The Disciplinary Politics of “Race”: An Exploration of Scholarly Associations’ Approaches to Race Research in a Color-blind Era

Academic debates about the place of race in social science research—and specifically the nearly opposite approaches taken recently by the national organizations of anthropologists and sociologists (American Sociological Association, 2003; American Anthropological Association, 1998)—in some ways mirror political disputes about the utility of race-based government policy versus "color-blind" government policy. The color-blind approach strategically builds on the idea that race is socially constructed rather than “real,” but takes the position that it is wrong for individuals and government policy to expressly account for race. This approach over-simplifies race as merely skin color, eliding its nature as historically rooted and materially embedded at all levels of American society. In this work-in-progress, we construct a genealogy of scholarly associations’ statements on race research since 1980, a period of time when the idea of race as socially constructed became dominant in the social sciences and when color-blind ideology became ascendant in politics, law and popular thinking.

Laura E. Gómez, J.D., Ph.D.
Professor of Law & American Studies, UNM

Nancy López, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Sociology, UNM
Co-Directors, Institute for the Study of “Race” and Social Justice
Senior Fellows, RWJF Center for Health Policy

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Contact 277-4524 for more info.

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