego 2012), social commentators and media pundits claim that the United States has embarked on a new postracial

era, highlighted by the election of President Barack Obama to the highest political office in the nation. Yet social scientists assert that this accomplishment has not resulted in a dismantling of institutional racism that pervades U.S. society (Bonilla-Silva and Dietrich 2011). Immigrant enforcement policies, which we argue are rooted in institutional racism, have, in fact, intensified during Obama’s presidency. Ironically, swing-voting Latinos supported President Obama in his second-term reelection (Lopez, Gonzalez-Barrera, and Motel 2011). Despite this support, the head of the largest Hispanic nonprofit organization in the nation, the National Council of La Raza, Janet Murguía, recently referred to President Obama as “deporter in chief” (Peralta 2014) due to the record number of deportations during his time in office, reaching almost 410,000 in 2012 (U.S. Department of Homeland Security 2012a).<sup>1</sup> Some now argue that this new immigration enforcement regime, particularly through mass deportations, is a gendered racial removal project of the state that targets men of color specifically (Golash-Boza and Hondagneu-Sotelo 2013).

We examine the social consequences of the new immigration enforcement regime on the lives of young adults who moved to the United States as undocumented minors. We focus on their experiences, fears, and vulnerabilities linked to the detention and deportation of their families and, sometimes, their own deportability, as well as the role of race and racism in understanding the mechanisms by which enforcement measures shape their lives. We argue that the new enforcement regime is a product of structural and systemic racism (Bonilla-Silva 1997; Feagin 2006) that relies on racist discursive practices (Bonilla-Silva 2009; Byng 2013; Feagin 2010) and racial profiling to criminalize immigrant populations, even though the mechanisms by which this occurs claim to be race-neutral, or colorblind (Bonilla-Silva 2009). We argue that the criminalization of immigrants relies on the racialization of identities through multilevel social processes and practices that, through the interaction of macro, meso, and micro levels of experience (Byng 2013), result in a racialized immigrant dragnet with spillover effects—repercussions in other areas of social life—that perpetuate racial inequalities.

## REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The history of U.S. immigration policies is imbued with racial meanings and the intent to discriminate

through exclusion and segregation since the late nineteenth century when immigration restrictions were first imposed (Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882; Ngai 2005; Page Act of 1875). This dates back to the 1875 and 1882 acts, which justified limiting Chinese nationals and others from “Oriental” countries based on immorality or for being “racially inferior,” and the racist immigrant quotas of the 1924 National Origins Act, which curtailed immigration from southern and eastern Europe. These examples illustrate how racial bias has often determined immigration laws (Golash-Boza 2012; Ngai 2005). In short, immigration policies of the last 140 years have aimed to preserve the whiteness of the population (Haney-López 2006)—in some cases based on racial fears tied to the eugenics movement (Hodgson 1991; Zuberi 2001)—and, in our current era, as racist racial projects of the state that preserve existing racial hierarchies (Aranda et al. 2014).<sup>2</sup>

### *Theoretical Framing of the Current Study*

To understand how immigration enforcement policies represent contemporary racism, we locate our study in the theoretical formulations of Eduardo Bonilla-Silva’s (1997) structural theory of racism and his colorblind racism approach to discursive practices. Bonilla-Silva argues that racism is embedded in the social structure of society, and he proposes the mechanisms by which racialization occurs and articulates which groups are central in that process. Through racialization, groups are placed in a hierarchy with “the totality of these racialized social relations and practices” constituting “the racial structure of a society” (Bonilla-Silva 1997:470). In such a system, racism becomes “common sense” (Bonilla-Silva 1997:474) and racial inequality is reproduced given its embeddedness in social, economic, and political institutions. We approach our analysis using some of his frames for interpretation in which colorblind discourse amounts to “racism without racists.” These frames include naturalization, cultural racism, abstract liberalism, and minimization of racism (Bonilla-Silva 2009). These discursive frames help perpetuate racial domination and obscure the ever-widening gap of inequality and disenfranchisement of racialized populations.

We also ground our analysis in Michelle Byng’s (2013) social process theory of race and racism. Byng argues that “racism is a social process where the meanings of race identities are traded across macro, meso, and micro levels of society. These

trades legitimate social policies, they are used to define a society as moral, and they inform experiences” (Byng 2013:708). From this perspective, the macro level refers policies and laws, the meso level captures the discursive practices or modes of “framing,”<sup>3</sup> and the micro level reflects the experiences of social actors (Byng 2013). Byng’s (2013:708) theory productively “weds racism to racialized identities” an approach that is of particular importance because it addresses the racialization of ethnic groups that is often contextual and contingent on shifting political agendas. Byng (2013:709) states, “As the meanings that are attached to a racialized identity change so does the quality of racism that is directed toward it.” This perspective models understanding of the fluidity of race at various levels of analysis and accounts for how social processes of racism can vary across time and space when race is treated as a political commodity (Byng 2013).

Combining these perspectives improves our understanding of racism as the totality of Byng’s levels, including the “process of transmitting meanings recursively across social levels” (710) yet also recognizing that these dynamics emerge from a racial social structure that is in a constant state of reconfiguring itself (Bonilla-Silva 2004). These approaches to racism lie in stark contrast to interpreting racism as a set of beliefs relegated to the realm of bigots. Recognizing the structural foundations of racism, we argue that contemporary immigration policies, particularly the immigration regime that consists of mass detentions and deportations (Dreby 2014; Golash-Boza and Hondagneu-Sotelo 2013) and policies of interior enforcement (Donato and Armenta 2011), are built upon racist structural foundations and sustained through discursive practices (Bonilla-Silva 2009; Feagin 2010).

