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Unruly Borders, Bodies, and Blood: Mexican “Mongrels” and the Eugenics of Empire

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ABSTRACT

This essay connects the lynching of Mexican men and poor Mexican women to marriage between wealthy Mexican women and Anglo settlers to argue that these practices composed bodily rhetorics that sanctioned the colonization of the now-U.S. Southwest. Lynching cleared the land, making room for white ownership of the annexed territories through murder and spectacles of extreme violence. Inter-marriage between wealthy Mexicans and Anglo settlers transferred lands into white hands through more genteel means. Together, lynching and inter-marriage established the “whiteness of property” and suggested the inevitability of Manifest Destiny.

Much of the rhetoric surrounding the Trump administration’s 2020 efforts to confirm Amy Coney Barrett as a United States Supreme Court Justice centered on Barrett’s identity as a mother of seven children. During her nomination ceremony, Trump called Barrett a devoted mother who “opened her home and her heart” by adopting two Haitian children (“Remarks” 2020). His framing of Barrett’s maternal altruism jars against his 2018 demands that revisions in immigration policy eliminate special considerations for people from Haiti, a nation he deemed a “shithole,” and his subsequent threats to issue an executive order ending birthright citizenship (Vitali, Hunt, and Thorp 2018; Wagner, Dawsey, and Sonmez 2018). This contrast has not been lost on critics who note that Trump referred to the children of immigrants as “anchor babies” during his presidential campaign (Campoamor 2020). In a 2015 interview, Trump suggested that birthright citizenship wasn’t guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment, stating, “We have to start a process where we take back our country. Our country is going to hell” (R. Flores 2015).

Overtly, Trump’s remarks regarding Barrett’s maternally established qualifications seem an endorsement of “legal” immigration and familialism: Barrett and her husband are well-to-do citizens whose adopted children will not be a burden on the state.¹ However, when examined through a critical rhetorical

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lens, Trump's comments invoke virulent attitudes about immigration that target Latinx and Caribbean immigrants. Namely, immigrant children from "shithole nations" are welcome to a better life only if incorporated into a traditional white nuclear family, and large immigrant families threaten the nation due to their high fertility rates and unassimilability while the white family's large numbers are admirable (Chalfin 2015; Chomsky 2018). Trump's praise for Barrett also reflects a reliance on rhetorics of motherhood and family to sustain empire. Such rhetorics have been used to justify conquest, colonization, and violence against racialized Others throughout our nation's history.

Despite clichés describing the United States as a welcoming nation of immigrants, neo-nativist discourses ostracize recent arrivals especially when they come from predominantly nonwhite countries. Beyond stoking fears regarding immigrants' refusal to assimilate, these discourses create stereotypes that frame immigrants – particularly immigrant women – as hyper-fertile and sexually licentious. Set against declining fertility rates among white United-Statesians and an ever-greater differentiated labor market that demands a constant influx of immigrant labor (Massey and Magaly Sánchez 2010, 9), these racist fantasies inure views of women of color immigrants as predisposed to an animalistic fecundity that threatens the birthright of "real" Americans via ethnic invasion. These stereotypes also affect non-immigrant women of color whose ethnic origins mark them as Other (Roberts 1997).

These rhetorics affect Mexican and Mexican-origin women in particular, tying their ethno-racial, cultural, and citizenship status to a "natural" propensity for childcare and domestic labor (Romero 2008, 1365–7). These views have led medical professionals to claim that Mexican women breed like rabbits, and even advocates have deemed them victims easily exploited due to their regressive cultural values (Gutiérrez 2008, 52; Lira and Stern 2014, 16; García 2017; Sanchez 2016). These stereotypes reemerge with vigor during times of economic crisis and social turmoil, signifying centuries of discourse classifying Mexican and Mexican-origin people as less-than-human savages whose spread must be contained to protect the futurity of whiteness and/as nation.

