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ARTICLE

Towards a global theory of colorblindness: Comparing colorblind racial ideology in France and the United States

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Abstract

In this article, we apply key tenants of colorblindness, as a racial ideology developed in the United States, to France. In France, colorblindness means more than not seeing how race structures opportunities and outcomes; it also means not acknowledging racial and ethnic categories. Colorblindness arose in a different historical context, for different reasons, and as a product of different mechanisms in France than it did in the United States. We argue that despite variations in the contexts and mechanisms underpinning colorblindness between the United States and France, the consequences are markedly similar in both contexts. Colorblind ideology silences opposition to racial and ethnic inequality and maintains white supremacy in both contexts. Finally, we demonstrate that such a comparison moves us closer towards a global theory of colorblindness.

1 | INTRODUCTION

Many social scientists have explained persistent racial and ethnic inequality in American society through the framework of colorblindness as the dominant racial ideology (Smith & Mayorga-Gallo, 2017). Subsequent to the Civil Rights Movement, laws, including the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1968 Fair Housing Act, were enacted protecting against discrimination based on race and ethnicity (as well as other protected statuses). One cannot explicitly deny access to housing, for example, based on one's racial and ethnic status. One cannot be promoted or fired based solely on racial and ethnic status either. Yet, patterns of inequality, such as residential segregation or disparate educational attainment levels, which can be traced directly to race and ethnicity, persist (Duncan & Murnane, 2011; Holliday & Dwyer, 2009; Massey, 2016).

Colorblindness is an ideology that enables people to ignore the persistence of racism by providing nonracial explanations for enduring racial inequalities (Bonilla-Silva, 2017). For example, when employing a colorblind ideology,

individuals use abstract principles like meritocracy to explain racialized outcomes (abstract liberalism), minimize the extent of racism as compared with the past, use cultural explanations insinuating that racial minorities' behaviors are the problem, and/or argue that natural self-selection leads to racial inequality (naturalization) (see Bonilla-Silva, 2017; Mueller, 2017). They do not think that racism is the factor producing unequal outcomes by race.

Colorblind ideology enables Americans to imagine the United States as a less racist society than in previous periods, despite the persistence of racial inequality across numerous sectors of society (Bonilla-Silva, 2017; Lipsitz, 2019).^{1,2} According to sociologist George Lipsitz, “colorblindness pretends that racial recognition rather than racist rule is the problem to be solved” (2019: p. 24). And, by not acknowledging how race factors into processes of decision-making and opportunity-affording, whites maintain ignorance of contemporary forms of racism and protect their privilege (Forman, 2004; Mueller, 2017).

This understanding of colorblindness, however, is based upon a particular American history of legalized racism and subjugation and conception of race and ethnicity. For example, race and ethnicity are official categories in the United States. We therefore sought to compare how colorblindness operates in a society that does not officially acknowledge such categories, in either practice or the law. France offers an intriguing counterpoint, as it disavows racial and ethnic categorization. The state itself, as revealed in the Census and other government documents, for example, does not measure race and ethnicity, and several lawmakers have proposed removing the word “race” from the French Constitution.³ The ideology and legal framework of French Republicanism sees being French as the only legible identity or distinction—above linguistic, religious, or other identifications. Colorblindness is therefore present in French society at the level of the state (Simon & Piché, 2012).⁴

In this article, based on our expertise of race and racism⁵ in the United States and in France, we examine existing research to compare how colorblindness functions in societies with a different history and conception of race and racism. In doing so, we bring together existing literature on colorblindness in the United States, race and racialization in France, and racial denial in Europe. We demonstrate how colorblindness functions in contemporary France through a simultaneous denial of and consciousness of race, which has implications for colorblindness in other societies. We chose France for this comparison, not because it is the only other society operating under a colorblind ethos, but rather because it takes a different approach to racial and ethnic categorization than does the United States, and therefore allows us to question assumptions about how colorblind ideology actually operates. We argue much like how colorblindness maintains the societal racial order in the United States (Bonilla-Silva, 2017); it does so in France—a society with different conceptions of race, ethnicity, and racism. We further discuss how thinking of colorblindness in France moves us closer towards cultivating a critical global theory of colorblindness, akin to a global race theory (Weiner, 2012).