Interpreting immigration and enforcement policies as components of the U.S. racial social system enables us to see that historical examples of immigration policies, today considered racist and “irrational,” exist well into the twenty-first century but have changed from overt to covert and thus wear the garb of colorblindness. For example, framing the issue of “illegal” immigration as a *crime* rooted in an immigrant’s choice reflects Bonilla-Silva’s (2009) frame of abstract liberalism, in which the values of liberalism (e.g., egalitarianism and individual choice) are applied to a situation without contextualization, thereby normalizing the outcome and removing the racist context. In this way, Bonilla-Silva (2009) argues that racism persists while proponents of these frames of discourse

claim to be nonracist since they are not overtly expressing racial animus. Thus, even though today these overt racial discourses and practices are shunned, racism is imbued in immigration policies, differing only because immigration is framed as a matter of legality and illegality. Although post-Civil Rights immigration policies and programs might theoretically appear race-neutral, they disproportionately affect ethnic and racial minorities negatively, particularly Latin American and Caribbean immigrants, primarily through racial profiling (Golash-Boza and Hondagneu-Sotelo 2013).

The enforcement arm of immigration policies affects members of the 1.5 generation through their experiences with immigrant policing that involves racial profiling practices and immigrant detention and removal. We demonstrate how these practices and the threats they represent to young immigrants and their kin result in chronic fear and mistrust of law enforcement personnel. We argue that the discourse of “illegality”—which fuels the criminalization of immigrants—is the lynchpin of colorblind racist policies toward immigrants that result in these racialized practices (e.g., racial profiling, detention, etc.), leading to unequal life chances in several areas of their lives (Aranda, Menjívar, and Donato forthcoming), thus perpetuating racial inequalities. To illustrate this, we examine how, as racialized actors in the immigration regime, these young adults, who came to the country during their formative years and who mostly consider themselves “American,” experience the brunt of enforcement measures emerging from legally but only ostensibly colorblind tactics that affect their families, their friends, and themselves.

## DATA AND METHODS

We draw our data from interviews with 27 undocumented young adults whom immigrant scholars have broadly defined as the 1.5 generation (Rumbaut 2004), including immigrants who experienced some education in their country of origin and some in the United States postmigration, most arriving during their preadolescence and teenage years. Our sample also includes several young adults who arrived in the United States as babies (see Table 1).

Recruitment of participants was led by a research assistant who is actively involved in an immigrant advocacy organization in Florida. A formerly undocumented immigrant himself, trained in qualitative interviewing and immigrant issues, he

conducted most of the in-depth interviews, with the remaining ones completed by two other trained student researchers. We used a snowball sampling method through Florida immigrant organizational networks and callers to a hotline for information on Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). We also recruited participants through service providers with clients residing in a low-income ethnic community.

Most of the 27 interviewees were involved in immigrant advocacy activities (e.g., by belonging to an advocacy organization or volunteering in advocacy events or legal aids clinics). All of the participants were aged 18 to 27 at the time of the interview and arrived in the United States before turning 16, with the exception of one respondent who arrived in the United States shortly after his 16th birthday. Participants came from 13 different countries, most of them in Latin America and the Caribbean with the exception of two immigrants who came from Pakistan and Nigeria. The sample included 14 individuals who were born female, 12 who were born male, and 1 transgender participant.<sup>4</sup> Three quarters of the respondents arrived to the United States by the age of 10, spending the majority of their formative years in the United States, specifically in Florida.

Florida is an interesting location for this research since compared with states in the Southwest, it is comprised of a very diverse population and its undocumented residents are largely understudied (DiPietro and Bursik 2012). Florida has the fourth largest foreign-born population among U.S. states, and it is among the states where South American and Caribbean immigrants each outnumber the Mexican population (Pew Hispanic Center 2011).

Interviews were carried out in two ways: in-person and online via Skype (video-conference). Our institutional review board (IRB) approved a waiver from collecting written consent to maintain participant anonymity, given the undocumented legal status of participants. The names of the participants are pseudonyms chosen by the interviewees. The interview guide covered several broad topic areas: racial-ethnic identity, family background and close relationships, transnational activities, educational background and experiences at school, immigration histories, experiences with and attitudes toward the U.S. immigration system, sexual identity, and emotional and psychological well-being.

We focus on respondents' involvement with immigration enforcement by examining their experiences with detention and deportation (theirs and/

**Table 1.** Key Characteristics of Respondents (N = 27).

Name	Age at Time of Interview	Age of Migration	Country of Birth	Current Residence	Highest Educational Level <sup>a</sup>	Occupation	Gender	Legal Status	Immigrant Advocacy Group
Max	22	10	Argentina	Miami, FL	College (senior)	Researcher	Male	DACA	Yes
Nico	23	9	Argentina	Washington DC (temporary); Ft Lauderdale, FL (permanent)	College/bachelor's degree	Advocacy for immigration reform	Male	DACA	Yes
Fernando	27	14	Brazil	Tampa, FL	College/bachelor's degree	Full-time organizer	Male	DACA	Yes
Alonso	25	3	Chile	Miami, FL	College/bachelor's degree	Tennis coach	Male	DACA ineligible (misdemeanor)	Yes
Pau	24	5	Chile	Naples, FL	College/bachelor's degree	Graphic designer	Transgender	DACA	Yes
Cami	25	3	Colombia	Altamonte Springs, FL	College (sophomore)	Full-time organizer	Female	DACA	Yes
Aureliano	22	9	Colombia	Miami, FL	College (unknown whether he completed his degree)	Front desk receptionist; second job, legal assistant	Male	DACA	Yes
John	20	10	Colombia	Lakeland, FL	Associate degree	Bank attendant	Male	DACA	Yes
Natalia	22	6 months	Costa Rica	Bronxville, NY (Temporary). Lakeland, FL (Permanent)	College (freshman)	Student	Female	DACA	Yes
Mario	24	16	Honduras	Miami, FL	College (junior)	Construction	Male	Undocumented and ineligible for DACA (age of migration)	Yes
Carlos	20	9	Honduras	Miami, FL	College (freshman)	Construction	Male	DACA	No
Ana	23	15	Mexico	St. Petersburg, FL	High school (ninth grade)	Student	Female	DACA ineligible (did not complete high school)	No
Jasmin	18	<1	Mexico	Tampa, FL	High school graduate	Babysitter	Female	DACA	Yes
Lucia	22	9	Mexico	Auburndale, FL	College (freshman)	Student	Female	In deportation proceedings	Yes