To illustrate, this essay turns to the 19th century post-Guadalupe Hidalgo era when white settlers themselves proved immigrants in a "new land," taking up this set of concerns to show how Anglo unease regarding race, birthright, and power linked citizenship and familial relations to the fundamental integrity of the nation. These anxieties manifested as a rhetoric of embodiment that cast Mexicans as racially ambiguous, giving rise to gendered embodied rhetorics that rewrote the ethno-racial histories of landed Mexican women so they could marry Anglo settlers and exposed Mexican men and poor Mexican women to mortal violence through lynching. Sanctioned intermarriage and lynching functioned as strategies of social organization that reified for white settlers the unstable boundaries between races and nations, serving as

a reproductive technology that encouraged or stigmatized procreation based on the demands of empire. Emerging at a time when the United States was fulfilling its self-authorized (and self-authorizing) vision of Manifest Destiny, these rhetorics determined who would embody the nation's entelechy and who should be purged, setting the stage for current deployments of racist/racializing rhetorics based in white nationalist reproductive and familial ideologies.

Race, Rights, and Reading History

When the Treaty of Guadalupe–Hidalgo ended the Mexican-American War and ceded over half of Mexico's territory to the United States, an estimated 50,000 Mexicans found themselves living within a new cultural order where they were the majority population but a political minority (Jiménez 2010, 6).² Mexicans were now United States citizens by law and not explicitly constrained by many of the laws targeting Black, Asian, and Indian peoples. However, they experienced a distinctive vulnerability marked by ambivalence that framed them by turns as friendly neighbors and allies to white settlers or as savages needing to be civilized (Alonso 2004, 462). This inconsistency hinged primarily on Mexicans' mixed Indigenous and European ancestry, which meant they might be regarded as white legally but viewed as suspect by association with Indians, since, unlike enslaved peoples, issues of sovereignty and treaty rights established Native Americans as a racial and political Other with some degree of power (Molina 2014, 36).³ As a “mongrel” population, Mexicans did not fit neatly into racial and political categories maintained by scientific and colonial discourses that organized peoples within hierarchical white supremacist taxonomies. Thus, when white settlers arrived in the newly ceded territory, they found themselves vastly outnumbered and in competition for resources and land with these fellow citizens who had inhabited the area for generations but whose social status now proved ambiguous and problematic within a white United-Statesian rubric of power.

The issue of Mexican racial status mattered because race, then as now, determined a person's right to claim land and goods – and the right to claim it from others through conquest. Writing about “Whiteness as Property” by Cheryl Harris, the canonical essay that established how whiteness functions as a rights-granting possession, Anjali Vats states that “the history of racism in America is deeply intertwined with the history of property” (Vats 2019, 509). Whiteness and white supremacy are maintained through a variety of rhetorical performances in spaces construed as ideologically neutral, implicating “not only land but also the politics of knowledge, labor, human health, and communities of care” (Vats 2019, 510). The connections between property as material assets and property as exclusive racialized rights vary depending on the time and space of a particular performance, but in that way, they function together to ensure the ascendancy of whiteness. By seemingly accommodating

diverse neoliberal notions of difference, these performances allow particular kinds of ethnic bodies to strive for full inclusion at the expense of other, less suitable ethnic bodies (Puar 2007, 25–36). Impressions of the “less foreign” body and “too foreign” body maintain white supremacy by preserving the boundary between white and ethnic bodies as the former aims for full rights by patrolling the latter.

The ambiguous racial status of Mexicans during the post-Guadalupe Hidalgo era provides a clear example of how such regulation happens by design whether or not the acceptable Other realizes their role in maintaining the ascendancy of whiteness and/as property. In the case of Mexicans in the newly ceded territories, the ascendancy of whiteness and/as property distinguished between Mexicans that were passably white or utterly strange. Anglo settlers often deemed wealthy Mexican women “Spanish,” therefore white and marriageable, and gained land through politically expedient marriages. At the same time, Anglo authorities and civilian mobs lynched Mexican men and some poor Mexican women and used the threat of vigilante violence to evict their Mexican neighbors so that their lands could be seized. Through the use of what Natalia Molina calls “racial scripts” (Molina 2014, 21–3), Mexicans experienced symbolic, bodily, and geographic colonization with significant reproductive consequences.