In comparing France and the United States, we also argue for the salience of race and ethnicity in differently organized societies and the necessity of such cross-national comparisons. In their 1999 article, Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant critique the “cultural imperialism” of many American scholars who study contexts outside of the United States and, in their view, misuse and misappropriate American conceptions and theoretical concepts to non-American contexts. Specifically, they suggest that the “unexpected discovery of the ‘globalization of race’ results, not from a sudden convergence of forms of ethnoracial domination in the various countries, but from the quasi-universalization of the US folk-concept of ‘race’ as a result of the worldwide export of US scholarly categories” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1999: p. 48). Yet, we contest this notion in terms of comparing France and the United States and point to the plethora of research demonstrating how race and racism are consequential outside of American formulations, and how discussing the salience of race and racism does not imply a solely American conceptualization of these phenomena.⁶ Much research has revealed how racism persists in multiple ways in French society, in terms of non-whites seeing themselves as racialized and excluded due to their ethnic origins, as well as ethnic disparities in terms of education attainment and the labor market, among other metrics (Beaman, 2017; Fleming, 2017; Jugé & Perez, 2006; Silberman, Alba, & Fournier, 2007; Silberman, 2011; Silverstein, 2018; Simon, 2012). We seek not to reiterate these findings here but rather to mention them as they help to justify our France–United States comparison. By understanding how colorblindness operates in everyday life in France, we reveal what happens when the state establishes such a “white ignorance” (Mueller, 2017).

In what follows, we briefly review the literature on colorblindness in the American context and the different tenets of colorblind racial ideology. We then discuss the French case, and how colorblindness is present in both similar and divergent ways from the United States. We conclude by discussing the implications of this comparison.

2 | BACKGROUND: RACE AND COLORBLINDNESS IN THE UNITED STATES

Colorblindness as a framework was developed to help explain how most Americans, particularly whites, could believe that the United States provided equal opportunities to all while simultaneously seeing inequality persist along racial lines (Doane, 2017). By claiming to not “see” race, people can explain racial inequality without mention of racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2017). Importantly, colorblindness does not mean that people do not notice differences, but that how we see race is constitutive of the social construction of race (Doane, 2017; Obasogie, 2010; Obasogie, 2013). In fact, differences can be acknowledged in terms of diversity and multiculturalism, even as systemic racism is not acknowledged (Bell & Hartmann, 2007; Berrey, 2015; Burke, 2017; Obasogie, 2010). A misreading of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King’s “I Have a Dream” speech in which he dreams of people being judged by the content of their character rather than the color of their skin has come to exemplify contemporary American discourse about race and colorblindness (Lipsitz, 2019). Therefore, colorblindness, the dominant racial ideology, means that individuals can claim that race is inconsequential in their interactions with others and for broader outcomes in society. Otherwise put, it is opportunity that is colorblind.

Thus, even though Americans self-identify, and are identified by others, in reference to racial and ethnic categories, there is simultaneously a push to deny that such categories have any real relevance in contemporary life. In 2007, in a majority opinion by the Supreme Court, Chief Justice John Roberts wrote, “The way to stop discrimination on the basis of race is to stop discriminating on the basis of race.”⁷ The 2008 presidential election of Barack Obama led some to proclaim the United States as now “post-racial,” even though the subsequent presidential election belied these claims. This colorblind logic explains, among other factors, opposition to affirmative action policies and race consciousness in university admissions (Berrey, 2015; Brown et al., 2003; Espinosa, Gaertner, & Orfield, 2015). Today, different domains in society purport to be colorblind, including immigration enforcement (Aranda & Vaquera, 2015; Armenta, 2017); actions and rhetoric towards diversity (Berrey, 2015); the criminal justice system (Van Cleve, 2016); or science and medicine (Roberts, 2015). More and more Americans support “colorblindness” today—or even identify as colorblind—even if there is disagreement as to what that entails (Hartmann, Croll, Larson, Gerteis, & Manning, 2017; Ioanide, 2015).