(continued)

**Table 1.** (continued)

Name	Age at Time of Interview	Age of Migration	Country of Birth	Current Residence	Highest Educational Level <sup>a</sup>	Occupation	Gender	Legal Status	Immigrant Advocacy Group
Paloma	24	6	Mexico	Plant City, FL	College (junior)	Full-time organizer	Female	DACA	Yes
Alex	20	12	Mexico	Miami, FL	College (freshman)	Part-time student	Male	DACA	Yes
Oscar	22	<1	Mexico	Naples, FL	College (freshman)	Bank associate	Male	DACA	Yes
Isabella	23	3	Mexico	Dover, FL	Some college (one year)	DACA coordinator	Female	DACA	Yes
Steve	23	<1	Mexico	Naples, FL	Some college (two years, Mexico)	Unemployed	Male	DACA ineligible (did not maintain continuous U.S. residence)	Yes
Maria A. Tony	22 18	10 6	Mexico Nicaragua	Auburndale, FL Miami, FL	High school graduate College (freshman)	Retail Researcher	Female Male	DACA Legal permanent resident	No Yes
Carolina	26	15	Nigeria	West Palm Beach, FL	College (junior)	Nursing assistant	Female	DACA	No
Alyssa	27	1	Pakistan	Fort Lauderdale, FL	College/working on second bachelor's degree	Paralegal	Female	DACA	Yes
Elena Kathy	24 27	14 10	Peru Trinidad and Tobago	Miami, FL Miami, FL	College (senior) College (year unknown)	Full-time organizer Unemployed	Female Female	DACA DACA	Yes No
Jenny	23	13	Venezuela	Doral, FL	College (sophomore/junior)	Tutoring/retail	Female	DACA	Yes
Kate	24	6	Venezuela	Hallandale, FL	College (sophomore)	Customer service	Female	DACA	No

Note: DACA = Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals.

<sup>a</sup>In parentheses, when available, current grade level if enrolled in school.

**Table 2.** Undocumented Population, Apprehensions, Detentions, and Deportations (2012) (ranked by unauthorized residents).

Country of Origin	% Unauthorized Residents <sup>a</sup>	% Apprehensions <sup>b</sup>	% Detentions <sup>c,d</sup>	% All Removals <sup>b</sup>	% Criminal Removals <sup>b</sup>	% Noncriminal Removals <sup>b</sup>
Mexico	58.79	69.73	64.40	73.17	75.72	70.86
El Salvador	6.04	5.78	6.55	4.45	4.33	4.56
Guatemala	4.90	8.60	10.62	9.22	6.75	11.47
Honduras	3.15	7.61	8.47	7.51	6.91	8.06
Philippines	2.71	0.14	N/A	0.11	0.15	0.08
India	2.27	0.24	N/A	0.13	0.08	0.17
Korea	2.01	0.09	N/A	0.08	0.09	0.07
China	1.84	0.36	0.42	0.18	0.10	0.26
Ecuador	1.49	0.67	0.81	0.41	0.35	0.46
Vietnam	1.40	0.20	N/A	0.01	0.01	0.02
All others	15.40	6.59	6.45	4.72	5.51	4.00
N	11,430,000	643,474	477,523	419,384	199,445	219,939

<sup>a</sup>Baker and Rytina (2013).

<sup>b</sup>U.S. Department of Homeland Security (2013).

<sup>c</sup>Simanski and Sapp (2013).

<sup>d</sup>Available data from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) only report detentions for the top 10 countries. Philippines, India, Korea, and Vietnam are not in this list and, thus, we do not know their percentage of all detentions. The four countries not included in the table that are on the DHS list are Dominican Republic (0.89%), Jamaica (0.50%), Nicaragua (0.45%), and Cuba (0.44%).

Note: N/A means that the data were not available.

or that of close relations), their perceptions of enforcement practices, and the consequences of being an undocumented immigrant. We pay particular attention to how these practices have affected their everyday lives, their families (which often include U.S. citizens), and their future prospects and hopes. Ultimately, we argue that the status of “illegal immigrant” subjects these young adults to racial practices that result in inequalities, despite the fact that enforcement measures use race-neutral, colorblind language that has been upheld all the way up to the Supreme Court.

## FINDINGS

### *Enforcement Discourse, Detention, and Deportations: From Overt to Covert Racism*

Today’s immigration policies contrast with those prior to the Civil Rights Era in that they are framed using the discourse of illegality rather than that of race. For example, whereas the discourse related to enforcement and deportations targeted “wetbacks” in the 1950s and 1960s, this racially derogatory term has been replaced with the term *illegal* since the 1970s (Ackerman 2013), thereby removing race

from the issue altogether and instead referring to immigration as a problem of illegal border-crossers. The term *illegal immigrant* “is the direct result of politicians, activists, and government agents working to shape the debate in this direction” since the 1970s (Ackerman 2013:73). As such, policies such as “attrition through enforcement” embody colorblind, “commonsense” approaches to immigration control (Plascencia 2013:95) rather than the blatantly racist, yet similar racial removal project, “Operation Wetback,” in the early 1950s.