Below, I examine the rhetorics that rendered Mexicans racially ambiguous, a status that could be exploited in contrasting ways; although, due to such ambiguity, the specter of racial and national contamination proved a constant threat in the figure of the mongrel. Then, I analyze sanctioned intermarriage and lynching as rhetorical processes that authorized connections between whiteness and property rights and functioned to ensure the futurity of whiteness as/of property in the ceded lands. They did so by delimiting who might live, marry, and bequeath a name and title, and who might be stripped of their assets and even killed.

The linking of these figurative-corporal-spatial processes to rights, race, and parentage bear further investigation by scholars of rhetoric and reproductive justice. These rhetorics have become part of a painful, largely forgotten history, especially given the relative rarity of surviving documents, images, and news stories that contest the dominant narrative from the perspective of Mexicans specifically (Gonzales-Day 2006). Further compounding this problem, bodily and spatial rhetorics cannot be recorded solely in words and may not be recorded at all if such preservation does not benefit the colonial power. However, as Jacqueline Royster and Gesa Kirsch note, research methods that include tacking in and out – “attempts to connect the past, present, and future” by engaging history and its current consequences dialogically – and developing a sense of place – “the physical, embodied experience of visiting place” – can help make this work possible (Royster and Kirsch 2012, 78, 92).⁴ Therefore, here I apply an approach that includes tacking in and out and

using my own experience of Mexican racialization in the Southwest to analyze fragments culled from work by researchers like William D. Carrigan and Clive Webb and Ken Gonzales-Day. This tack proves necessary due to the scarcity of primary documents that explicitly attend to Mexican lynching or privileged Mexican-Anglo intermarriage. Perhaps as more such records from the period are uncovered, researchers may begin to do this painful but important history justice.

Making “The Mongrel”

During the period between 1850 and 1930, as lands seized through the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo were incorporated by the United States the racial classification of Mexicans took on unique significance, as the ideological basis of empire. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo gave Mexicans in ceded territories the citizenship afforded free white persons and denied to Asians and Africans, though they were viewed as “little removed above the [Black people]” (Gómez 2005, 91; Hollinger 2003). In Washington, D.C., legislators debated whether Mexicans could be disqualified from citizenship and civic participation on racial grounds (Perea 2003, 295). White settlers exercised consubstantiality in contrast to Mexicans, framing themselves as a separate, superior race known as “Anglo-Saxons,” claiming the “innate superiority of the Saxon-Teutonic branch of the white race” (Rodríguez 2008, 96). Disgusted authors claimed that white America was becoming “racially degraded by historic and familial ties to Indians and Africans,” calling Mexicans “a constant reminder of the frontier’s potential for ‘unfit amalgamation’ of Europeans and Indians” (Warren 2002, 1154).

Yet, Mexicans’ European lineage also proved problematic. Perceived as “retrograde . . . by virtue of their ‘mongrelized’ mestizo heritage,” Mexicans were regarded as inferior for their Spanish heritage, too (Anderson 1998, 29). Eugenicists like Francis Galton drew on European Black Legend stereotypes that painted Spaniards as cruel, mixed-race brutes to argue that the great families of Europe should practice selective breeding. They needed to counteract their own histories of mongrelization through intermarriage lest they, too, become degraded like the “superstitious, unintelligent Spanish race” (Galton 1879, 64, 359). Thus, even Mexicans’ European ancestry represented the social and biological risks posed by generations of disordered reproduction – and the need to control such pathological corruption. During the mid-nineteenth century, when Anglo settlers revitalized the Black Legend to include Mexicans, they painted Mexican men as especially prone to murder and thievery by nature and requiring (white) regulation (DeGuzmán 2005).

