The Brown Threat: Post-9/11 conflations of Latina/os and Middle Eastern Muslims in the US American imagination

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Abstract   In the post-9/11 American imagination, stereotypical images of the terrorist from the Middle East and the illegal migrant worker from south of the US border consistently appear in media and rhetoric. Dominant US representations of Latinos and Middle Eastern Muslims shape not only how US government and media construes them as "Brown Threats," but also how citizens in the US interpret these minority groups as dangerous, foreign, inauthentic and brown(ed) Americans. By analyzing law, rhetoric and visual culture, the concept of the Brown Threat interrogates contemporary conflations of Latinos and Middle Eastern Muslims.
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The renaming and transportation of the black/white binary into the American/alien binary through the Patriot Act, and the consequent reinvigoration of racial profiling against 'Arab looking persons' and Muslims has been facilitated by the pervasiveness of ethnic categorization. In other words, just about any group could eventually conceivably be singled out as such, and turned, for whatever reason, into the next 'enemy within' by the Patriot Act […] The color ambiguity that permeates ethnic labeling is also important. In fact, it is uncanny how the profiling of Arab Americans

coincides with and almost substitutes the previous stereotype of the knife-flicking Latino.

Suzanne Oboler,
Latinos and the (Re)Racializing of US Society and Politics

[…] the events of 9/11 'raised the stakes' and added a new and urgent argument for confronting all perceived threats to national security, both new and old.

Leo R. Chavez, *The Latino Threat*

Conflating Brown Bodies: The Latina/o and Muslim Threats

Permeating the US American imagination, the Brown Threat refers to post-9/11 discourses that construct Latina/os and Middle Eastern Muslims[1] as dangerous to the overall social and economic well-being of the country. Pervasive US representations of Latinos and Middle Eastern Muslims abound in governmental legislation and mediatic stereotypes that come to define these two minority groups as brown (that is to say not black or white); therefore, because of the dominant racialized assumptions, they share more than one might think at first glance. Generic religious affiliations place these two groups in separate categories, and these differences frequently appear in public rhetoric.[2] However, contemporary racial and ethnic discourses define both Latina/os and Muslims living in the United States as socio-political "problems" on the rise. In this article I discuss, through twin processes of racialization and securitization, the construction of Latina/os and Muslims in dominant culture as posing a "Brown Threat" in the post-9/11 American imagination. The shared brownness of Latinos and Middle Eastern Muslims stems from racialized stereotypes, and exceptions certainly do exist; however, the focus of this article is not self-fashioning of Latinos or Middle Eastern Muslims that reflects how they think about or interact with one another. Following Said's (1978, 40) notion from *Orientalism* regarding how the Orient is created, contained and represented by dominant frameworks, I argue US media and legislation function as the overarching frameworks that establish the Brown Threat. Subsequently, combining Said's (1981, 39–40) work in *Orientalism* with his ideas from *Covering Islam* that stress "[to] compare Islam to everything you dislike, regardless of whether or not what you say is factually accurate [is part of how] Western media creates these images of Islam to reflect its view and serve its ends," I show how Latina/os and Middle Eastern Muslims are constructed by others through popular images/discourses in such a way that their stereotypical representations as undesirable minorities are given yet another dimension as they become interchangeable Brown Threats in the post-9/11 American imagination.

This notion of interchangeability among Middle Eastern Muslims and Latinos mostly comes from members of the dominant culture that are part of neither

1 The terms used to identify individuals and groups that pose a Brown Threat are contentious and can be confusing; however, no perfect phraseology exists precisely because scholars/critics are also not always consistent and they themselves use any variation of these problematic terms. Therefore, in this article, I use "Latina/o(s)," "Hispanic(s)," "Latin American(s)" and "Mexican(s)," when speaking of various individuals from the Americas. When speaking of people who are affiliated with Islam, the terms "Middle Eastern Muslim(s)," "Persian(s),"

group – however, when I discuss the Latino Comedy Project's (LCP, 2008) online skit and Maniquis and Rodriguez's (2010) film *Machete*, these are parodical examples of Latinos/Chicanos representing themselves as similar to the image of Muslim invaders/terrorists. The major limitations regarding the concept of racialized and ethnic conflations that leads to the interchangeability of these brown bodies center on visual elements. That is to say that people see members of either group and then form opinions about who they are, what religious affiliations they potentially have or from where they may originate, all based on visual stereotypes. Although Middle Eastern Muslims and Latina/os are not always brown in the conventional sense of pigmentation, the construction of these two groups by the US media and state intersect to pose a "Brown Threat." Therefore the Brown Threat suggests that the conflation of these two groups relies not only on a perceived physical similarity but also, at times, highlights an ideological construction in the United States that suggests a difference from and a danger to the current definition of white(ness) as indicative of European descent or of black(ness) as indicative of African descent. It is the vague, in between or racially ambiguous brown states of being that in the post-9/11 imagination produce the most fears and anxieties.

Analyzing the Brown Threat reveals how the profiling of Arab Americans not only echoes that of Latinos, as Oboler suggests in the above epigraph, but also helps us understand that their mediatic and discursive representations mark them as potentially interchangeable in the post-9/11 American imagination. By interchangeable I simply mean there is a chance that Middle Eastern Muslims, Arabs, Latin Americans and Latinos can be mistakenly identified for each other in differing contexts. This potential for mistaken identities relies heavily on the dominant culture's evaluation of the bodies of these group members as sharing similarly colored hair and skin; further, the idea that they allegedly speak in an accented-English also plays a key role. Oboler notes that because of this possibility of substitution in contemporary discourses, Muslims have now replaced Latina/os as public enemy number one. Both stereotypical images, Oboler's knife-flicking Latino and that of the Muslim terrorist, are gendered male in the social imaginary. Therefore, though both women and men from these groups pose threats, what I am calling the Brown Threat primarily hinges on the ideological construction of Latinos and Middle Eastern Muslims as social deviants and as cultural problems because of their non-white and non-black, male bodies.[3]