Despite this change in discourse, immigrant enforcement policies are colorblind racial projects of the state. The era of mass detentions and deportations in recent years has led to racial outcomes given that, with the exception of Salvadorans, Latino and black immigrants are disproportionately represented among those being apprehended, detained, and deported from the country when compared with their shares of the undocumented population, as Table 2 illustrates.<sup>5</sup> All non-Latin American countries are underrepresented in these measures when compared with their proportions of the undocumented population.

What are the consequences of these racialized apprehensions, detentions, and removals for young immigrants and their families? We focus on the

experiences of our participants and the effects the immigration regime has on them in the next section.

### *Policing Immigrants and the Fear of Deportation*

Previous research indicates that immigrant young adults and their family members are afraid of driving. Contrary to public workplace raids and more recently the “silent” home raids of the last 15 years, being pulled over for a driving violation ushers these immigrants into the detention-to-deportation pipeline due to Section 287(g) agreements and the Secure Communities program (Donato and Rodriguez 2014; Stuesse and Coleman 2014). Section 287(g) of the Immigration and Nationality Act put in place a provision whereby Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) created partnerships with local police departments after 9/11, giving officers various authorities that previously were afforded exclusively to immigration agents. Similarly, the Secure Communities program, implemented in 2008 and coordinated by ICE, chiefly aims to accelerate deportations through the joint efforts of federal, state, and local agencies. Under this program, someone arrested for a minor traffic violation could be held if local police suspect he or she is undocumented, which would result in data sharing with the FBI and ICE to match the fingerprints of the person pulled over with those in immigration databases.

Once immigrants are in police custody, they can be held while their immigration backgrounds are checked, and, if found to be undocumented, they are likely transferred to Detention Centers, which sometimes are located in isolated areas—hours from their homes (García Hernández 2011)—or detained in county jails until their orders for removal are processed (Immigration and Customs Enforcement 2014). This essentially eliminates any possibility for family visits with immigrants while in detention or for making necessary arrangements for impending deportations (Androff et al. 2011). Because of these realities, many in our sample were apprehensive about driving for fear of being pulled over and arrested. This was most pronounced when they discussed their undocumented immigrant parents.

Cami is a 25-year-old Colombian-born immigrant who has lived in central Florida since she was 3. Cami, a college sophomore, related the following:

Back in 2007 . . . we got pulled over and I had previously mentioned she [her mother] had already been stopped for driving without a

license before. . . . Because they saw in her record that she didn't have a driver's license and continued to drive, she ended up being arrested that day. Then [she was] taken to the local jail and there they saw that she didn't come up in the system 'cause she didn't have any status. She didn't exist. She was transferred to a detention center a few hours away from our house. Ultimately, [she] was deported 4 months later for having no status.

Cami explained they were not speeding but instead were slowing down at a light when the police officer did a U-turn, drove behind them, and pulled them over on their way to school. Like Cami, many in the community fear driving and being pulled over and the possible consequences of a stop during which police request immigration documents. Participants believed that police racially profile drivers they chose to stop. Their fears are not unfounded; research has shown that in these stops, markers of foreignness (e.g., country of origin, language use, and legal status) have taken on greater salience in officers' arrest narratives after the implementation of 287(g) agreements (Donato and Rodriguez 2014). In Cami's case, the police were stopping someone they had previously ticketed for a similar infraction. With Secure Communities, ICE has the authority to recommend that local police detain “suspects” who are shown to be in the country without proper documentation until they can initiate deportation proceedings (U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement 2012b). Thus, when examining the driving-to-deportation pipeline we see the importance of racial profiling tactics that hone in on markers of foreignness. Skin tone, too, plays an important role, which we will examine shortly in more detail.

Overall, immigrants' fears of being pulled over and experiencing their worst-case scenarios, including profiling and the outcomes of an arrest (e.g., detention or deportation), were not unfounded, as evidenced with Cami's mother. Although it was not Cami herself who experienced the brunt of the immigration enforcement regime, Cami's life changed because of it. Research has found that immigrant detention and deportation result in significant disruptions for the families left behind. More specifically, separations in immigrant families have been found to result in increased symptoms of mental health problems among children who remain without their immigrant parents (Pottinger 2005). Androff et al. (2011:87) argue



that these events can be so traumatic that the “fear of deportation itself results in emotional stress” and that this extends into heightened fears of arrest (see also Dreby 2014). Cami’s experiences show how race and racialized identities are institutionalized in the structure of society through enforcement policies with devastating consequences for her family and for her own mental health, which she shared with us. Speaking about the four months when her mother was jailed and then deported, Cami said, “I don’t know if I blocked it out or I don’t really remember. Honestly, I don’t remember those four months of that whole experience.”

Cami graduated from high school during her mother’s detention. Six years after her mother was deported, Cami visited her through a fence separating the U.S.–Mexico border—the only place they could reunite—for 12 hours over the course of two days. It was another four years after that before Cami’s mother could apply for re-entry into the United States. The use of Secure Communities to detain Cami’s mother is a clear example of macro-level immigration policy crashing into Cami’s life, breaking up her family. In sum, a daughter lost her mother’s presence in her life for 10 years—per statutory requirement. Cami’s repression of parts of this horrible time demonstrates the emotional trauma created by it.

Cami’s story, supported by the data we presented on deportations, underscores that policies do not necessarily have to be racial in their intent for them to be racist in their consequences. As we see in the next section, immigrant young adults reflect upon which of their phenotypic attributes make them more or less vulnerable to racial profiling. However, it is their deportability (De Genova 2002) as a class of people that subjects them to these enforcement measures in the first place.