Most importantly, by providing colorblind explanations for evident racial inequalities, individuals maintain ignorance of how race structures interactions and opportunity (Mueller, 2017). For example, using “acting white” as a cultural explanation for inequalities in education outcomes for Black students ignores structural forms of discrimination, like how educational institutions are organized to the benefit of white students (Ferguson, 2010; Tyson, 2011). Because colorblind ideology maintains white ignorance of the persistence of racism, it normalizes racial inequality to the point that there is no perceived need to redress racial injustice nor fight against it (Bobo, Kluegel, & Smith, 1997; Feagin, 2010).

Therefore, colorblindness itself functions as form of racism because colorblind ideology downplays racism and allows it to persist (Bonilla-Silva, 2015; Bonilla-Silva, 2017). People may articulate that they accept or tolerate everyone, while engaging in behaviors that maintain white privilege—or “smiling racism” (Bonilla-Silva, 2017). For example, even when someone expresses racist hostility and prejudice, if justified by colorblind explanations, they can maintain that such actions are not racist (Ioanide, 2015). Because of the same colorblind explanations, racist societal structures are also not seen to be complicit in unequal outcomes. As a result, ignorance of how interactions and institutions are often structured to benefit whites and disadvantage people of color persists.

Not only does colorblindness lead to ignorance of the continued role of racism in society, it also structures and constrains opposition to this racism. Anti-racist struggles operate in a context in which inequality is framed as

unrelated to race, and many Americans believe that there are equal opportunities (Bobo, 1998; Bonilla-Silva, 2017; Burke, 2017; Doane, 2017; Gallagher, 2003b). Consequently, the type of changes that needs to occur to reduce disparate outcomes and discrimination is not sought and is not well supported by whites (Brown et al., 2003). For example, white students at a prestigious university can agree with the idea that racial minorities should be represented on-campus but simultaneously advocate for the removal of affirmative action admission policies and multicultural centers (Warikoo & de Novais, 2015). And, like affirmative action efforts, attempts to rectify racial and ethnic inequalities are often perceived as disadvantaging whites instead of as seeking racial justice (Gallagher, 2003a; Gallagher, 2003b). This can be seen in the reaction to the Black Lives Matter movement, where many whites reinterpret the slogan "Black Lives Matter" to be a claim that black lives matter more than white lives do. In an era of colorblindness, mentioning that one race matters, if all have equality, is thought to disadvantage other racial groups. This reinterpretation ignores the fact that because racism persists, Black lives are undervalued (Burke, 2017; Doane, 2017).

3 | RACE AND COLORBLINDNESS IN FRANCE

Before we can discuss colorblindness in France, we need to describe how race is constructed in France in contrast to race in the United States, or in other words, what one can claim to be colorblind to. We discuss these constructions yet are mindful of the complications of cross-national comparisons.

Part of understanding how racialization contrasts across differently organized societies is through understanding processes of boundary construction. Whereas meaningful racial boundaries in the United States often center around phenotypic characteristics, the meaningful boundary in France, as exemplified for example, in Census categories, is whether one is French or not. Imperialism and colonialism, in regions including the Caribbean, the Maghreb, and parts of West Africa and Asia, served to reinforce that distinction, as "Frenchness," and who was or could be considered as French, was defined in relation to "othered" populations in the colonies (Esafré-Dublet & Simon, 2011).