Brown represents the color most frequently associated with Middle Eastern Muslims and Latina/os. Because racialized stereotypes lead to facile comparisons between Latina/os and Middle Eastern Muslims, these groups come to pose a Brown Threat in the post-9/11 social imaginary. For example, regarding the perceptions of blacks in the social imaginary, in *Racial Formation in the US from the 1960s to the 1990s* Omi and Winant (1994) argue that there is, in fact, a subtly racist element in this substitution – in which whites are seen as variegated in terms of group identities, but blacks "all look alike." In their view, this

is nothing intentional, but simply the effect of the application of a paradigm based on white ethnic history to a racially defined Other. Blacks are thus aggregated – and treated as the great exception because they are so clearly racially identified in the United States (Omi and Winant, 1994, 22). What is interesting here is how Omi and Winant suggest that blackness, like whiteness, has become so clearly definable, or so matter of fact, in US constructions and understandings of race. My work on the Brown Threat questions where brownness, with its ambiguity and in between status, fits into this US binaristic conceptualization of race, ethnicity, citizenship and threat.

The Brown Threat suggests that after 11 September 2001, a new dimension of ethnic and racial profiling was added to the concept of US American otherness. Author and public intellectual Richard Rodriguez's *Los Angeles Times* editorial, "The 'Great Wall' of America and the threat within" also suggests what Oboler (2007, 11) identifies as the making and remaking of the "next enemy within." The connections between Oboler and Rodriguez's works are found not just in the title of the latter's piece, but also, as I show, in how both authors relate the Brown Threat to political, and by extension social, racialized constructions of national belonging and otherness. In the editorial Rodriguez writes, "After September 11, the fear one heard in America was that agents of violence from the Middle East might easily disguise themselves as Latin American peasants and trespass into our midst." Rodriguez's vague suggestion that people "heard" this notion of Middle Easterners impersonating Latin American peasants and crossing into the United States at the Southern US–Mexican border is an example of Glasser's (1999) "media effects theory." Ideas and images circulate in media frequently enough to then have effects, such as producing fear, in viewers. I argue that in the post-9/11 American imagination, fears about terrorism and illegal immigration coalesce through media and public discourse in such a way that Latina/os and Middle Eastern Muslims are constructed as posing a Brown Threat.

Returning to Rodriguez's op-ed piece, he directly references two geographic regions of origin, the Middle East and Latin America, when presenting the notion of passing and how these groups are interrelated in the post-9/11 imaginary. My analysis suggests Rodriguez also supports Omi and Winant's conceptualization of current racial and ethnic classifications in the United States, extending their debates on visual identification of racial and ethnic differences to brown Middle Eastern Muslims, Latin American immigrants and Latina/os – who, like African Americans in their example, seem to "all look alike" regardless of ethnic affiliations. However, I would like to take this point further by arguing that, beyond stereotypes related to similar coloring, popular representations of such individuals emphasize fears about how these groups will ultimately impact racial, ethnic, class, economic and religious structures in the United States.

Thus, if Latina/os and Middle Eastern Muslims are viewed as brown(ed), the logic continues that they can potentially pass for one another; moreover this passing for each other translates into broader fears about these brown bodies passing

through borders and by security officials in covert ways that have deleterious effects on US culture. Three factors shape the current construction of Latina/os and Middle Eastern Muslims as potentially interchangeable in the American imagination: the interconnected histories of Muslims in Spain and the Spanish in the New World; the legal treatment of these two minorities as white (at various points throughout American history) combined with their ideological status as neither white nor black but specifically as brown(ed); and the post-9/11 mediatic representation of both groups as foreign invaders who threaten national security and the economy.

From a historical perspective, the connection between Muslims and present day Latina/os began in Spain in the early 700s, when Muslims gained a strong presence in Spain that lasted over 800 years. During this long period, even as the Spanish sought to expel the Moors from Western Christendom, people of Spanish and Muslim descent became intertwined in an ethnic/racial mixture that resulted in the browning of Spain; this browning was not limited to physical elements but also transcended the superficial and took root in language itself. Thousands of words of Arabic origin, such as "algebra" and "almohada," place names such as Alhambra or Andalucía (from the Arabic "Al-Andalus") show the deep-rooted historic and current connections between these cultures. Thus when the *reconquista* ended and the newly liberated (and allegedly ethnically and religiously purified) Spain set out to expand its empire across the Atlantic, it brought with it physical, religious and linguistic admixtures.[4] The traces of Spain's Muslim past thus create an undeniable historic link between present day Latina/os and Latin Americans and people of the Islamic world.

By analyzing the Spanish conquest of the Americas, one can logically assume this browning process continued to evolve in nuanced ways with the encounter between the Spaniards and the natives in Mexico and Latin America. These historical overlaps between descendants of the Spanish empire and descendants of the Islamic world establish a precedent, oftentimes overlooked or forgotten, for the post-9/11 conflation of Middle Eastern Muslims and Latina/os as brown.

In the more recent past, the US Census has allowed members of both groups to officially claim themselves as "white," even though both Latina/o and Muslim populations are perceived of as brown – more specifically non-white and non-black – in contemporary legal and non-legal US rhetorical and mediatic racial conceptualizations. This legal claim on whiteness dates back to the mid-1800s with the "Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo" for Mexicans living in America at a time of fluctuating national borders. For individuals of Middle Eastern descent, debates surrounding their official status as white in America date back to the early 1900s (Gualtieri, 2009). Although both the groups were able to claim legal whiteness, this does not mean that they were readily accepted into mainstream American society. In fact their identities as legally white but socially brown produced ambivalence and ambiguity.

Debates surrounding the threats that Latina/os and Muslims pose to the "fabric of America" are by no means new. What is new, however, is how my work here

4 For more information on Moriscos and Muslims in the New World, see Cook (2008).

with the Brown Threat unmasks the stereotypes in rhetoric and media that allow for nuanced readings of and conflations of Latina/os and Muslims after 9/11. In this project, I mark out spaces where these debates converge, even if they occurred at different historical moments. Expanding the work of contemporary scholars in the fields of Latino Studies, Latin American Studies and Middle Eastern Studies, I frame the Brown Threat in relation to their works but also go beyond what the current academic rhetoric suggests. Therefore, this argument critically analyzes popular rhetoric and the way language and media reflect current cultural conceptualizations of brown bodies as posing a Brown Threat.