Moreover, the history of the Spanish colonial caste system, which hinged on racial intelligibility, compounded negative perceptions of Mexicans’ ambiguous status. Caste relied on the notion of *calidad*, accounting for the

individual's "social body as a whole" with regard to skin color, wealth, and lineage (Carrera 2003, 6), though these qualities were metaphorized physiologically in casta paintings. Casta paintings placed mixed-race families in a grid or series of panels to present "hierarchies of miscegenation" among Europeans, Indians and Africans (Olson 2009, 310). These portraits "tapped into a complex of social energy amassed from the power anxieties of elites and that aimed to allay worries about loss of control by imagining New Spain's population as divided into easily identifiable and eminently knowable groups" (314). By the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, casta paintings lost traction in Mexico because they signified "colonial renovation and regulation" rather than a nationalist body built on "citizenship evaluated through origins and authenticity" (Carrera 2003, 144). Yet their rhetoricity shows how social interactions between races fundamental to life in the ceded territories confounded a "bourgeois aesthetic that assumed (even demanded) bodily transparency" to categorize and racialize people (Chinn 2000, 6).

A case surrounding ownership of a mule, related by Major Horace Bell in 1881's *Reminiscences of a Ranger*, illustrates the use of transparency as a racial socio-scientific framework. Two Mexicans could not testify against a white man unless physiologists determined that they were white. The court sought to determine differences between "a person of pure white blood and a mongrel" (qtd. in Gonzales-Day 199) based on the evidence provided by examination of their salivary glands, lachrymal glands, and wisdom teeth. Ultimately, the men ran away. Bell's report shows how the notion of transparency affected racialization processes. Transparency relied on dividing the body into parts and functions that could (ostensibly) render an individual's nature visible, discoverable, and quantifiable (Chinn 2000, 5). The tenor of juridical and social proof also changed with empirical evidence such as eyewitness testimony taking precedence over the standing of juries and declarants. Through this process, bodies were simultaneously "de- and hypercorporealized: reduced to elements in a statistical model, and rendered visible only as a collection of physical features" (Chinn 2000, 19). Notably, the two witnesses in Bell's account had to be proven white before their statements could be considered legitimate empirical evidence, and proving their whiteness required close observation of specific body parts that signified the entire legal and social worth of an entire person. Examination of the two men was required precisely because Mexicans were racially ambiguous. If they were plainly white or not white, then no exam would be necessary; their testimony could simply be accepted or not. Like casta paintings, physical examinations tied racial identity to transparency and intelligibility even as they revealed race as a matter of social status and rights rather than mere biology.

Thus, the very notion of racial ambiguity "denaturalizes racialization and makes transparent the power structures that underlie racial classification" (Ho 2015, 5). Despite deriving from racist structures that attempt to fix distinct categories, the concept of ambiguous identity reveals the limits of such schemes. Mexicans did

not fit within the racial categories “scientifically” legitimated by naturalists like Linnaeus – Caucasian, Mongolian, Ethiopian, and American – or Blumenbach – European, Asiatic, African, American Indian, or Malay (Blumenbach 1865; Haney-Lopez 1994; McGregor 1997). Thus, racial ambiguity complicates race as an “understandable and easily identifiable entity” (Flores and Moon 2002, 184), revealing its basis in a complex of political, social, and bodily arrangements. Race is not just a social construct (Smaje 1997; Flores 2016; Omi and Winant 2005). Race and its taxonomies arise through networked “bodies, forces, velocities, intensities, institutions, interests, ideologies, and desires in racializing assemblages” (Weheliye 2014, 12), reified through bodies granted access to or restricted from material and social spaces, and granted or denied the rights that are the property of whiteness. Mexican identity destabilized these processes, too. Legal whiteness did not guarantee social whiteness; sometimes political and cultural expectations converged while at others they conflicted (Molina 2014, 17). Depending on class, skin color, and generational status, Mexicans could be “considered white in one town and not in another, white in Santa Barbara in 1880 but not in the same city in 1920, white for the purposes of naturalization law but not for the school board, or white for the 1920 census but not for the 1930 one” (Fox and Guglielmo 2012, 335). Thus, Mexicans could not be easily categorized racially or politically and in “relation to the spatial, placial, and social world” (Ngo 2016, 850). Mexicans epitomized the geographic and ontological borders of humanity defined through a lens of white nationalism, a mix of inferior races with cultural and political ties to more than one nation.