Moreover, in contrast to the United States, the locus of France's colorblind logic lies in its lack of official categories for race and ethnicity, so that race has no "meaning" (Cohen, 2018). France is therefore both "anti-racial," in that the French reject the use of racial terms or race is anything real or definable (Meghji, 2019), and "non-racial," in that it denies the reality of race (Russell & Carter, 2019). France's ideology of colorblindness can almost be framed as a "category blindness," per its Republican ideology. Being French is the only significant identity category—not religion nor race nor ethnicity. France operates under a principle of universalism (Derderian, 2016; Jugé & Perez, 2006; Meriman, 2006). The concept of an identity-based minority group is antithetical to French Republicanism, which recognizes individuals in their relation to the state, and not groups. Being French is often construed as something one is born into, rather than something one can become. Therefore, French nationality and French "ethnicity" are seen as equivalent. France conceives of its identity in national and civic, rather than ethnic, terms, an emphasis which predates the French Revolution (Bell, 2003). Ideas against identity distinctions were hardened following the Vichy Regime during World War II, in which Jews in France and its colonies were deported to concentration camps in Germany and Poland. France is often contrasted with other nations regarding its strict assimilationist framework (Derderian, 2016; Favell, 2016). Subsuming other identifications is seen as the only way to create a cohesive national community; this is in contrast with the United Kingdom and the United States, which are seen as more divided or balkanized societies. France fears *le communitarianisme* (communitarianism)—the idea that groups based on identity will only interact with themselves rather than being part of society as a whole (Beaman, 2017).

Colorblindness in France dates further back than in the United States; it is found in universalist ideas that predate the French Revolution. These universalist ideals are expressed through French Republican ideology yet belied by the use of racial and ethnic distinctions in prior periods of slavery and colonial rule throughout much of Africa, the Caribbean, and parts of Asia (Cohen, 2018; Jugé & Perez, 2006; Lewis, 2007; Peabody, 1996; Selby, 2016). For example, in Peabody's *There are No Slaves Here* (1996), she examines how contradictory ideals of freedom and

equality existed simultaneously with the slavery in its colonies, so that France could use racialized language and rely on slave labor in its colonies while promoting universalist ideals (including that race does not exist) within the geographical borders of France.

Not only do the historical and political circumstances surrounding colorblind ethos differ between the United States and France, so too do the cultural justifications for its necessity and continuity. Universalism arose as a protective mechanism against targeting groups labeled as other with violence or oppression in France (Merriman, 2006; Rallu, Piché, & Simon, 2006). In other words, the belief that everyone who is a French citizen is French, and French alone protects against the possibility that someone could be targeted as different and discriminated against as a result. This belief is so strong that accounting for race in any governmental process is not allowed in France (Escafré-Dublet & Simon, 2011). Not seeing race in France reflects an overall rejection of racial discourse (Derderian, 2016).

In contrast, in the United States, justifications for colorblindness have less to do with protecting against violence and oppression and more to do with allowing for meritocracy and individualism (Bonilla-Silva, 2017; Burke, 2017; Rallu et al., 2006). In other words, not seeing race, in the United States, is important because it allows for individuals to believe that they have succeeded as the result of their own merit. The authority of many institutions in the United States is built on the premise of meritocracy. For example, most Americans believe that students should be admitted to college based solely on their academic potential and past achievement (Newport, 2016) and fail to see the ways that academic potential and achievement are racialized (Hurtado, Inkelas, Briggs, & Rhee, 1997). As a result, despite the fact that whites are much more likely to attend selective colleges (Carnevale & Strohl, 2013), the integrity of higher education is left unchallenged because colorblindness can be used to justify racial inequity (Petts, forthcoming).

4 | FACETS OF COLORBLINDNESS IN FRANCE

Although there are differences in the historical and political underpinnings of colorblindness in France and the United States, we argue that how colorblindness operates is similar and similarly consequential. Political scientist Robert Lieberman (2007) has argued that the United States is unique in its simultaneous race consciousness and colorblindness, which explains how colorblind policies can have disparate effects by race. Yet, we argue that France has a simultaneous construction of having a colorblind ethos and a race consciousness as (see also Fassin & Fassin, 2006). In France, colorblindness is inscribed in law—for example, in the forbiddance of collecting ethnic statistics—yet, there still exists a consciousness of race (or color) (Keaton, 2013).