Framing the Brown Threat through Contemporary Discourses

The Brown Threat as a theoretical concept is indebted to Santa Ana's (2002) *Brown Tide Rising*, Chavez's (2008) *Latino Threat Narrative*, Majid's (2009) *We Are All Moors*, Gualtieri's (2009) *Between Arab and White* and Alsultany's (2007) article, "Selling American Diversity and Muslim American Identity through Nonprofit Advertising Post-9/11." All of these authors present valuable information regarding stereotypes about Latina/os or Muslims throughout history and how they are represented in law, media and rhetoric. However, what is different about my argument in the Brown Threat is that like Majid's analysis, my work lies in the intersections of a combined understanding of these two minorities in light of how others frame them in post-9/11 discourse. I investigate the dual processes of racialization and securitization that connect Muslims and Latina/os in discourse and media.

Santa Ana's work in *Brown Tide Rising* focuses on Chicanos/Latinos as a brown community whose population and presence in America is undeniably on the rise. He identifies metaphors used in everyday discourse that label this rising tide as dangerous and threatening. For Santa Ana (2002, 9), "common metaphors" hold the utmost importance when studying the representation of otherness as expressed throughout broader culture. Common metaphors naturalize the perception of individuals and groups in the United States. That is to say, when the public repeatedly sees images/words that substantiate Latina/os and Muslims as threatening, they not only begin to believe them but they also accept such connections as natural. Whether visual or textual metaphors, Santa Ana demonstrates how these ideas have made an impact on contemporary public discourse in the United States and my work in the Brown Threat builds upon his focus on metaphorical language.

Chavez's work on what he calls the "Latino threat narrative" also influences my critical approach to the Brown Threat in the American imagination. In *The Latino Threat*, Chavez (2008, 9, 36) argues that by playing on media stereotypes, politicians are able to restrict immigration with new policies targeted

at dealing with "the immigration problem" and by suggesting that these immigrants are possible criminals and terrorists. This point arises in Maniquis and Rodriguez's (2010) film *Machete*, a genre film that is one of my two examples of Latino self-representations. The film is also rich with cultural criticism targeting the treatment of Mexicans and, Mexican-Americans, and other brown bodies along the southern border. Robert De Niro's character, Senator John McLaughlin, gives a re-election speech in which he associates Mexicans with terrorists and invaders, arguing that: "every time an illegal dances across our border it is an act of aggression against this sovereign state [Texas], an overt act of terrorism." Maniquis and Rodriguez parody exactly the point Chavez is making about political discourse as establishing the "Latino threat narrative." In addition, it highlights the framing of immigrants from Latin America in post-9/11 discourses through similar rhetoric as Middle Eastern Muslims – that is, by connecting their threat to terrorism and by reinforcing their construction as actively invading the United States by both reflecting and informing popular fears and perceptions. US political discourse forms part of a larger cultural logic whose rhetoric and images establish Latina/o minorities as a danger interchangeable with the figure of the terrorist – a figure, as I noted before, almost exclusively constructed as a Middle Eastern Muslim man.[5]

Anouar Majid, in *We Are All Moors*, links scholarship in Middle Eastern Studies with studies of the Americas. The major contribution his book makes is linking the parallel treatment of Muslims and Hispanics as undesirable minorities in the United States and/or Europe. In addition, he argues that the histories of people of Spanish descent and Middle Eastern descent intersect since the ways these minorities are treated appear to echo each other, and also both groups share physical similarities. He says their treatment as undesirable minorities can, in ways, be read as interchangeable in first-world contexts, but he goes even further to say their bodies, in many instances, can also be read as interchangeable. Majid (2009, 142) writes:

> When I argue that Muslims and Hispanics are sometimes interchangeable […], I mean it literally. There are at least two Hispanics – a Brazilian in London and a Colombian in Florida – who were shot dead in the wake of fears about Muslim terrorists because they behaved suspiciously. No one seems to say it, but it is clear that the two had the right (or is it wrong?) profile, *such as dark skin and black hair*. (emphasis mine)

Majid's presentation of the ideological and potential physical interchangeability of Latinos and Muslims undeniably influences my analysis of the Brown Threat. The fact that two Latin Americans suffered violence by members of dominant white culture (both in the United States and Europe) because they were assumed to be Muslims – and thus terrorists – highlights the conflation of Latina/os and Middle Eastern Muslims in the post-9/11 American imagination (and beyond).

Another important scholar whose work helps to theoretically ground the Brown Threat is Sarah Gualtieri. In *Between Arab and White*, Gualtieri discusses

5 See Shaheen (2001) and subsequent documentary with the same name released in 2006 for a discussion on US representations of Arabs on film before 9/11. For the construction of Latinos as threatening, see Chavez (2008) – specifically the epigraph at the start of this article.

the legal implications of whiteness in a historical context, presenting Syrians as the first immigrants in the United States who fought for, and won, the legal right to claim whiteness in 1909. She notes that part of the reason for this legal victory relates to the self-fashioning of Syrians with an identity that stressed their Christianity. However, Gualtieri (2009, 4, 10) argues that even with their courtroom victories, they "continued to be perceived as not fully white but somewhere in between the poles of 'Asian' and 'black' in 'American' racial schemes," or "honorary whites," or "not quite white." Previously, I argued that this in between racial space produces ambiguity because it is not clearly white or black; I identify this in between space as brown and filled with ambiguities that produce confusion/fear for members of dominant culture.