### *Deportability, Racial Identities, and Race*

Many of our respondents were sharply aware of the racial profiling that often led to arrest, detention, and deportation. This awareness created much anxiety for those in our sample, which was only slightly alleviated by having DACA status—legal presence that gives them permission to work in the United States and a stay of deportation for two years—because they continued to fear for their family members and friends. Moreover, the levels of fear they experienced fluctuated, yet endured, as they acknowledged that the fate of DACA was uncertain and they felt nervous about the prospects of losing “legal presence.” As a deportable

population, hearing news about raids and deportations unnerved them.

Paloma, a 24-year-old Mexican-born young woman who came to the United States when she was 6 and worked for an immigrant advocacy organization, discussed events in Homestead, Florida, a town south of Miami with a large proportion of Mexican immigrants:

“Homestead is a big area where a lot [of] raids happen . . . there’s a lot of farmworkers. It’s something that shouldn’t happen. . . . There [are] 1,100 deportations at least every day and the [Obama] administration is not doing anything to stop that. Kids are being separated from their parents.”

Paloma implicated police profiling in accounting for those who get caught up in the immigration dragnet, adding that when undocumented immigrants’ rights are violated, they are reluctant to report anything to police for fear of their own arrest:

“Right now I have several cases and those [are] the ones I know of. In Tampa there is so many people whose rights get violated because they are undocumented and they are scared to report to the police, just because they don’t think they can do it and sometimes even the Spanish-speaking police are the ones that treat them the worst.”

Although Paloma was the only young immigrant to make the point that Latino police officers are “the worst,” we must consider that this may be a product of the racialization of undocumented immigrants across levels of analysis. At the micro level of analysis, the stigma of being undocumented can be associated with markers of Latinidad, particularly among Mexican populations or Latinos mistaken for Mexican (Aranda et al. 2014). This stigma, particularly the anti-immigrant discourse in the media—or the meso level of analysis according to Byng (2013)—may affect *documented* immigrants (as well as Latino U.S. citizens) as they may want to deflect the stigma of illegality so as to mitigate potential discrimination (Lewin-Epstein and Levanon 2005). It is possible that Paloma’s reference to Latino police being harder on immigrants than those from other racial-ethnic backgrounds reflects this wish to disassociate from that stigma—an example of how discursive practices shape interactions within a racial social system.

Alex, a 20-year-old college freshman, came to Miami from Mexico City at the age of 12. He, too, spoke about the Homestead raids and how they created fear, affecting his own family:

There have been many instances where my parents actually don't go to work because we do get info that there is a checkpoint or that there is raids and stuff like that. For the last 6 months or so, just recently, they have been working at Homestead and Homestead has had many raids continuously. If we do get information that there is a checkpoint or raid they don't go.

The fear that rumors of raids produce is so real that parents do not show up for work, children miss school, and the police become people to avoid. Alex recounted his terror when his father was pulled over by a police officer, and Alex had to translate for him:

I was scared, I was really scared. I was about to break down into tears when the police officer pulled up to the window. I was shaking the entire time. As I was translating, my voice would break. I was so nervous of what was going on and when they said, "Oh, you guys are fine, nothing is going on," I asked the officer, "Is there any issue or whatever?" . . . "Are we in trouble?" And the officer was like, "No, no it is a routine stop, everything will be fine." It calmed me down, I was really concerned as to what was going to happen. . . . It's [being undocumented] really difficult. It's affected me in a way that I'm afraid that maybe one day I won't see them [parents]. Just like . . . I haven't seen my grandparents in 7 years. What if that were to happen with my parents? . . . That would be super devastating.

These practices, participants' own experiences, and those they hear about create intense fears among young immigrants, even though some have legal presence through DACA. Alex had DACA, yet he still feared for his family and community. Even though he was not currently subject to deportation, the fact that his family was had a bearing on his sense of well-being. Fear of losing his loved ones was difficult to mitigate.

Participants reflected on the meaning of these fears, particularly when they considered their own skin color and how it factored into their chances of being pulled over and possibly apprehended. In doing so, they validated that at the core

of enforcement tactics are race and racialization processes. Max, a 22-year-old male born in Argentina who migrated at the age of 10 and is currently a college senior, noted the differential treatment received by immigrants because of their skin color and the lower likelihood of being profiled if they have a lighter skin tone. He stated:

I have friends that have gone through racism because they are Hispanic or Latino or whatever. I am a light skinned Hispanic. Hispanics range in colors and skin tones and I'm probably one of the whitest Hispanics there are. To the point where people mistake me for an American. So I do think that I had some sort of privilege in being a light skinned Hispanic. I don't get profiled as much as other people do. . . . So I do think it provides me with some kind of privilege, being light skinned.

While Latinos are racialized at the macro level of social structure through policies that target their identities, and at the meso level through public discourse (Byng 2013) that essentializes Latino "illegals" as criminals, many still recognized that at the micro level of experience, white Latinos benefit from light skin privilege. Elena, a 24-year-old full-time organizer and student who was born in Peru and came to the United States at age 14, elaborated on the advantaged position that undocumented individuals who "look" white have and how being a racial minority increases visibility and associations with illegality on behalf of law enforcement. Referring to how skin color plays a factor in her treatment in the United States, she stated,

I have met a few undocumented folks that are white, blue eyes, blonde, and they got their driver's license right away because people look at them as if they were Americans. They will never have to worry about being asked for their papers or the police stopping them or anything like that. That is not something I can get away with. A lot of it because of the color of my skin and my accent and all of that.

From the experiences of young immigrants, one can glean that the laws allowing police officers to act as immigration agents have contributed to structural racism and an awareness of how immigrants' own racialization (including skin color but also markers of foreignness) in the United States mattered for their safety and ability to avoid enforcement measures. Important to consider

though, is that Latinos are a multiracial population, which is often mirrored within family units. Thus, even if one family member benefits from light-skin privilege, she is still indirectly at risk if other family members are darker and more likely to be profiled.