Much research has demonstrated that despite the renunciation of racial classification in France, race and ethnicity have been used to mark distinctions among individuals and apply a consequential hierarchy to those distinctions (Beaman, 2017; Jugé & Perez, 2006; Kastoryano, 2004; Peabody & Stovall, 2003). Such scholarship reveals how race, though repeatedly denied, is nonetheless omnipresent throughout French society (Keaton, 2010). Extant research reveals the existence of racialization including how racial and ethnic minorities are racialized at both micro- and macrolevels of society, including frequent stops by the police, lack of representation in elected government, or disparate educational outcomes and labor market participation (see Bickerstaff, 2012; Fleming, 2017; Keaton, 2010; Niang & Soumahoro, 2019; Quillian et al., 2019; Silberman, 2011).

Moreover, France's colorblind ideology is evident in the use of explicitly nonracial discourse to convey racial bias.⁸ In Cohen's (2018) ethnography of French lawyers and judges, she identifies various forms of "avoidance strategies" used to evade or circumvent discourse around race and ethnicity, including linguistic, institutional, and geographic. Legal actors avoided explicitly naming or discussing racial and ethnic diversity. Moreover, the language of foreigners, immigrants, or banlieue residents is used in lieu of explicit racial and ethnic identity labels. Bonnet, DeMaillard, and Roche (2014), in their ethnography of police officers and security guards, identify how these individuals simultaneously enact a colorblind ethos while targeting racial and ethnic minority youth. He shows how these individuals are invested in performing nonracism or being seen by others as nonracist, yet still structure their work with a race consciousness of North African and Black youth as a security threat. The role of proxies or other factors

in making distinctions based on race and ethnicity is also exemplified in research on how residence in the banlieues, or beleaguered suburban outskirts of major cities, or having a North African sounding name is coded as racial and ethnic otherness. Research comparing traditional French names with traditional Muslim or North African names or comparing identical curriculum vitae between Paris and banlieue residents evidence such disparate treatment (ENAR, 2014; Silberman, 2011). So even though France is colorblind at the macro- or state level, it is not blind at a micro- or everyday level.

Similar to the United States, colorblind explanations, such as cultural explanations and minimizing racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2017), are also used in France to justify racial inequality. Differences among France's population are framed in terms of culture rather than race or ethnicity. For example, unequal outcomes are conventionally explained by individuals lacking particular French values or not being French enough (Beaman, 2017; Dikeç, 2004; Selby, 2016). Existing scholarship has also illustrated this through an analysis of symbolic boundaries. Lamont et al. (2002) argue that French Republicanism enables symbolic boundaries drawn between individuals seen as native French and immigrant-origin individuals who are not seen as native French; such distinctions are underpinned by "the long-standing faith that French culture is superior, and by a colonial history that the French believe puts them above people from their former colonies" (2002: p. 41). In *The Dignity of working men: Morality and the boundaries of race, class, and immigration* (2002), Lamont also demonstrates how white French male workers place explicit boundaries on "Frenchness" as a culture and national identity as it pertains to North African immigrants. Such cultural boundaries provide justification for the continued exclusion of North African immigrants and their descendants. Yet, this boundary work around French culture is another manifestation of colorblind ideology, in which racial and ethnic distinctions are instead framed as cultural ones and white supremacy in France is maintained (see also Beaman, 2017; Fleming, 2017). Here, French culture is implicitly framed as white, and non-white individuals are seen to be outside of French culture. Non-white immigrants and their descendants are positioned outside of French culture, which is therefore used to justify their marginalization. Yet, descendants of immigrants are French, in that they are born and raised in French society. French colorblindness masks this reality.

Another way that colorblindness is culturally justified in France is through *laïcité*, the French word for the separation of church and state or secularism. Even though this applies to all religions in France, discourse about religious difference masks discourse of racial and ethnic difference, which further serves France's colorblind racial ideology. *Laïcité* has often been employed to stress the assimilation of those of immigrant origin (Bowen, 2007). For example, the 1989 Affaire du Foulard (headscarf affair), in which three Muslim girls of Moroccan descent were suspended from school for wearing headscarves, served as a visible indicator of all that was considered "foreign" in French society (Chapman & Frader, 2004). In 2004, France's parliament passed a law banning the wearing of "conspicuous religious symbols" in public schools (Bowen, 2007; Scott, 2009; Silverstein, 2004). Though this law did not mention any specific religion or religious symbol, it was widely interpreted as a ban on the hijab (Bowen, 2007).