Discussing Syrian immigrants' status as "unfit" and "undesirable," particularly in the medical imaginary that controlled which bodies would enter Ellis Island and which would be rejected, Gualtieri reports on a US governmental document that highlights, in the opinion of the drafters of the document, how Mexico became a strategic entry point into the United States. One would assume this logic of entering the United States through Mexico is motivated partially to avoid the medicalized, anti-Arab sentiments in New York but also, as I argue, because of the assumed shared brownness between Arab (-Americans) and Latin Americans. She highlights how official documents suggest "some Syrians even 'disguised' themselves as Mexicans by learning rudimentary Spanish and crossed into the United States from Mexico at El Paso, Texas" (Gualtieri, 2009, 55). This process of disguising oneself as Mexican, of course, centers on costume or dress. Learning some basic Spanish and dressing in "authentically Mexican" clothing reflected not only the opinion of that particular US official drafting this statement in the historical record but also it reflects what Syrians thought they would need to do to look Mexican-enough to pass. Both the US imagination and the Syrians' interpretations of themselves acknowledge the potential conflation and interchangeability of their brown bodies with those of Mexicans.

Gualtieri's historical overview thus demonstrates several important components when situating the Brown Threat. First, we see the racial ambivalence produced through legal documentation (a topic that will be important later when discussing borders and the Support Our Law Enforcement and Safe Neighborhood Act, or as it is more commonly known, SB 1070)[6]; next, we see that being perceived of as a community that is "undesirable" and threatening in the American imagination can and does change over time and in different contexts (something Santa Ana and Chavez's work also suggests). In addition, for over a century, a racialized logic reflecting dominant US constructions of difference connects the "not quite white" or brown bodies of Middle Eastern immigrants to the "not quite white" or brown bodies of Latin American immigrants so that they are potentially interchangeable; furthermore, their physical interchangeability (confirmed through skin color, dress or language abilities) becomes a challenge for border patrol officers historically and contemporarily.

6 State of Arizona Ministry of Citizenship (2010) relates to all citations of SB 1070.

The Brown Threat is further evidenced when considering Evelyn Alsultany's findings on stereotypes about Muslim and Muslim Americans in the media after 11 September 2001. Alsultany (2007, 595) argues that the conceptualization of the American citizen "became suddenly and momentarily centered on multi-cultural diversity in opposition to Arabs and Muslims (and those who are mistaken for Arab or Muslim, such as South Asians and Iranians) who came to be marked as noncitizen terrorists." That individuals other than Arabs or Middle Easterners could be and frequently are "mistaken for Arab or Muslim" informs my work in the Brown Threat. Although she references South Asians and Iranians directly, they are not the only groups that could arouse such suspicions; furthermore, because of their conjoined fates under the Brown Threat, I disagree with her argument that Latinos "are refigured as 'American' alongside whites" (ibid, 598). Although Arabs and South Asians have had a more difficult time being absorbed into facile notions of whiteness or blackness in the age of terror, and while these groups have been targets of violence based on racial/ethnic profiling, I argue that Latina/os do not count as "white" to the same extent that they do not count as "black" simply because Americans have found a new threat; indeed, there is all the more excuse to lump them together as a similar threat because of the numerous ways they are both represented as dangerously foreign brown bodies.

The Brown Threat in Visual Culture

An episode of *South Park* (Parker, 2007) highlights a key example of the interchangeability of the Latina/o and Middle Eastern Muslim body that helps construct my notion of the Brown Threat. This long-running animated cable television comedy functions as a form of social criticism by frequently parodying people, trends or moments significant to North American culture. The episode under consideration first aired in 2007 under the title "D-Yikes!" – a play on a derogatory term for lesbians, combined with the exclamation "yikes" that foreshadows the fears essential to the plot.

In "D-Yikes!" a group of "Mexicans" impersonate "Persians" by changing their hair styles, clothes, and wearing a lot of cologne. The basic premise of the episode spoofs the 2006 film *300*, directed by Zack Snyder. It focuses on "Persian" business owners who come to South Park, Colorado to purchase the only lesbian bar in town, Les Bos – which they (inaccurately) claim to be French, but usually pronounce as "Lesbos." Xerxes,[7] the presumably male leader of the "Persians," is secretly a woman, and the hired Mexicans (an exclusively male group) impersonate Persians in order to spy on them and uncover this information. How the Mexican workers learn about Xerxes is the crucial element in the episode's representation of the interchangeability of brown bodies from Latin America and the Islamic world. The episode features the regular character Ms. Garrison as the protagonist: in an attempt to help the lesbians save their club, she seeks the help of Mexicans who

7 In Snyder's film, Xerxes' character is played by Rodrigo Santoro, one of Brazil's most famous actors. Thus, the casting of the film

hang out in the outskirts of South Park waiting for daily employment. She asks them to infiltrate the "Persian" group, and convinces the other lesbians it will work:

> Ms. Garrison: (to the Mexicans) ¿Qué pasó, qué pasó? Looking for work, sí? ¿Trabajo, sí?
> Mexican Workers (accented English): Yes. Sure. We all can work, sí.
> Ms. Garrison: Alright. We need you to infiltrate some Persians who run club 'Persh' and dig up some dirt on the owner.
> Mexicans (accented English): Okay. Sure. Okay.
> Allison: Janet (Garrison), how is this going to work? *They don't look Persian.*
> Ms. Garrison: [Approaches the Mexicans] *Sure they do! You just have to gel the hair, put on a silk shirt, some gold chains and tons of cologne.* [Presents the restyled Mexican to her companions.] *Persian.*
> Mexicans/Persian Impersonators: Sí.
> Unnamed Lesbian: Wow! [Smiling optimistically]

Later in the episode, after the lesbians have already once defended their bar from the "Persians," they fear a second attack. A lesbian character looking out the window yells in alarm, "the Persians are attacking again" and all the women seem to believe this. Then Ms. Garrison assures the women that the people approaching are the Mexicans they hired "to dress and act as Persians." Another unnamed lesbian character responds, "Really? How can you tell?"

