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HOW LATINO ANTI-BLACKNESS UPHOLDS RACISM IN THE UNITED STATES: A COUNTERSTORY BOOK REVIEW OF TANYA KATERÍ HERNÁNDEZ'S *RACIAL INNOCENCE*

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How Latino anti-Blackness upholds racism in the United States: A counterstory book review of Tanya Katerí Hernández's *Racial Innocence*

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In this piece, the author uses counterstorytelling as a research method to write a book review of Tanya Katerí Hernández's recently published book, *Racial Innocence: Unmasking Latino Anti-Black Bias and the Struggle for Equality.* Specifically, in this counterstory, the author created two composite characters, Alberto and his mother, Lola, made up of arguments from the book to engage in a real and critical dialogue about the anti-Blackness amongst Latinos in the United States. Drawing on Hernández's argument that Latino anti-Blackness upholds racism, the author uses this counterstory to illustrate the various ways Latinos enact anti-Black ideologies and practices to deny Black people good experiences in public spaces, a quality education, work opportunities, housing, and physical and psychological safety. The author argues that counterstorytelling allows him to make research accessible—digestible and understandable— to his community and other Communities of Color who continue to be systematically excluded from academia and knowledge production in higher education.

During the Summer of 2022, I attended the Latina/o Studies Association Biennial Conference at the University of Notre Dame; the conference theme was "Centering Blackness, Challenging Latinidad." One of the discussions that I attended was titled "Author Response to Readers' Response to *Racial Innocence: Unmasking Latino Anti-Black Bias*," Tanya Katerí Hernández addressed several observations and comments put forth by other scholars about her newest book that sheds light on how Latinos uphold racism through their anti-Black cultural prejudices and discriminatory practices (Hernández et al., 2022). As the discussants were detailing the harsh reality of the anti-Blackness that exists amongst Latinos, as proved thoroughly in Hernández's (2022) book, I was able to relate to those statements. So, this conversation about *Racial*

Innocence made me reflect on the various ways my own community upheld racist views about Black people. For example, the empirical data in the book discussed during the panel at the conference reminded me of some of the observations I made growing up in Oxnard, California, a predominantly Latino community. In Oxnard, there were (and still are) some Black families, yet many Latinos distanced themselves from them and would not speak positively about the Black families. When I spent time with my Black friends, my Latino friends made fun of me because I was trying to "act Black." Furthermore, whenever I did something as a joke that would get me in trouble, like throwing eggs or toilet paper at houses, my Black friends would be to blame for this behavior and not me. While these are a couple of my early memories of how racism and anti-Blackness appeared within my Latino community, there are many other examples that I can name as part of the Latino's racism and anti-Blackness.

After reading *Racial Innocence,* I wanted to write a book review as it was extremely relatable to my growing-up experiences and thought-provoking. I come from a family of storytellers, and stories have allowed me to simplify seemingly complex topics like racism and anti-Blackness. Specifically, I chose to write this book review as a counterstory because I wanted people from my community to read this story, and possibly see themselves in the characters and dialogue. There are two main purposes for this book review: First, this is a book review on *Racial Innocence* to shed light on the anti-Black beliefs and ideologies that exist in the Latino community. Second, I use counterstory as a method to illustrate that storytelling is a useful tool for research. With this counterstory book review, I hope to inspire the application of different, nondominant research methods to analyze pressing topics in Communities of Color.

A Brief Introduction to Counterstorytelling

Critical race theory (CRT) research methodologies and epistemologies help better understand the experiences of People of Color without undervaluing their voices, ultimately challenging traditional forms of research (Pizarro, 1998; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Specifically, storytelling as a research method is very important because it disrupts harshly misleading, oppressive stories, narratives, conventions, and understandings of People of Color that were established by empowered groups long ago (Delgado, 1993). In this way, storytelling becomes a useful tool for historically and currently marginalized People of Color because "they invite the listener to suspend judgment, listen for the story's point, and test it against his or her own version of reality" (Delgado, 1989, p. 2440). Solórzano and Yosso (2002) focus carefully on the usefulness of counterstorytelling in debunking myths about Communities of Color, which they define as a method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are seldom told (p. 32). Furthermore, Solórzano and Yosso argue that counterstorytelling exposes, analyzes, and challenges the majoritarian stories of racial privilege with the potential to further the struggle for racial reform. As such, numerous scholars have used counterstorytelling as a research method to illuminate the experiences of People of Color, who a readily marginalized, excluded, and misrepresented in stories (Alemán, 2017; Cook & Dixson, 2013; Gonzalez, 2022a, 2022b, 2023a, 2023b, 2023c; Martinez, 2020; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