In short, racial profiling in the name of keeping the nation safe from “illegals” has created a pipeline into the immigration regime (e.g., through arrest, detention, and deportation). As a result, even though many of our respondents had DACA at the time of the interview and thus personally were exempt from deportation temporarily, they continued to experience much fear of police, particularly since they feared for their loved ones who did not have such a status. This affected their ability to plan for the future and to feel secure and, in some cases, it destabilized their families.

Kate is a 24-year-old woman who works in customer service. Born in Venezuela, she came to the United States at age 6 and is a college sophomore. When relating her mother’s fear of driving without a license, Kate expressed helplessness: “I felt powerless to help her. There was nothing I could do for her. There is nothing I could do to make her feel better.” Now that Kate has DACA, she is less fearful for herself:

“Now, yes. I don’t feel like I . . . I can feel like I can walk on the street and be ok. If someone pulls me over I can show them my ID and it’s current. Before, no. Before, I used to feel very insecure and like someone . . . like someone was going to wake me up and take me out of my dream place and I was going to wake up in my nightmare again.”

Nonetheless, Kate was still fearful—perhaps less about her immediate future, but certainly about the future in general:

I worry about it all ending. I worry about the time when it comes to renew my status where they will say, “We don’t think it’s worth it,” and they [will] just cancel [DACA status] and everything that I have worked for up to this point will be erased. It will be as if it never happened and I will be back to square one. It’s going to be like I woke up from a dream.

Potential raids and stories of deportation generate fears that make undocumented immigrants more vulnerable to generalized anxieties and isolation due to fear of going out. This often affects

workplace interactions, education, and family lives, as is evident in the next section. Similar to Gonzales and Chavez’s (2012:262) account of the 1.5 immigrants in their study who equated finding out about their undocumented statuses to “awakening to a nightmare,” Kate, too, equates losing DACA as “wak[ing] up in my nightmare again.” This is a powerful metaphor that conveys the depths of despair that young immigrants feel when thinking about living as an undocumented immigrant or, as Gonzales and Chavez (2012) conceptualize, in a state of abjectivity.

In the new immigration enforcement regime, the policies and programs that have been enforced criminalize immigrants (Dowling and Inda 2013; Little and Klarreich 2005), further leading to isolation and marginalization, creating heightened states of anxiety, and ultimately, for some, resulting in detention and deportation. While the mainstream discourse on immigration has been one of legality versus illegality, the consequences have been racial, as we see that Latino and black immigrants are overrepresented subjects of enforcement and note that there are differences in how the policies affect them depending on their skin color and racialization. Moreover, although white Latinos can sometimes deflect the suspicion that their darker counterparts experience through racial profiling, when we examine the numbers of detentions, removals, and deportations, as discussed in Table 2, Latinos as a whole remain disproportionately represented in those apprehended, detained, and expelled from the United States. In this regard, some Latino immigrants may be able to capitalize from their situational white privilege as it allows them the ability to pass for white (Roth 2012), but at a macro level of analysis, situational white privilege has diminishing returns. In other words, Latinos, and anyone associated with Latinidad by accent or perception of foreignness in spite of whiteness are treated as a deportable population (De Genova 2002). Moreover, the discourse of illegality reflects the institutionalization of the criminalization of immigrant Latinos, which we argue is a racist state racial project, as it perpetuates racial inequalities through its practices and their spillover effects.

### *Enforcement Spillover Effects: Reproducing Racial Inequalities*

The realities of living under surveillance and the fear of being subject to enforcement practices affect members of our sample as individuals and as

members of larger family units. This “enforcement-first regime” has been found to have spillover effects into other areas of their lives (Aranda et al. forthcoming). Returning to Kate’s story, the fears and anxiety that stemmed directly from their perceptions of heightened enforcement measures had dire consequences for the family as a whole:

There is always that tension where they [her parents] always feared that something was going to happen and we had to go back. Always that desperation of trying to figure out a way to become legal in this country. There was never a time where they were . . . where my parents were ever comfortable with being illegal in this country. And it seemed that every time they found a solution, something went wrong or they didn’t qualify or it was over. They didn’t have that program anymore. For them, it became incredibly frustrating and that is pretty much why their marriage ended.

She continued that the undocumented status of her family has

“definitely made life a lot harder. My family worries about us all the time—something happening to us or someone just coming in and just taking us away. They will not know where we are for a long period of time or taking us to those prisons that they talk about.”

The toll that stress, fear, and anxiety take on immigrant families can be devastating, as in Kate’s family, where her parents eventually divorced. But there are other ways in which families are affected, particularly when one parent has been jailed and/or deported. Cami, whose mother was detained and eventually deported, had to deal with the aftermath of her mother’s removal. It affected her well-being and left her in a state of limbo as she and the rest of her family determined how to pick up the pieces. Considering her turmoil, Cami, as well as other undocumented young adults, showed remarkable resilience. When asked whether she has ever felt sad or depressed, she stated,

Very sad. But not depressed. The way I explained it to people before is it’s borderline depressed. I could almost be there but I am not quite. That was back in 2007 when I did graduate from high school and [that] was the same year that my mom was deported. . . . That time period was very difficult for me seeing that my life wasn’t moving

anywhere and knowing that my talents and the potential I had, were just working behind a cash register. Those were the times that things were very difficult. Trying to figure out what happened with my family. My mom wasn’t here. I didn’t have my mother’s physical support here. Trying to decide the other decisions that our family [had to make], of staying here or relocating. It was that time that I was very, very sad.