The writers and creators of *South Park*, Trey Parker and Matt Stone, use parody to criticize the contemporary notion that, according to US dominant culture, "Persians"/Muslims and Latinos are viewed as interchangeable. Viewers take for granted the diegetic presentation of "Persians" as menacing and threatening; they come to South Park to take over businesses that affect the daily lives of local (white) residents. The Mexicans, first presented to viewers stereotypically as waiting for work outside of a moving company (an allusion to their illegal status as non-citizen aliens), speak with heavy accents and repeatedly say things like "sí." Both the "Persians" and the Mexicans are colored on screen with approximately the same hue of brown, making it impossible to distinguish them on the basis of color. Even the characters in the show cannot detect any physical differences between the Mexicans and "Persians" when their dress is similar. Both groups are represented as brown, even the same shade of brown, and therefore interchangeable with one another. In "D'Yikes!" with a simple change of clothes, any member of these two groups can go from Mexican to Middle Eastern or Middle Eastern to Mexican (the latter being the more worrisome impersonation). What is so telling here is that Parker and Stone admit in interviews to taking ideas from popular North American culture. They alone do not believe that Mexicans would be able to pass for menacing Middle Easterners; national discourse reflects a fear of the Islamic terrorists passing as Latin American migrant workers, as Rodriguez points out in his *Los Angeles Times* editorial.

already suggests that Latin Americans could pass for Middle Eastern individuals.

Turning to another parodic critique of the American imagination in visual culture, the LCP, a Houston-based Chicano–Latino sketch comedy group, makes social commentary on the ways in which they are stereotypically represented in rhetoric and media by dominant US culture.[8] This is the second example I briefly addressed previously when discussing Chicano–Latino self-presentation. It is inaccurate to say that the LCP represents its own views of Middle Easterners or Latinos living in the United States. Rather, the LCP consciously critiques pervasive representations of themselves in popular culture. Snyder's film *300* serves yet again as the foundation of this parody, a short, one-minute video clip found on the LCP's official webpage: www.lcp.org. Viewers are presented with a mass of brown bodies, identified as Mexicans at the border by the opening line: "Mexicans, tonight we dine in San Diego." This is a play on an iconic line in *300* when the Spartans prepare for battle against the Persians: "Spartans, tonight we dine in hell." In the clip, the bodies begin to run towards the California border. Some wear sombreros, some wear aprons; some carry brooms or swing oranges in metaphoric reference to weapons yet also to the stereotypical jobs they will assume across the border. For the first time in the texts and videos I review, we see the female body as representing a threat to national security: there is a close up of a pregnant woman running, suggesting that her unborn child's *jus solis* citizenship counts as her weapon. As the brown bodies pass, or the brown tide rises, viewers hear the sound of various animal roars that match the mouth movements of the crowd. The scene closes with text. The number 300 begins to increase quickly from 300 to 301 to 302 all the way up to 321, 136, 827 and counting. Echoing the language of movie trailers, the clip ends with the words, "Coming soon and bringing cousins."

This short clip is so rich with codified meaning. It offers references to common stereotypes about Latinos including their subhumanity, comparing their cross-border migration with an infestation of cockroaches or representing them as dogs or other animals in an example of what Santa Ana (2002, 273) calls "the ontology of immigrant as animal." It highlights the issue of birthright and how it legally implicates families, and at the same time it comments about overall issues of citizenship as problems these brown bodies create when crossing into US territory. Moreover, the clip presents Mexicans as intending to make the most of governmental resources, thereby framing them as an economic threat. Finally, the clip suggests that if these illegal brown bodies continue to cross the border their numbers could be so high that they may "take over." The act of border crossing in conjunction with the high fertility of the female Mexican/Latin American body combine to create the mechanisms through which their numbers will increase, leading to their numeric take over. All of these events and images represent the point of view of Chicanos/Latinos who are comedic actors but who also clearly see themselves and their work as politically engaged.

This LCP clip is connected on several levels to a larger concept of the Brown Threat. The choice to structure the narrative on a historic battle between the

"civilized" Greeks and the "barbarous" Persians, transported and transposed to the present day Mexican–US border, connects these two fraught cultural clashes despite great historical/geographic distance. However, unlike the *South Park* parody, here a more palpable ambivalence about this connection exists. In "D-Yikes!" the Mexicans impersonate the Persians. However, the LCP parody lacks clarity regarding exactly who the Hispanic brown bodies represent. Are the Latinos acting as the Spartans or as the Persians – or perhaps both? The ambivalence produced if we read them as both is telling.

In the film *300*, the Spartans defend their land against Persian invaders, and their low numbers show that only 300 remain to defend themselves from this external threat. On the one hand, the LCP clip positions Latinos as the decimated group on the defensive side. The only human voice in the clip echoes the line the Spartan leader tells his fellow warriors to motivate them to persevere despite the danger and uncertain outcome. On the other hand, it is not their homeland they are protecting; rather, this group of 300 (and growing) immigrants are the ones "invading" San Diego. This movement of conquest links the Mexicans to the Persians, who were identified as the dangerous other par excellence by the classical Greeks. Therefore, one of the coded messages in this clip critiques how the United States perceives of these brown immigrants as dangerous invaders. As the LCP is parodying not just *300* but also common beliefs held by dominant culture, to see the Latinos in the role of the Persians also makes sense. In the LCP clip, the illegal migrant brown bodies are the ones that attack, as opposed to being attack. Yet, they *are* being attacked ideologically and culturally. Finally, a basic assumption represented in this clip again deals with the actual bodies involved. The LCP represents itself through the parody of a major invasion of the cradle of European civilization from the Middle East: this suggests that something similar exists in their look, their manner of attack, the perceived threat they pose, and perhaps, even in their cultural treatment.

Brown Border Crossers as Threats to National Security: The US–Canada Border

Racial/ethnic profiling occurring both at the northern and southern borders influences my analysis of the Brown Threat. Amtrak trains and Greyhound buses appear to receive the most media attention when dealing with issues of immigration and securitization efforts at the northern border. Press releases from the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) discuss the pivotal role Amtrak plays in national security at the northern border. A DHS press release from 1 July 2010 represents the culmination of efforts and actions already in progress for several years with regard to national security, immigration and activities near the US–Canada border.