It is especially important to note that counterstories are not just made-up stories to blow off steam by venting or ranting regarding one's own racial struggle, and that counterstories are grounded in experiential knowledge and other forms of data (Ladson-

Billings, 2013; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Solórzano and Yosso (2002) explain that one of the many ways to write a counterstory is to create composite characters to help tell a story. Specifically, Solórzano and Yosso suggest that counterstories are created using various sources of data like books, peer-reviewed articles, reports, personal experiences, observations, and so on that have been compiled, examined, and analyzed. To this, Martinez (2014) argues that composite counterstorytelling "differs from fictional storytelling by critically examining theoretical concepts and humanizing empirical data while also deriving material for counterstory's discourse, setting, and characters from sources" (p. 37). Adhering to the tradition of counterstorytelling, in the story that follows I used counterstory as narrated dialogue to develop my ideas "through exchanges between characters that represent and voice contending viewpoints about contemporary issues" (Martinez, 2020, pp. 34-35).

Specifically, in this story, I created two composite characters, Alberto and his mother, Lola, who are used to engage in a real and critical dialogue about the findings in Tanya Katerí Hernández's (2022) *Racial Innocence: Unmasking Latino Anti-Black Bias and the Struggle for Equality*. In essence, this counterstory is a book review. There are headings throughout the story with the book's actual chapter numbers and titles. There are also page numbers from *Racial Innocence* included for readers to reference the book for more information about the specific claims being discussed in the story. Some quotes are taken directly from the text, while other examples are also taken from the text, but they are paraphrased. Aligning with a traditional book review, I included those headings, so you can follow along and understand how Hernández builds and supports her argument. To challenge dominant and oppressive notions of the English

language, I decided not to italicize or translate the Spanish included in this story. Also, I decided to use "Latino" in this story rather than "Latinx" [1] because Hernández does so in her book. She explains the reasons she used "Latinos" instead of "Latinxs" were because she did not want to confuse readers who are not familiar with the term "Latinx" and because it sounds awkward in English (see p. 32).

Counterstory

"¡Amá! Listen to this!" Alberto erupted through his house's front door after being dropped off by the school bus.

"¡Ay Mijo! Is everything okay?! What happened?!" Lola, Alberto's mom, responded franticly while getting up from her chair at the kitchen table.

Chapter 1: What is Latino Anti-Blackness?

"Turns out, Latinos CAN be racist after all!" Alberto said excitedly as he pointed to his copy of Tanya Katerí Hernández's recently published book, *Racial Innocence: Unmasking Latino Anti-Black Bias and the Struggle for Equality*.

"You scared me… Don't be bursting through my door like you are the police with a search warrant," Lola sat back down. "Last month, you persuaded me into believing that Latinos, and other colored people, couldn't be racist because they do not gain advantages in the system of racism… o algo así."

"It's People of Color," Alberto corrected his mom. "Y sí. I did tell you that. Throughout the year in my Ethnic Studies classes, we have discussed various racism theories. For example, a very popular theory says Latinos, like other People of Color,

[1] I prefer the term "Latinx" because it is a gender-neutral label for Latino/a and Latin@. Using Latinx disrupts traditional notions of inclusivity and ultimately shapes institutional understandings of intersectionality (Salinas & Lozano, 2017).

could be prejudicial and discriminatory, but they could not be racist because they do not hold power, nor do they benefit systematically from a racist society such as the United States."

"Sí. Andale. That's what I remember you told me," Lola pushed in her reading glasses to continue her word search puzzle.

"I know that's what I told you, but we just finished reading *Racial Innocence*, and it challenges that theory," Alberto walked over to the fridge to get the water pitcher.