In contrast to the purity of whiteness, Mexican-ness in the post-Guadalupe Hidalgo era epitomized the threat of ontological, cultural, and political instability. Mexicans were figured as a monster – the mongrel (McPherson 2006; Villanueva 2011). As socially liminal hybrids that signify cultural anxieties and merge diverse kinds of difference, monsters are marked by “excesses” that defy categorization (Calafell 2012; Cohen 1996). Mongrels represent the danger of contamination through social, political, and bodily intercourse. The mongrel as monster provided a convenient target that allows a community to cohere in contrast to, and against, the aberration so long as its threat is contained. Two ways by which Mexican racial ambiguity was regulated was through the practices of sanctioned intermarriage and lynching, rhetorical acts that helped advance Manifest Destiny. These acts justified Anglo settlement and grounded a longstanding racial/izing rhetoric of embodiment that still conjoins Mexican racial identity, geographic space, and reproductive potential to depict a marginalized population as monstrous in the Euroamerican imaginary.

Sanctioned Intermarriage and Lynching as Embodied Rhetorics

Recent scholarship has honed attention on the forgotten history of Latinx lynching (Carrigan and Webb 2003, 2013; Delgado 2009; Gonzales-Day 2006;

Pérez 2020). Between the years 1848 and 1930, thousands of Mexicans were lynched in the Southwestern United States by Anglo mobs in displays of vigilante justice and by Anglo law enforcement like the Texas Rangers (Swanson 2020; Villanueva 2017). Tangentially, this research broaches the topic of Anglo-Mexican intermarriage to juxtapose the plight of vulnerable Mexicans with the racial privilege extended to the daughters of wealthy landowners. The histories of Mexican lynching and privileged Mexican-Anglo intermarriage illuminate complex racialization processes and practices that still render Mexicans a “racially ambiguous” group (Bonilla-Silva 2004; Gómez 2016; Santiago 2018). These histories also show to what degree race, racism, wealth, and power inform our understanding of property and reproductive rights (Roberts 1997, 5–7).

Together, lynching and sanctioned intermarriage granted settlers access to land and resources while affirming connections between whiteness and property. They also inured racial scripts that drew from stereotypes of other groups in attempts to resolve Mexican ambiguity, scripts that affect Mexicans today. In *How Race Is Made in America: Immigration, Citizenship, and the Historical Power of Racial Scripts*, Natalia Molina explains racial scripts as a kind of “shorthand” that draws upon past acts of racialization to classify a racialized group in terms of another group considered more familiar (2014, 34–36). In the case of Mexicans, these scripts drew from negative depictions of Native, Black, and Spanish peoples in service to the ascendancy of whiteness as Mexican bodies deemed too foreign were expunged through killing or eviction, while those deemed less foreign were incorporated into white families and the (white) nation.