This document informs the general public that its "See Something, Say Something" campaign "announced a new national information-sharing partnership with Amtrak as part of the Department's nationwide Suspicious Activity Reporting initiative during a whistlestop train tour." The rhetoric here in the "See Something, Say Something" campaign itself is visually centered. The reliance on the *visible* represents key factors in national security issues, yet there is no reference to the possible deception of the senses or the reality that individuals might interpret visual cues in contradictory and unforeseen ways. Returning to the DHS press release, though it does not directly refer to the bodies it plans to investigate, it directly addresses the Brown Threat posed by "terrorists." Secretary Janet Napolitano states, "Implementing a national suspicious activity reporting partnership with Amtrak and expanding the 'See Something, Say Something,' campaign strengthens our ability to guard against terrorism and crime […] These initiatives enable us to provide frontline security personnel with the latest information and intelligence to recognize behaviors and indicators associated with new and evolving threats." Relying on visually interpretable materials proves crucial to successfully protecting the nation. Broader culture's ability to "recognize behaviors and indicators associated" with threats at once implicates Hispanics (legal or illegal) and Middle Easterners because of their shared visual characteristics.

Other reports from the frontlines substantiate links between commonly held perceptions of suspicious individuals and visuality. In two *New York Times* articles from late August 2010, Nina Bernstein describes her first-hand experience of travel within 100 miles of the northern border, but without making any international stops in Canada. She plans to refuse to answer the question "Are you a US citizen?" and to see how the officers react. She defines herself as "a white woman in jeans who had spoken American English with no accent" and notes that despite her refusal to identify herself, the officers move on to an "immigrant-looking" family from India, that she reports legally resides in the United States (Bernstein, 2010a). Later we learn that officers question a Ms. Ruth Fernández (a naturalized US citizen born in Ecuador) regarding her identification documents as she travels from New York to Ohio. Bernstein notes that Ms. Fernández recounts in "imperfect English" how she is accustomed to bringing her passport with her as she travels within the United States to visit her family. Previously Bernstein described Fernández's treatment while traveling inside the United States, Bernstein (2010b) notes "on earlier trips […] agents had photographed her and taken away a nervous Hispanic man." After such interactions with officials, Fernández always has her documents when traveling. The fact that this woman, a naturalized citizen, feels compelled to bring her passport while traveling within the United States reflects the reality of racial/ethnic profiling currently in place near the northern border.

Further, Bernstein's article presents a debate between passengers on the train regarding the fairness of such "random" inspections by officers. Passengers

questioned the officers' motives: was it about safety, or was it unjustified racial profiling? A passenger named Fred Linxweiler, frustrated by the officers' methods, states, "What I worry about is how he [the officer] picked her [Fernández]. It's O.K. if it's really random otherwise it's going to look like this new Arizona law [SB 1070]" (Bernstein, 2010a). This law will be further discussed below; for now, I simply respond to Linxweiler's question with a close reading of the two groups of individuals questioned by officers. The people who aroused suspicion include a family from India and a woman from Ecuador, all of whom were legally in the United States. A final passenger, described as an older man with a long gray ponytail visible from under his hat, argues that he could have been foreign; his understanding of why he was not required to show the same documentation as the more suspicious (read: browner) passengers was that the procedure was "virtual racial profiling."

Moreover, by turning to YouTube, one can find actual footage of DHS officers raiding trains and speaking with both suspicious and unsuspicious passengers. One clip, in particular, entitled "Border Patrol on Amtrak Part 2," shows Amtrak's Lake Shore Limited line, the same route Bernstein speaks about in her articles (Anonymous, 2011). The video presents a women who recorded the clip noting that when asked about her citizenship status she, like Bernstein, would not answer the question. The woman then asks an officer about the requirements for answering the immigration status question. The officer says that it is not mandatory but then, without any prompts from the woman, states that if someone seems "suspicious enough," officers have the right to "keep pressing if there's other suspicion beyond all the typical facts." She then quickly follows up with the question, "What would be the suspicion, for instance?" to which the officer responds, "Accent. Dress. You know, different customs. Stuff like that. Suspicious. Shaking. Nervous. Stuff like that." Accent, "that nasty accent" as Dabashi (2011, 27) calls it in *Brown Skin, White Masks*, clearly still plays a significant role in defining one's identity as native or foreign and in arousing suspicion. Even though the officer does not explicitly mention skin color, clearly based on the people selected (none were black or white) to produce documentation, those who pose a Brown Threat because they look or sound different most frequently illicit "reasonable suspicion."

As the clip unfolds, the officer questions a South Korean woman, who is not brown in the sense of pigmentation. She represents what Ancheta (2006) calls, in *Race, Rights, and the Asian American Experience*, "outsider racialization." Being something other than black or white marks Latina/os and Middle Eastern Muslims as categorically brown(ed). However, other non-white or non-black bodies are racialized as outsiders because of their color differences or physical characteristics. Moreover, ideologically aligning these non-white bodies as brown, does not rely on an exact physical color match. What matters is that the body under suspicion is not overtly white, or as Omi and Winant (1994, 22) suggest, overtly black, the two poles that are "so clearly racially identified in

the US." Because her "brown body" produces more ambiguity than its black or white counterparts, this South Korean woman's body consequently produces ambivalence in the eyes of the officers; she is deemed suspicious and as posing a Brown Threat. Regardless of the high level of national security efforts at the southern border, racial profiling at both borders is common.