"Ummmm," Lola hummed as she searched for the "Resemblance" in her puzzle.

"The book is really good!" Alberto filled his glass with cold water. "In this book, Tanya Katerí Hernández, the author, argues that although Latinos do not reap systemic benefits from racism, their firm anti-Black cultural prejudices make them active participants in the denial of access to important life opportunities to Black people like a home, a job, a quality education, an entrance into public spaces, and freedom from violence because of their race" (see p. 11).

"So, basically, just because Latinos do not benefit from racism, it doesn't stop them from upkeeping and ensuring the system of racism is functioning properly through their anti-Black cultural prejudice?" Lola asked rhetorically, knowing she understood Alberto.

"Yes!!!" Alberto took a sip of his water. "Non-Black Latinos are hella anti-Black. They don't like Black people—whether African, African American, or even Afro-Latinos. Latinidad erases Blackness and Indigeneity."

"Hmm-hmm. Tell me something I don't know. I've seen plenty of instances where non-Black Latinos get confused when a Black Latino speaks Spanish fluently," Lola smirked.

"Yes! Latinos are part of the problem of racism, and they use the idea that they are racially mixed with Indigenous people or have also been racially discriminated against to prove their innocence of being racist," Alberto explained.

"Ahhh. The name of the book is *Racial Innocence*. Ok. That's clever. Que bueno," Lola remarked.

"Yes, and one of my favorite lines in the book is this…" Alberto walked over to his copy and opened it to page 16. "When it comes to Latino racism, the family is the scene of the crime."

Lola immediately paused her word search and slid her glasses off her face, "Oh no! Mentiras. Not in my home. Maybe at Abuela's house, but not my house."

Alberto sipped more water.

"We have heard Abuela say some racist stuff like 'maldito sea este pelo' when referring to dark curly hair, 'negra sucia' when referring to Black women, or even let's 'mejorar y adelantar la raza' by marrying whiter partners to ensure any form of Blackness, or Indigeneity for that matter, is eradicated from our family lineage (see p. 18). But not me. I have learned to challenge those ideologies. I tried my best to raise you differently," Lola confessed aloud.

"Can I keep it real with you?" Alberto asked innocently.

Lola stared at him silently.

"You may not be as racist-sounding as Abuela, but you still hold anti-Black views," Alberto whispered timidly.

"How so?" Lola asked.

"Growing up, you frequently told us phrases like 'salte del sol' to avoid getting darker or 'tan ojos bonitos de color' when referring to someone with blue eyes. Those are anti-Black phrases! After all, our black and brown eyes are colored, too. Yet, we don't get those phrases because society values blue and green eyes, which are associated with white people. Latinos have a strong obsession for whiteness, and some will not admit it, at least not aloud."

Lola thought about it for a long five seconds and then slid her glasses back on, "You're right, mijo. I could see how those phrases are anti-Black. I think it's important to recognize that there is a pervasive Latin American/Caribbean racialized denigration of curly African hair as 'bad' and straight European hair as 'good,' along with the distaste for dark skin (see p. 19). Such twisted logic can result in Latinos discriminating against those who have African characteristics and features, even if they are members of our own Latino family."

"And that's why I appreciate you so much, Amá! You're so open-minded, and you're always willing to change," Alberto walked over to give his mom a hug and then walked back to his water.

He continued the conversation, "What makes things worse is that these anti-Black attitudes leave the house and make their way to the streets, schools, bars, and other public spaces. Hernández suggests that the anti-Black cultural prejudice held by Latino families is so deeply internalized that it seeps out into other realms of life that

have significant material, social, psychological, and financial impacts on the lives of Black people (Afro-Latinos and African Americans) in metropolitan diverse cities across the United States like Miami, Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, El Paso, and even Puerto Rico."

"How does Hernández prove her points in her book?" Lola asked in curiosity.

"Well, Hernández identifies as Afro-Latina. She provides a powerful testimony about how she is a daughter of an Afro-Puerto Rican mother who was almost given away by her family because of her Blackness to explain why she wrote this book (see p. 139). She used her personal experiences of being discriminated against to fuel her investigation of this topic. As a law professor, she proves her case by using accounts of discrimination in national and local news, electronic databases, and court cases concerning anti-Black racial discrimination, along with interviews she did with civil rights leaders, attorneys, educators, and self-identified Afro-Latino respondents."