An examination of sanctioned intermarriage highlights its contributions to making some Mexicans “lynchable” through deployment of “less foreign” bodies to regulate “too foreign bodies (Puar 2007). When Anglo men married landed Mexican women to gain land, they often deemed their spouses the descendants of Spanish conquistadores and therefore white. Although Mexicans in the ceded territories were more likely to have Native and African origins than Spanish (Gómez 2016, 90), popular accounts described elite Mexican women like Anglo women – beautiful, proper, civilized. One Alfred Robinson, who married into a Californio family, claimed that “there [were] few places in the world where ... [could] be found more chastity, industrious habits, and correct deportment, than among the women of this place” (Carrigan and Webb 2003, 421). Anglo settlers deployed the same Spanish ancestry that they used to stereotype Mexican men as criminals to safeguard the social status of their Mexican brides whose associations with property and propriety benefited white order. Elite Mexicans’ own attitudes furthered these arrangements through counterscripting, or proving they were similar to Anglos vis-à-vis practices and/or property. Mexicans viewed race as a matter of cultural conventions, and many elite Mexicans aimed to advance

Anglo colonial aims. As Anglos sought to expel Mexicans in the ceded territories because some assisted fugitive slaves, affluent Mexicans fought for the Confederacy; while most Tejanos opposed slavery, wealthy Tejanos supported its legalization (Juárez 2011, 90). White settlers' anti-Spanish sentiments and anti-Native hostility cast Mexicans as "the worst and most depraved extremes of both races and cultures" (Anderson 1998, 29). Yet the maligned Spanish "race" was still white in contrast to the Indian and the African, and through marriage wealthy Mexican women gave their spouses access to titles and deeds, in turn ascending the ranks of their own racial caste system.

The rhetorics of racial ambiguity reinforced the superiority of whites over Mexicans even as they sanctioned intermarriage between Anglo men and elite Mexican women. Due to sheer demographics, Anglo men and Mexican women surely married all the time in the ceded territories, but sanctioned marriages functioned rhetorically, socially, and politically to advance white empire. Sanctioned intermarriage authenticated elite Mexican women's whiteness regardless of phenotype, relying on "the workings of racialization (differentiation) and racism (hierarchization and exclusion)" to distinguish them from mongrels whose bodies disclosed their racial degeneracy and placed them in a primitive past superseded by Anglo dominance (Weheliye 2014, 71–72). By claiming a European lineage for their spouses, white settlers claimed spouses and their property as white. This rhetorical race play elided a long history of colonization, settlement, and struggle in the Southwest to harken back to a past where Spaniards conquered the continent and made way for subsequent conquest by other Europeans. Domination of the land transferred from one group of Europeans to another with ultimate control by Anglos marking the consummation of the colonial project.

Procreative rhetorics played a major role in this process. In the nineteenth century, during the peak of global colonial activity, sexuality became a potent metaphorical wellspring, with colonial notions of land, home, and citizenship corresponding culturally to a feminine corporeality that required protection from threats of invasion even as colonized nations were allegorized as receptive women's bodies (Law 2006; Spurr 1993). The script of the affluent white family served as a central figure in nation-building. Wealthy white women were encouraged to "birth sons who would inherit the fledgling republic" and figured as "bearers of moral guidance and virtue . . . responsible for cultivating their sons' investments in civic participation and state leadership" (Fixmer-Oraiz 2019, 16). Thus, white women were expected to produce white sons, not only in terms of lineage but also in terms of whiteness as rights and the possession of material property. Those rights included preeminence in relationships to women and the land. Unlike Native men, who had "ignorantly" and "lazily" failed to exploit the land's wealth, Anglos had the drive and ability to tame it (Black 2009; Lajimodiere 2013; Sanchez and Stuckey 2000; Stuckey and Murphy 2001). Like their Indigenous ancestors, Mexican men could not

compete with manly Anglos; as a Mexican-American War-era poem asserted, the “[Mexican] maid . . . awaits our Yankee chivalry/Whose purer blood and valiant arms,/Are fit to clasp her budding charms” because Mexican men are “sunk in sloth,” nap “some dozen times by day,” and are “somber and sad” (Takaki 2008, 177). Sanctioned intermarriage between Anglos and “less foreign” affluent Spanish women guaranteed the whiteness of property genealogically and ideologically, and provided a functional antithesis to Mexicans too monstrous to be assimilated by the national/ist project.