The Southern, US–Mexican Border and Senate Bill 1070

What Richard Rodriguez ironically dubs the " 'Great Wall' of America" provides a metaphor to better understand the anxieties surrounding illegal border crossing at the southern US border. The problems illegal border crossing evokes in the US imaginary manifest ideologically and materially in Arizona's controversial immigration law, SB 1070. The wall reflects in physical form what the law intends to do through political language. On 25 June 2012, the US Supreme Court made an official ruling upholding what Julia Preston of *The New York Times* calls the law's "most intensely disputed provision, which requires the police to determine the immigration status of anyone they stop if there is a 'reasonable suspicion' the person is an illegal immigrant." Applying an analytical reading of the Brown Threat to the original SB 1070 text from April 2010 and the June 2012 Supreme Court ruling, this section unpacks national discourses that construct notions of threat, power and powerlessness with regard to various US American subjectivities at, but not limited to, the area around the US–Mexican border.

Legislature such as SB 1070 plays a key role in constructing a national imaginary that identifies who should or could be read as dangerous versus "safe." Section 1 of SB 1070, titled "Intent," reads as follows:

> The legislature finds that there is a compelling interest in the cooperative enforcement of federal immigration laws throughout all of Arizona. The legislature declares that the intent of this act is to make attrition through enforcement the public policy of all state and local government agencies in Arizona. The provisions of this act are intended to work together to discourage and deter the unlawful *entry and presence of aliens and economic activity by persons unlawfully present* in the United States. (1, emphasis mine)

The economy is identified explicitly here as the locus of the "threat" of immigration, a statement that serves as a code for a particular type of immigrant in the post-9/11 imagination. The Brown Threat shows how both Middle Eastern Muslims (stereotypically identified as terrorists) and Latin American immigrants (stereotypically understood as "taking over jobs" and requiring public assistance once they illegally enter) are the clear targeted immigrant groups in this economically centered legislative rhetoric. At its most basic, the law identifies Arizona as penetrable and effectively defenseless against, to borrow Santa Ana's metaphor, the brown tide rising. In addition, because SB 1070 frames the immigration threat as

being inherently related to Arizona's status as a border state, it implies that other states could and should follow suit. Since it was originally passed in 2010 other states, such as Georgia, Alabama and Indiana, for example, have developed laws whose intent and focus appear in line with Arizona's SB 1070. That other states followed suit demonstrates the perception and construction of the Brown Threat in dominant culture as expanding through legal discourse.

Superficially, at least, SB 1070 aims to protect the United States physically and economically by increasing police efforts at and around the border. Racial and ethnic profiling can become an immediate byproduct of SB 1070 and with the recent ruling upholding specifically the "show-me-your-papers" or what MSNBC news show host Rachel Maddow calls the "papers, please" component of the original law, it seems that only the rhetoric and not much surrounding the actual practice of profiling changed. Police officers in Arizona, if (and only if) they go through appropriate federal channels can still ask for papers when suspicion about legal status arises. Even before 9/11 people were taking stock of illegal immigrants' role in US culture. However, in light of 11 September, as Chavez's epigraph highlights, with the "stakes raised" regarding national safety, I analyze how the Brown Threat represents a newer focus of these debates.

The Brown Threat suggests that if the bodies of the aliens were obviously white or black they would be able to not only pass as US Americans much more easily, but also they could pass through borders without arousing suspicion – just like the incidences I previously discuss on Amtrak trains at the northern borders. "Suspicion" is a key term in the drafting of SB 1070. The wording used under Article 8 – Enforcement of Immigration Laws (Section B) – states that political action can take place "where reasonable suspicion exists that the person is an alien who is unlawfully present in the United States" (SB 1070, 1). The language of "reasonable suspicion" as the basis for detaining "illegal aliens" is consistent throughout the entire document and was upheld by the federal court; yet one is left to speculate what actually constitutes "reasonable suspicion." How could English-speaking language abilities, race, ethnicity and assumptions regarding the national origin of individuals not filter into the psyche of law enforcement (referred to consistently as "peace officers" throughout SB 1070) as they question, suspect and detain individuals?

The law specifically states that "peace officers" must not engage in any unjust activities, or any community corruption related to various forms of profiling. The law produces ambivalence because on the one hand it suggests the very real possibility of racial/ethnic profiling as a way to protect US citizens, yet it also acknowledges that such profiling can be abused by officers. Preston notes in *The New York Times* that the Supreme Court, "in allowing the 'show-me-your-papers' provision to stand […] accepted, for the time being at least, Arizona's word that police officers would not engage in racial profiling as they put it into practice." The Brown Threat is thus constructed through federal and state institutions as permissible as long as it is not excessive. Just as we are left to

question what an illegal immigrant looks like, or what the definition of reasonable suspicion really is, now we also have to question where to draw the line between appropriate and excessive racial profiling.

The forms of profiling that can be read implicitly and explicitly in the original SB 1070 text connect Latina/os and Middle Eastern Muslims in the post-9/11 imaginary. Much of the original document's language focuses on illegal aliens and various threats, such as "committing an act of terrorism," among others, that they represent if law enforcement does not have these basic rights to investigate cases of "reasonable suspicion" (SB 1070, 3). In this post-9/11 era, most people connect the reference to terrorism with an almost exclusive implication of Middle Eastern Muslim men. Of course Middle Eastern Muslims are not mentioned by name in this law. The same lack of specific naming applies to Hispanics. Although the law itself does not directly mention Hispanics, reactions from the Latino community demonstrate that they feel their identities are directly implicated both in the original drafting of the law and in the recent Supreme Court ruling. For example, Preston's *New York Times* article notes how "Latino leaders said they were deeply dismayed that the Supreme Court had allowed the policing provision of the law to take effect." Janet Murguía, president of the National Council of La Raza, is quoted as saying, "We believe it puts the civil rights of all Americans at risk and it places a bull's-eye on the back of all Latinos." The notion of the Brown Threat that I advance here supports this idea of a "bull's eye" on Latinos and also extends the application of this target to Middle Eastern Muslims because of the assumed, shared characteristics among these groups. Although both go unnamed directly in SB 1070, they are nonetheless directly incriminated.