"Wow. Seems pretty legit," Lola commented, impressed by such a rigorous research project.

Chapter 2: "No juegues con niños de color extraño" Playing and Learning in "White" Latino Spaces

"It's very legit!" Alberto supplemented his mom's observation. "Hernández provides so many examples of how non-Black Latinos exert their anti-Blackness to discriminate against Black people, even those who are dark-skinned, especially Afro-Latinos. For example, Latinos discriminate against Black people in public spaces as clerks and managers refusing to serve African Americans and Afro-Latinos at gas stations or restaurants."

"I could see this being true at restaurants," Lola said. "We see it on the news every other day. I saw that a Denny's restaurant that was managed by a Latino was scrutinized because of their anti-Black practices. The manager had a 'black out' company code word for when they felt were too many Blacks in the restaurant at one time (see p. 40). That manager later got fired, and the Black people who were discriminated against were awarded financial compensation for the racial exclusion they experienced."

"Yup! Hernández provides numerous instances in which Latinos discriminate against Black people—African American or Afro-Latinos—in various public spaces, including schools," Alberto added.

"Oh… Schools, too?" Lola said sarcastically.

"Ha," Alberto fake laughed at Lola's sarcasm. "Latino teachers and principals discriminate against Black students by denying them resources and opportunities and refusing to consider their perspectives in schools. Not only that, but Latino students also discriminate against Black students. For example, there was an instance talked about in the book where two white Latinas bullied and jumped an African American student because she was Black and another instance where Latino students called an Afro-Latina 'black and ugly'" (see pp. 50-51).

"That's sad," Lola stated depressingly.

"Messed up!" Alberto took another sip of his water.

Chapter 3: Working in the USA

"It's unsurprising. I see it in the workforce," Lola admitted. "I've personally seen how Latino anti-Blackness has resulted in discrimination towards African Americans and

Afro-Latinos in the workforce, which has resulted in them not being hired for jobs they are qualified for, being paid lower wages, constant harassment while at work, and denial of promotions."

"That was a topic that was discussed in the book!" Alberto said excitedly.

"I'm sure it was," Lola sided with his response.

He continued, "Hernández shows that even when Black people bring up claims of discrimination in the workforce, many Latino jurors and judges themselves can be equally confounded by allegations of Latino anti-Black discrimination when they presume that Latino workplaces are not as susceptible to racial discrimination because of the predominance of Latino employees. Moreover, Latino cultural attitudes presume that racism is a North American phenomenon that is more exceptional in Latino contexts" (see p. 68).

"In other words, the judicial presumption is that Latino coworkers in diverse workplaces cannot be bearers of racism?" (see p. 67) Lola asked for clarification.

"Yup!" Alberto replied nonchalantly.

"Ha! I call bullshit on that one," Lola chuckled at the absurdity. "It may seem as if Black people don't get discriminated against at work because they aren't even given a chance to work at most Latino-ran workplaces and businesses. Remember that dealership owned by the Latino around the corner from Abuela's house?"

Alberto nodded, "The one with the Mexican flag hanging in the front, right?"

"Yes! That one," Lola conferred. "The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) investigated and filed a case to address the pattern and practice of systemic discrimination against Black people at that dealership. Well, they found

significant evidence about the Latino owner's stated policy of not hiring African Americans as salespersons and his promotion of a racially hostile environment. The evidence included testimony regarding racist commentary at the workplace that the Latino owned condoned, such as 'I don't care how good that N---r is, he will never work here'" (see p. 77).

"SHEESH. No shame in his game," Alberto shook his head.

"Sin vergüenza," Lola adjusted her glasses to look for her next word in the puzzle.

Chapter 4: "Oye Negro, You Can't Live Here" Latino Landlords in Action

After another drink of water, Alberto broke the silence, "I mean Latino anti-Blackness is the reason why we don't have any Black neighbors."

"Hmmm-hmm," Lola agreed.