Those same connections between whiteness, property, and reproductive status endangered the “too foreign” Mexican, which included poor Mexican women. Since Anglo men were entitled to the land’s women who, like the land, were property to be exploited, and Mexicans’ racial ambiguity was often resolved by class status, poor Mexican women were vulnerable to violence. In 1851, Josefa Segovia of Downieville, California, was hanged as a “criminal aggressor” for killing Frederick Canon after he broke into her home and attempted to rape her (Carrigan and Webb 2003, 421). Against Anglo notions of domestic virtue, women like Josefa were scripted as “hotblooded and excessive” due to their Indigenous ancestry (Vargas 2010, 121), as hypersexual and prone to crime like Mexican men. During the California Gold Rush, Mexican women were deemed “tawny visaged creatures” who turned to prostitution because they were inherently moral degenerates, with one prospector writing that Mexican women were “just half as good-looking as cows and just about as neat” (Carrigan and Webb 2003, 421). Unlike “white” Mexican women who were chaste, assiduous, and well-mannered, these women were dark, dirty, and corrupt, the exact opposite of the angel of the home who served as the white home’s moral center and whose sexuality safeguarded the nation’s wellbeing (Fixmer-Oraiz 2015). This contrast helped to expedite settler colonization by associating women’s bodies with the land and the “true” woman’s body as one under white political and social control. Since nonwhite Mexican women had no recourse to whiteness and/as property, they were open to white masculine conquest like the continent through other means than marriage. Like the women who sought employment as prostitutes during the Gold Rush, poor Mexican women like Josefa were framed as less than decent by a combined lack of social standing, property, and domestic roles, leaving them vulnerable to violence like lynching.

Following the 1855 Rancheria Tragedy in California wherein white and Mexican bandits murdered six people, authorities destroyed every Mexican home in the area and ordered all Mexicans, including women, to leave the area or receive a punishment of 150 lashes (Gonzales-Day 2006, 36). The events following Rancheria illustrate the symbolic and physical violences that proved a constant danger for Mexicans without the counterbalance of whiteness and/as property that affluent Mexicans might draw from. Threats of lynching and corporal punishment reinforced the racial script of “Mexican as criminal”

despite the interracial makeup of the bandits since such severe consequences were justified if levied against depraved individuals. Furthermore, threats of lynching and violence drove Mexicans from the land, making room for white settlers who alone could bring order to the “wild” lands. In some areas, the lynching of Mexicans occurred at rates comparable to or surpassing those of African Americans (Ortiz 2011). Until recently, this grisly history was largely overlooked except in familial stories or as a passing fact illustrative of racialized cruelty (Anzaldúa 1987; García 2018; Juárez 2011). However, Mexican lynching, like sanctioned intermarriage, served vital political, material, and rhetorical ends in the nation-building project.

Then, as now, lynching enabled “a performance of American identity, constitutively as a practice of civic supremacy and citizenship belonging, and epideictically as a kind of racialized civic blueprint for civic life” (Ore 2019, 17). An 1853 letter from California gold miner John Eagle to his wife, Margaret, expresses a contemporaneous perspective regarding vigilante justice: “I am opposed to Capital Punishment . . . but in new settlements, and new countries, like California where there is little or no protection from the hands of such monsters in human shape, it becomes necessary to dispose of them by the shortest mode, for the safety of the community” (Carrigan and Webb 2013, 24). Eagle exhibits a typical view of the “frontier” as an empty and wild space clamoring for regulation, obscuring centuries of Native, Spanish, and Mexican inhabitation, governance, and order. As a rhetorical act, the threat of lynching enforced a disciplinary paradox: rendering Mexicans vulnerable to threats of mob violence due to their “wild” nature while suggesting they could evade such punishment if they submitted to white notions of justice like proper citizens. Much as white Southerners used lynching as a way to assert dominance over Black people, so, too, did Anglos lynch Mexicans to establish social supremacy and assert control over land and lives. However, while whites deployed lynching against Blacks to maintain their fixed nethermost social position – as “nothing incarnated” (Warren 2018, 9) – the lynching of Mexicans was determined by gender and class, like sanctioned intermarriage. Eagle’s letter shows how lynching was deemed “legally *just* . . . a practice of subsistence and survival” due to the presence of bodies construed as much “too foreign” to the white body politic.