The fears that brown bodies produce in the post-9/11 American imagination transform into a language of reasonable suspicion; this suspicion translates in practice to racial profiling or a heavy focus on the mobility of brown bodies as they enter the United States, while they move within the borders, and in particular, when they are near the borders. On 23 April, Archibold (2010) , *The New York Times* bureau chief for Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean, highlighted the infringements on human rights the law imposes, quoting President Obama's cautionary response to the bill and citing worries that police will have too much power to detain brown bodies based on suspicion. Archibold quotes Obama as follows: "[O]pponents have called it an open invitation for harassment and discrimination against Hispanics regardless of their citizenship status." The Supreme Court is highly concerned with "protecting the civil rights of all persons and respecting the privileges and immunities of United States citizens" (United States Supreme Court, 2012). Following Obama's lead by identifying specific targeted minority groups whose rights could be infringed upon, the Brown Threat underscores the potential for specific groups (Hispanics, and by extension Muslims) to be targeted unjustly.

To paraphrase the words of Janet Murguía and President Obama: even if someone looks different from the current definition of an "authentic" US

citizen, they are still entitled to the same human/civil rights as anyone else. Indeed, US American history offers ample evidence that assumptions based on color do not provide fair treatment in accordance with internationally accepted human rights. More recently, according to Liptak's (2012) article in *The New York Times*, upon hearing the Supreme Court's decisions, President Obama "emphasized his concern that the remaining provision could lead to racial profiling, an issue that the court may yet consider in a future case" and is quoted as saying "No American should ever live under a cloud of suspicion just because of what they look like." Nonetheless, this law is in effect and this potential for profiling is still intact. Therefore anyone considered reasonably suspicious (that is, brown, visibly other, with limited or accented English) may be questioned because of his/her potential violations of the law.

The Brown Threat and its Future in the United States and Beyond

To be brown in the United States represents ambiguity and it also means that the person in question is not visually identifiable as black or white in contemporary racial/ethnic discourses. To be brown(ed) is also to be connected with the construction of the Middle Eastern Muslim terrorist in the West and historically this means, and as the Brown Threat suggests, this figure is the ultimate threatening, "illegal alien." In addition, because of the fears surrounding the numeric take-over of people of Hispanic descent that plague the US majority in this century, the conflation of these two minority groups as dangerous, though racist and xenophobic, appears to makes sense. This narration of the Brown Threat is preliminary and there is still much work to do in this field of cultural criticism. Racist ideologies have increasingly manifested themselves through legal documents such as Arizona's SB 1070 because of the Brown Threat. Moreover, the truth of the matter is that the federal ruling reminds everyone that racist/xenophobic acts are in fact, at times, permissible under US law.

Currently the brown bodies of Latin Americans and Middle Easterners have a proverbial "bull's eye" on their backs with regard to immigration in US culture. The shared danger they pose lies in their alleged threat to the economy and to national security; the dominant ideology now supports the notion that being brown also potentially means being a threat to the future of the United States. Owing to the fact that the brown(ed) body is imagined/represented as threatening in the United States, all variations of it must be controlled. The policing of borders and bodies functions as an attempt to block threatening brown bodies from entering the lands and imagination of the United States in ways that reposition them as numerically (and perhaps even linguistically) dominant, with the concomitant fear that bodies with hegemonic identities will then be subordinated.

The reality is that the Brown Threat is not really new in either national or international contexts. However, the fears these two minority groups produce have been refurbished to fit post-9/11 US American discourses. The conflation of the Latina/os, Latin Americans, Arabs and Middle Eastern Muslims is reinforced through repetitive rhetorical and mediatic representations in the US. "Latinophobia" and "Islamophobia" are on the rise and it does not appear as if a revaluation of these images will occur any time soon. Whether because of fears of economic security or national security, the brown body has been marked in Western culture as the newest public enemy number one.

I offer this notion of the Brown Threat as a way to read racial/ethnic forms of profiling that occur all over the United States. Although I focus almost exclusively on public discourses and mediatic representations in the United States, we need more global, comparative work on the role of the Brown Threat in Europe. In order to see how the Brown Threat works outside of the United States, all one needs to do is to take a critical look at the European Union's (EU) decades-long evasive techniques to deny Turkey (a secular and democratic Muslim country) entrance into the EU despite the country's cultural, political and economic "Europeanization" (you can buy a Coke in Turkish Lira *or* Euros in Istanbul and many of the airports in Turkey list prices of items at Duty Free shops exclusively in Euros). In addition, I hope that other scholars further develop the role of gender, particularly that of women, in the Brown Threat and in various processes of racialization and securitization pre- and post-9/11. Moreover, expanding investigations of the Brown Threat and its presence on various other social networks, such as Facebook, Google+, Identi.ca, or Twitter (for example, with the hashtag SCOTUS or more commonly known as #SCOTUS) help further unmask what the general public thinks about this on a personal level. The future of the United States and the world is inevitably a brown(er) one; the ways in which the West deals with this Brown Threat will be a defining feature that shapes the course of the twenty-first century. As a point of departure, I welcome the work of international scholars in the fields of politics, law, literary studies, film and media, comparative literature and gender studies and so on, to increase the interdisciplinary thrust of what I delineate here as the Brown Threat.

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Christopher Rivera is the Director of the Center for Interdisciplinary Studies and Assistant Professor of International Studies at the University of Southern Indiana (USI). Before joining USI, he taught in a leadership and diversity program at Princeton University and spent 3 years working in Ankara, Turkey at Bilkent University. He teaches literature, film, gender and theory courses and his current research interests focus on a comparative approach to ethnic/minority studies. In 2012, he published the article, "Revisiting Rodriguez: Richard Rodriguez as an Inter-American Subject" in *Expanding "Latinidad."* Volume 6 (2012) of the series *Inter-American Studies/Estudios Interamericanos*: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier (Germany) and Bilingual Review Press. Because of his years in Turkey, he developed an interest in the relationship between Latina/os and Muslims and plans to continue his work on gender in the Brown Threat. In addition, he wrote an entry in the forthcoming *Oxford Encyclopedia of Latinos and Latinas in Contemporary Politics, Law and Social Movements*, edited by Suzanne Oboler and Deena J. Gonzalez, focusing on "Muslims, Latino/a."

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