"There's a whole chapter in the book dedicated to how Latino landlords and homeowners enact practices grounded anti-Blackness to discriminate against African Americans and Afro-Latinos by not selling to them (or selling above asking price), telling them their vacant rooms are occupied, or not giving them access to amenities and facilities like the pool, jacuzzi, gym, and so on."

"Aah!" Lola circled "Temporary" in her puzzle. "I am sure Latino landlords and homeowners discriminate against African Americans and Afro-Latinos to ensure their neighborhoods remain free of Blackness and stay as white as possible. I know Abuela would've done the same thing."

"It's so funny you say that," Alberto smiled. "I thought of Abuela when Hernández wrote about 'Mrs. Murphys.'"

Lola frowned without saying anything.

Alberto explained, “Hernández explains that our national law and many state laws prohibiting racial discrimination in the rental and purchase of housing are purposely exempt landlords who are owner-occupiers of small-scale multiple dwelling units (such as a building of four units or fewer). Legislators enacting the national Fair Housing Act wanted to protect the hypothetical ‘Mrs. Murphys’ of the world from being forced to share their intimate settings with races they did not like” (see p. 87).

“Wow! Ésa no me la sabía.” Lola admitted.

“For Latino landlords and apartment managers who discriminate against Black people, Hernández calls them ‘Mrs. Moraleses’” (see p. 88), Alberto laughed.

Lola accompanied his laugh, “Abuela is definitely a ‘Mrs. Morales.’”

“¡Qué lástima!” Lola sucked her teeth. “It’s just too bad. Because Latino residents choose to limit their interaction with Black neighbors, racial stereotypes are left undisturbed (see p. 101). And then the cycle of anti-Black stereotypes and discrimination continues.”

Chapter 5: Physical Violence: The Criminal Justice System’s “Brown” versus Black Dynamic

Alberto shook his head up and down in agreement, “Not only are these racial stereotypes of Black people left undisturbed, but these same ideologies and preconceived notions lead to violence and murder.”

“So true, mijo,” Lola affirmed his statement empathetically.

“Latino anti-Blackness has terrorized Black people and literally killed them,” Alberto told his mom in a severe, firm voice.

"George Zimmerman, a Peruvian American, killed an unarmed Black teenager Trayvon Martin" (see p. 103), Alberto recounted.

"Latino Texas state trooper Brian T. Encina escalated a routine traffic stop into an intensely violent encounter that ultimately resulted in the death of Sandra Bland" (see p. 117), Lola added.

"True…" Alberto acknowledged his mom's important observation. "Latino police officer violence inflicted on Black people does not always result in death. Sometimes it's constant harassment. Hernández details a few convictions of police officer misconduct, one of which was that of a Latino police officer named Raimundo Atesiano. Atesiano was a police chief in Biscayne, Florida, with a policy of directing his officers to pin any unsolved crimes on random Black people. His mandate to his officers was that 'if they [Blacks] have burglaries that are open cases that are not solved yet, or if you see anybody Black walking through our streets and they have somewhat of a record, arrest them so we can pin them for all the burglaries.' He also used a designated code to alert officers when a Black person 'was seen in the city and needed to be stopped and confronted.' Chief Raimundo Atesiano's campaign against Black people was not halted until he was sentenced in 2018 to three years in prison for encouraging wrongful arrests" (see p. 118).

"¡Eso es tan asqueroso!" Lola smacked her lips in disgust. "But you know what, it's not just Latino officers who inflict violence on Black people. It's also Latino gangs. The news recently reported that the Latino street gangs had been the most violent perpetrators of hate crimes in the Los Angeles region, primarily against African Americans" (see p. 110).

"I read about this in the book!" Alberto exclaimed excitedly. "Latino gangs attempt to remove African Americans from 'Latino spaces.' I think it's called 'turf defense' or something like that. Turf defense is when Latinos try to keep a space 'Brown' (see p. 113). For example, some Latino gangs have pled guilty to firebombing the Ramona Gardens public housing complex in East Los Angeles to drive Black residents out of the Boyle Heights neighborhood. The Latino gang firebombing was part of their mutual commitment to eradicating Black people from the predominantly Latino Ramona Gardens complex" (see p. 107).