The French society also minimizes the extent of racism, in this case not by comparing the degree of racial inequality with the past but often by comparing themselves with the United States. Cohen's (2018) ethnography also demonstrates how French legal actors would regulate discussion of race and racism to other locations, such as the United States and French départements. France constructs itself as colorblind also in relation to other more racist societies, such as the United States. Because other societies do mark race and ethnicity, they are seen to propagate racism in contrast to France.

Despite societal differences in managing difference, colorblind racial ideology often produces similar outcomes in France and the United States. In both the United States and France, despite claims of colorblindness, meaningful distinctions are made among populations. When discussing race is disavowed or discouraged, there is no discourse available to make claims about the perpetuation of racism at an individual or institutional level (see Fassin & Fassin, 2006).⁹ For example, because the colorblind Republican model holds that race, ethnicity, and other identity-related distinctions serve to produce identity politics, or make race and ethnicity salient where they otherwise would not have been, there are no "ethnic statistics" or official data demarcating different racial and ethnic groups. Crime statistics will not mention the race of a victim or perpetrator; school records will not indicate the ethnic breakdown of a

school population.¹⁰ Thus, it is difficult for groups to argue that they are being treated unfairly when it is hard to find statistics to justify it. As a result, ignorance of racism persists, and white privilege is maintained.

5 | DISCUSSION: TOWARDS A GLOBAL THEORY OF COLORBLINDNESS

In the United States, colorblindness as a racial ideology is used to protect white interests by refuting claims of racism with alternative explanations—particularly an assumption that the United States is a post-racial and meritocratic society and as such an individual's merit is the only factor for which they are judged (Bonilla-Silva, 2017). This is not the only racial ideology in the United States—as individuals also champion diversity and multiculturalism, an acknowledgement of racial and ethnic differences (Bell & Hartmann, 2007). In France, colorblindness is justified as a protection against violence and oppression of minority groups, and it is so long established that no pivotal event, like the Civil Rights Movement, for example, can be articulated as central to its development (Rallu et al., 2006). France is “officially” colorblind at the level of language by not acknowledging racial and ethnic categories. This is evident in the ongoing debate regarding “ethnic statistics,” or how some want to collect statistics based on race and ethnicity in order to address discrimination (Escafré-Dublet & Simon, 2011; Léonard, 2014). Denying the existence of racial and ethnic categories has implications for the mechanisms that perpetuate colorblindness in France. We discussed different facets of colorblindness in France, including how colorblind ethos exists simultaneously with a consciousness of race.

Despite these differently organized societies, many similarities exist. First, colorblind racial ideology produces a type of “blindness” in which people, particularly whites, are incapable of or willfully avoid seeing racism in their own behavior and in the wider society. Because the French and Americans explain disparate racial outcomes with colorblind explanations, they also do not take the kind of actions necessary to reduce racial inequality. Thus, colorblindness, as a racial ideology, in both the French and the United States, serves to maintain white privilege. Moreover, because an assumption of equality is made in the United States, and because the use of racial categorization is disavowed in France, it remains difficult to draw attention to the racial inequalities that are masked by colorblindness. We know that colorblind frameworks are not really colorblind and, therefore, do not actually minimize race nor the effects of race, and here, we have discussed how this operates in a society that does not even acknowledge the existence of race. Claiming that race is inconsequential is not unique to the United States and by looking at the practice of minimizing or ignoring race outside the United States, we can see how colorblindness exists, not just due to specific historical context but rather because it serves as the mechanism for maintaining white supremacy and the existing global and racial hierarchy.