The emotional well-being of these young adults is at stake given the effects of enforcement in all areas of their lives. As Gonzales and colleagues have suggested, becoming undocumented has far-reaching consequences for young immigrants’ psychosocial development and overall life chances. The *absence of belonging* of undocumented youth is the result not only of being denied a legal status in the country but also of lacking a place in the “cultural symbolic order as individuals” (Gonzales, Suárez-Orozco, and Dedios-Sanguinetti 2013:17). This abjectivity (Gonzales and Chavez 2012) is among the “costs of racism” (Feagin and McKinney 2003) that can perpetuate inequalities.

Pau is a 24-year-old college graduate, identifies as transgender, and is unemployed and lives with their parents. Born in Chile, Pau’s family moved to the United States when Pau was 5 years old. The valedictorian of their high school graduating class, Pau spoke about being undocumented and how it affected them:

Well it’s been a huge impact and it is still ongoing. You know, right now I’m part of a mixed status family and for . . . 15 years all of us were undocumented and then 18 years my parents and I were undocumented and currently, right now, I’m the only undocumented person in my household. How has it affected me personally, I think I’m very . . . I have some psychological traumas going on specifically about my self-worth. My worth as a person, sometimes I feel like I shouldn’t even apply for a job because I have no experience and I look from left to right and I look at what my peers have been doing in the past 2 years, almost 3 years out of school. Some of them are already getting their master’s or they are getting their Ph.Ds. and I’m like, “Oh crap, here I am sitting in my parents’ house, without a stable job, I can’t move with my partner, I have no money.” All of these different things that for me are specifically [sic] huge detriment. It is a scary thought to think about [what] my future is going

to be like. . . . We feel that we have been robbed of all of this time and now we have to make up for it and we don't know how.

Pau feels like their lives have been on hold, particularly Pau's career. Even though Pau is college-educated, as a past valedictorian, their aspirations were clearly higher than what was achieved. With Pau's life on hold, and their inability to advance in life, the prospects look dim. For every year that Pau was not able to launch a career, there are lost wages, a growing lack of background work experience, and a considerable lack of health insurance privileges. Pau related that they had not seen a doctor since childhood. With piling disadvantages, now Pau's family faced the prospect of losing their home, the only place where Pau really felt safe, although also the place where Pau had come to feel isolated. More broadly, enforcement policies that push immigrants into the shadows of our society reinforce the disadvantaged group position that is shared by others similarly affected by fear of engaging in civic life. It also affects their access to basic needs, such as health care, among others.

Tony, a 22-year-old Nicaraguan-born college freshman who moved to Miami at the age of 6 was in a similar situation as Pau, lacking access to basic needs. Tony's mother was deported two and a half years previously to Nicaragua, after which she relocated to Spain. As a result of her removal, Tony needed to earn money and considered dropping out of high school. A friend from the advocacy group to which he belonged talked him out of it. Nonetheless, Tony was in a precarious position for he had to move out of his home and in with a cousin, a high school dropout. His cousin was the only relative in the United States willing to offer him shelter, and he conveniently lived in Tony's school district. However, with no parental figure in the home, many of Tony's basic needs went unmet. Tony told of times when he had to ask peers in the advocacy group for food. The food insecurity and the possibility of dropping out of school kept Tony in a structurally disadvantaged position, even though, ironically, his mother's deportation made him eligible for a Special Immigrant Juvenile Visa as an unaccompanied alien minor, which he would later adjust to permanent lawful status. Rather than seeing his legal status translate into social advantages, though, he found that the spillover effects from his mother's deportation continued to shape his life chances and prospects for the future.

For all of these participants, a significant danger lies in internalizing the discourse surrounding

"illegal" immigrants and eventually doubting their own self-worth, as Pau did, which could have long-lasting consequences. We highlight one more example of how the spillover from enforcement can perpetuate racial inequalities as immigrant young adults live with the reality of being monitored by the state. Aureliano, a 22-year-old young man who worked as a receptionist and a legal assistant (and took additional odd jobs) was born in Colombia and came to Miami at age 9. He spoke excitedly about being accepted into the Honor's College at a local institution of higher education and we asked him about the day that he found out this positive news. He replied:

"Of course I remember that moment, that was the day that we . . . when we found out I was accepted into the Honor's College, but that was also the same day I found out that I had an order of deportation under my name."

Even though the barriers that Aureliano faces may not be rooted in racism or race per se, the consequences of the current immigration enforcement system will seriously jeopardize his education because it will make difficult his ability to feel safe during the commute to attend classes, and in the long run, they may affect whether he will complete his education given the unexpected ways in which this regime infiltrates the lives of immigrant young adults (Vaquera, Aranda, and Gonzales forthcoming). Similar to the other cases we have documented, Aureliano's situation demonstrates that enforcement policies exacerbate and perpetuate existing racial inequalities.

## CONCLUSION

Undocumented migration has been framed as an issue of legality (they broke the law!) and has resulted in the expectation that should immigrants fail to abide by the U.S. legal code, they will be subject to enforcement measures. The consequences are that inequalities among Latinos and between Latinos and other undocumented populations are generated and reinforced. In this regard, we argue that immigration policies and programs of enforcement discriminate against Latinos and other racialized immigrants and their families as a lesser class of people—similar to the proclaimed "racial inferiority" and "undesirability" of the Chinese in the 1800s.