Chapter 6: Latinos and the Future of Racial Equality in the United States

"That's sad and depressing," Lola remarked in a sad tone. "Does Hernández at least conclude her book with some hope?"

"Yes," Alberto gulped another drink of water. "Hernández concludes the book with an important conversation about successful coalition-building efforts to disrupt anti-Blackness in Latino communities and urges Latinos—across all fields, occupations, and careers, especially legal actors such as judges and lawyers—to acknowledge their anti-Black ideologies that drive their cultural prejudices and discrimination practices, which ultimately uphold a racist society."

Lola rolled her eyes, "I mean, that makes sense to me."

"I feel like an important contribution put forth by Hernández relates to the conversation as to whether Latino should be considered a race or an ethnicity in the United States Census," Alberto mentioned unsolicitedly.

"Don't get me started with that basura Census," Lola complained.

"I know, right," Alberto stated, siding with his mom. "While some argue that making Latino a racial category would resolve any confusion resulting from having to check the 'Non-white Hispanic' box in the Census, Hernández suggests that collapsing Latino/ Hispanic ethnic identity into the list of racial categories with Black in particular risks obscuring the number of Afro-Latinos and the monitoring of socioeconomic status differences of Latinos that exist across race" (see p. 126).

"Ahh. I see the problem," Lola speculated aloud.

However, Alberto interrupted her before she could share her thoughts verbally, "This is very important because Hernández has shown through empirical data that darker-skinned Latinos and Afro-Latinos have lower life chances and opportunities. So, it is important for Latinos to be able to select the racial category of 'Black.'"

"I was going to say something like that," Lola winked at Alberto.

He continued without catching his breath, "To conflate all Latinos into one racial category of 'Latino' will not allow us to recognize and effectively address the Latino racism that is a deeply intertwined intersection of biases based upon color, race, and ethnicity" (see p. 62).

"Just because someone is Latino does not mean they cannot be racist," Lola fueled Alberto's train of thought.

"Got that right!" Alberto preached to his mother. "It is important for Latinos to recognize that being "Latino" or a "Person of Color" does not automatically make you "woke" about racial justice, and it certainly does not make you *racially innocent* of being a racist. You can be Latino and uphold racism through your anti-Black prejudices and discriminatory practices."

"Y sí. Being a man of color doesn't automatically make you innocent of upholding a sexist society. Now go wash your hands so you can help me with dinner," Lola put her pen down and walked over to the kitchen sink.

"You're right," Alberto followed her to the kitchen sink.

Outro: Insert "discussion and conclusion" sections here

I decided to title this section "Outro: Insert 'discussion and conclusion' sections here" because often people, specifically academics, read my counterstories and expect "discussion" and "conclusion" sections at the end of the counterstory as if they should follow a "traditional" or dominant research paper format. Perhaps folks are expecting a step-by-step manual on what to do next. I struggle with this part a lot. Not because I cannot think of recommendations or implications. That's easy for me. In this case, it's simple—stop upholding white supremacy and racism with your anti-Black ideologies and practices! Instead, tell your dark-skinned prima that her skin is beautiful. Tell her that her curly hair is gorgeous. Tell her that her dark eyes are lovely.

I mainly struggle with the "discussion" and "conclusion" sections because my counterstories should be sufficient. They are perfectly "non-traditional" or non-dominant research. Why do I have to do anything else? Why do I have to make them "traditional" or dominant by including a conclusion to rationalize my research method, summarize findings, and propose recommendations? Academics expect me to justify why my research is valid and credible and why you should find value in my work. Research validity and credibility are concepts rooted in white supremacy to uphold white supremacist research approaches and perspectives. Why do I have to tell you what you should've taken from this story? Ask yourself, what did you learn from this counterstory?

How can you do things differently at work, school, or home to ensure you are not perpetuating anti-Black ideologies and practices? I tell counterstories to make people from my community, Oxnard, think critically about society, work, school, or other settings. I tell counterstories to make people from my community feel good about their darker skin. I tell counterstories so people from my community can enjoy reading research. So they can relate to it. So they can engage with it. So they can see themselves as knowledge producers because our counterstories produce knowledge and serve as valuable lessons for our communities.

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