Our discussion of colorblind frameworks in France and the United States is also in conversation with existing work on racial denial, specifically across Europe. David Theo Goldberg's (2006) framework of racial Europeanization is instructive here for illustrating how across Europe race is often implicitly and explicitly denied, or what Alana Lentin refers to as “the hushing up of race” (2008: p. 497). In her argument for a critical global race theory, Weiner (2012) argues that “the contemporary global imperial sovereignty of colorblind, neo-liberal discourse argues that individual failures within meritocratic societies are responsible for persistent racial inequality, thereby obscuring structural inequality to uphold racial segregation, oppression, and inequality” (2012: p. 336). For example, Bouilila's (2019) examination of state anti-racism in Switzerland reveals how race is denied in public discourse. She further argues that such anti-racialism functions to intentionally obscure racism as well as contest it in Swiss society. Similarly, despite actual evidence of racial and ethnic marginalization, the Netherlands portrays itself as a colorblind society (Weiner, 2015; Wekker, 2016). Thus, establishing a critical global theory of colorblindness will require more attention to the many contexts and circumstances that can produce colorblind racial ideologies as well as attention to a broader range and understanding of the mechanisms that sustain it as a culturally hegemonic ideology.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ We note Henricks (2018) as a challenge to viewing colorblind racial ideology as solely a post-Civil Rights Movement phenomenon. Rather, Henricks argues that traces of this framework can be located in the discourse surrounding the 3/5ths clause of the U.S. Constitution.
- ² By relying on Bonilla-Silva's (2017) definition of colorblindness, we do not mean to state that this is the only working definition of colorblindness (for others, see for example, Hartmann et al., 2017; Kull, 2009).
- ³ The proposal to remove the word "race" from the French Constitution appears in the Assemble Nationale Proposition de loi N. 1918 (<http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/12/propositions/pion1918.asp>). For more on the controversy surrounding the proposed removal, see <https://www.connexionfrance.com/French-news/france-assembly-votes-to-remove-race-French-constitution>; <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/global-opinions/wp/2018/07/13/frances-dangerous-move-to-remove-race-from-its-constitution/>; and https://www.huffingtonpost.fr/eric-deschavanne/pourquoi-supprimer-le-mot-race-de-la-constitution-est-une-grave-bourde-philosophique_a_23478654/.
- ⁴ An important caveat, however, is how France used ethnic categories throughout its colonial rule in various parts of Africa and what are now its overseas départements (see Silverstein, 2008; Silverstein, 2018).
- ⁵ For the purposes of this article, we define race as groups set apart because of phenotypic or ethnic differences and racism as a structure of social relationships that shape the life chances of such racial groups (Bonilla-Silva, 2017) yet recognize that there are varying definitions of each of these terms.
- ⁶ Moreover, we agree with Wieviorka's (2004) challenge to Bourdieu and Wacquant (2004) in his exposition of racism in France and the challenges of conducting such research. We also point to the work of David Theo Goldberg (2006) who helpfully challenges the distinction between American and European conceptions of race and discusses how one has shaped and influenced the conception of the other for centuries.
- ⁷ *Parents Involved in Community Schools vs. Seattle School District No. 1*, June 28, 2007. In this case, Roberts was referring to removing race conscious admission practices from public schools—practices designed to help racially integrate segregated school districts.
- ⁸ Similarly, we note the ongoing debate about how some French individuals use the English word "Black" instead of "noir" to refer to Black populations, as a way among other things, of distinguishing France' treatment of race and racism from that in the United States. See <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2016/04/france-debates-word-negre-negro-rossignol-160403054604312.html> and <https://www.pri.org/stories/2017-02-24/why-english-word-black-became-new-noir-france#:~:targetText=Words%20describing%20race%20and%20skin%20color%20vary%20wildly%20across%20lanaguages.&targetText=But%20it's%20also%20used%20in,for%20black%2C%20%22noir.%22> for more on this debate.
- ⁹ See Body-Gendrot (2004) regarding discussion of race and racism in French academia.
- ¹⁰ To give one example, Robert Ménard, the mayor of Béziers, a town in southern France, was reprimanded, accused of racism, and called "anti-Republican" in May 2015 when he claimed he had counted the number of Muslim children in the town based on whether or not they had Muslim names (AFP, 2015). Distinctions between Muslim and Christian children or children of other religions are not supposed to be made or even noticed. Although this is one recent anecdotal example, it nonetheless illustrates a French societal opposition to any kind of racial or ethnic counting.

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