As have other studies reviewing enforcement (Donato and Rodriguez 2014; Golash-Boza and

Hondagneu-Sotelo 2013), our findings indicate that components of today's immigration enforcement regime, such as detention and deportation, rely on racial profiling, which leads to increased likelihood of Latino and black immigrants being detained and deported compared with their white and Asian counterparts. Thus, U.S. immigration and enforcement policies embody mechanisms of racial exclusion and removal that have become the new racial policies of a country that considers itself to be in a "postrace" era. Moreover, our findings indicate that even though immigrants who are white might have situational advantages (e.g., reduced racial profiling), nonetheless, they are disproportionately negatively affected by macro-level state policies that have designated them and members of their families as a deportable population and by meso-level discursive practices that criminalize them and induce fear and anxiety in their lives, making them doubt their self-worth. Young adult immigrants fluctuate between fearing for their own futures, particularly because of the unpredictability of their DACA renewal, and fearing for their loved ones who are often not eligible for deportation relief. The fear and anxiety have spillover effects into other realms of their lives, such as education, work, relationships, and mental health, including self-esteem. Moreover, increased enforcement breeds isolation rooted in the fear of being apprehended and can limit immigrants' opportunities for social mobility.

We place these findings in a broader context in which the construction of the illegal immigrant gained momentum after the Civil Rights Movement (Ackerman 2013) for it used a colorblind discourse that maintained pre-Civil Rights racist practices. Framing the debate of immigration today as an issue of abiding by a legal code is a colorblind mechanism of a racial social system that perpetuates laws that exclude, segregate, remove, and expulse Latino, brown, and black people and any group that has been racialized at the macro and meso levels through policies and political discourse that have "othering" effects (Byng 2013) from the mainstream institutions of this nation. This, in turn, suggests that it is not race that guides immigration policy but rather laws (Bonilla-Silva 2009). By this logic, undocumented immigrants have brought on their own marginalization and criminalization by making the "choice" to migrate illegally to the United States.

Although not reflected in our sample—given that participants live in Florida, where there is smaller Mexican population than other states—Mexicans are

overrepresented among undocumented immigrants. The colorblind approach that emphasizes the illegality of border crosses and criminalizes this population neglects the centuries of integration that the United States and Mexico have shared, particularly since the border "crossed Mexicans," thereby incorporating Mexican nationals as U.S. citizens. Despite this history of integration, dominant narratives claim that the culprits for increasing numbers of undocumented immigrants in the United States are individuals who choose to cross illegally rather than the historical, structural, and institutional linkages between both countries (Massey et al. 2002). Through these narratives, Americans find themselves supporting enforcement practices that emphasize and legitimize racial profiling in the name of keeping them safe from "criminals."

The legal codification of immigrant criminalization affects young immigrant adults in particularly harsh ways. Fear, anxiety, and first-hand experience with the new immigration regime can traumatize young adults and their family members. The resulting isolation can be paralyzing as these young people often internalize what they hear and how they and their families are treated. This lies in stark contrast to those who argue that our racial policies (Civil Rights gains) have become the nation's immigrant integration policies (by helping the second generation to integrate into various societal institutions) (Kasinitz et al. 2008). Although this may be the case for certain U.S.-born children of immigrants, we argue that U.S. immigration policy has become the nation's racial policy in that it excludes (by barring admission and backlogs in applications for visas); it segregates (through isolation and through detention); it expulses (through deportation); it stratifies (by discriminating and relegating some groups to the shadows of social life and barring their entry into mainstream institutions); and it is racist toward racialized populations when we consider the long-term implications of all of the above. Future research should examine the totality of consequences of the current immigration enforcement regime, particularly the long-term effects not just for young immigrant adults but for children who might feel even more powerless than their older counterparts.

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## NOTES

1. Over the past decade the number of removals has been rising while the number of returns has decreased. This may have implications for the type of racial inequalities that are produced.
2. By racial projects of the state, we draw from Omi and Winant's (1994:71) work to mean the ways in which race is constructed and reformulated historically through "competing political projects, through the necessary and ineluctable link between the structural and cultural dimensions of race in the U.S." Although not all racial projects are racist, a racial project "can be defined as racist if and only if it creates or reproduces structures of domination based on essentialist categories of race" (emphasis in original) (Omi and Winant 1994:71).
3. Byng's (2013) focus on discursive practices falls in line with the "frames" that are used in examining racial discourse, such as Bonilla-Silva's (2009) frames of colorblind racism and Feagin's (2010) white racial framing.
4. Our transgender respondent did not identify with one gender over another. When referring to this respondent, we use the word *they*.
5. DHS (U.S. DHS 2013:103) defines *removals* as "the compulsory and confirmed movement of an inadmissible or deportable alien out of the United States based on an order of removal. An alien who is removed has administrative or criminal consequences placed on subsequent reentry owing to the fact of the removal." *Criminal removal* is defined as "persons removed who have a prior criminal conviction" (U.S. DHS 2013:115). Since 2008, criminal removals exclude "criminals" removed by Customs and Border Protection (CBP); CBP ENFORCE does not identify whether aliens removed were criminals. Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security, ENFORCE Alien Removal Module (EARM), February 2013, Enforcement Integrated Database (EID), November 2012 (U.S. DHS 2013:115).

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## AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

**Elizabeth Aranda** is Associate Professor and Chair of the Department of Sociology at the University of South Florida. She co-authored *Making a Life in Multiethnic Miami: Immigration and the Rise of a Global City* (with S. Hughes and E. Sabogal, 2014) and is author of *Emotional Bridges to Puerto Rico: Migration, Return Migration, and the Struggles of Incorporation* (2007). She has published articles in *Gender & Society*, *The Sociological Quarterly*, and recently co-edited two special issues of *American Behavioral Scientist*.

**Elizabeth Vaquera** is Associate Professor in the Department of Sociology at the University of South Florida. Her work has appeared in *Social Science Research*, *The Sociological Quarterly*, *Child Development*, *Ethnicity and Disease*, among others peer-reviewed journals. She coauthored *Education and Immigration* (with G. Kao and K. Goyette, 2013). For more information visit [www.elizabethvaquera.com](http://www.elizabethvaquera.com).