Racism obtains through structures and practices, participating in “world-making that seeps into, emerges from, and articulates to a host of significations” (Wanzer-Serrano 2019, 468). It is this aspect of racism that lynching bolstered. Lynching hinged on a racial script empowered through public display that rendered the script “real.” The victim was a criminal dissociated from white notions of community and civility or else they would not have been lynched. White authority was grounded by these rhetorical performances. By carrying out these acts, white settlers reified whiteness as a set of exclusive rights that included the authority to define justice. Lynching killed off

unwanted elements while the threat of lynching drove away those who might compete with Anglo interests, leaving Anglos the fully-human entelechial beings entitled to the fruits of conquest – land and heirs to fulfill the nation’s destiny.

Conclusion

Today, as in the post-Guadalupe Hidalgo period of Anglo settlement of the Southwest, racial scripts provide expedient stereotypes that are used to deny Mexicans access to property in the forms of power, social and political rights, belonging, and geographic and material spaces. These scripts bolster the ascendancy of whiteness by distinguishing between “less foreign” and “too foreign” Mexicans, a difference that hinges on material privilege and lineage. These factors permit privileged Mexicans to strive for and attain an approximation of whiteness at the expense of those whose economic and cultural status frames them as outside the bounds of propriety (Padilla 1998). Mexicans, especially Mexican women, continue to be “animalized, exoticized, tokenized, and sexualized” when they go against the status quo, speak out against injustice, or fail to abide by whitestream standards of comportment (Calafell 2012, 12).

Much of this violent history continues to be ignored within dominant culture narratives, which authorize gendered racial violence against Mexicans under a mythos of equality and justice for all. This record must be further exhumed and made known because rhetorics of embodiment based in whiteness as property and advancing the ascendancy of whiteness continue to underwrite bodily rhetorics that transmit essentialist nationalist messages regarding belonging, disbelonging, and sociopolitical rights that harm real people (Heuman and González 2018). Not least among the ensuing violences facing Mexicans (and other Latinxs) due to their Othered status are sexual and physical abuse, family separation and deportation, and indefinite detainment (Hernández 2019; Hernández and Upton 2020). People deemed too foreign, too poor, too unassimilatable currently inhabit immigration detention centers in kennels typically intended for dogs – mongrels. These cages signify and substantiate the futurity of the white nation and the continuation of whiteness as property as a United-Statesian birthright.

Notes

1. The concept of *familialism* links *familism*, or the culturally-determined importance of the family unit, to capitalist concerns regarding welfare and healthcare support structures (see Boucher 2014).
2. I use “Mexican” from here on to stress that, although they were made United-Statesians by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, people of Mexican descent were still perceived as

Mexican culturally and socially. Whether made Mexican Americans by the treaty or born as Mexican Americans afterward, they were amalgamated under the generic Mexican “mongrel” figure unless “made” white. Today, many Mexican-origin people identify and are identified as Mexican despite being U.S.-born.

3. Despite many broken treaties between the U.S. and Native tribal nations, U.S. political and commercial entities were forced to recognize Indigenous sovereignty to authorize their own colonial land claims (Karuka 2019, 2).
4. Manu Karuka speaks of this issue in terms of “rumors,” which “sounding through the caverns of colonial archives . . . appear at a remove from their community of meaning and interpretation” but nonetheless give rise to interpretive communities grounded in shared experiential knowledges (2019, 3–4).

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