

Portland State University

**PDXScholar**

---

Chicano/Latino Studies Faculty Publications  
and Presentations

Chicano Latino Studies

---

6-16-2023

# Review of the book Racial Innocence: Unmasking Latino Anti-Black Bias and the Struggle for Equality, by T. K. Hernández

Martín Alberto Gonzalez  
*Portland State University*, [martgo2@pdx.edu](mailto:martgo2@pdx.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: [https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/chla\\_fac](https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/chla_fac)



Part of the African American Studies Commons, Chicana/o Studies Commons, Ethnic Studies Commons, Latina/o Studies Commons, and the Social Justice Commons

**Let us know how access to this document benefits you.**

---

## Citation Details

Gonzalez, M.A. (2023). [Review of the book Racial Innocence: Unmasking Latino Anti-Black Bias and the Struggle for Equality, by T. K. Hernández]. Latino Studies. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41276-023-00426-2>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access. It has been accepted for inclusion in Chicano/Latino Studies Faculty Publications and Presentations by an authorized administrator of PDXScholar. Please contact us if we can make this document more accessible: [pdxscholar@pdx.edu](mailto:pdxscholar@pdx.edu).

Martín Alberto Gonzalez  
Portland State University  
martgo2@pdx.edu

*Racial Innocence: Unmasking Latino Anti-Black Bias and the Struggle for Equality*  
Tanya Katerí Hernández, Beacon Press, Boston, MA, 2022, 216 pp., \$24.95, ISBN: 978-0807020135 (hardcover)

During my undergraduate and graduate studies, I learned that Latinxs, like other People of Color, could be prejudicial and discriminatory, but supposedly they could not be racist, because they do not hold power, nor do they benefit systemically from a racist society such as the United States. To put it simply, I was often told, and believed, that racism is a system of advantages and People of Color do not reap advantages from racism. After reading Tanya Katerí Hernández's *Racial Innocence: Unmasking Latino Anti-Black Bias and the Struggle for Equality*, I realized that while such explanation of racism can be helpful, it also limits our understanding of who can contribute to upholding racism.

Drawing on court cases concerning anti-Black racial discrimination, along with qualitative interviews with civil rights leaders, attorneys, educators, and self-identified Afro-Latinx respondents, Hernández empirically and persuasively argues that although Latinxs do not reap systemic benefits from racism, their firm anti-Black cultural prejudices make them “active participants in the denial of access to an important life opportunity (a home, a job, an unimpeded education, entrance into public spaces, and freedom from violence) based on race” (p. 11). In other words, just because Latinxs do not benefit from racism does not stop them from upkeeping and ensuring that the system of racism is functioning properly via their anti-Black cultural prejudice. To be sure, Latinxs who are anti-Black are part of the problem of racism, and they use

the idea that they are racially mixed or have also been racially discriminated against to prove their innocence of being racist.

The upkeep of a racist society by Latinxs should be unsurprising. Hernández cleverly reminds us that, “when it comes to Latino racism, the family is the scene of the crime” (p. 16). Such statement coincides with phrases I have heard used in Latinx households, phrases such as *salte del sol* (get out of the sun) to avoid getting darker or *tan ojos bonitos de color* (beautiful colorful eyes) when referring to and complimenting someone who has blue eyes. Such phrases, casually stated by loved ones, begin to illuminate the Latinx desire for whiteness and the obsession with *mejorando y adelantando la raza* (improving and progressing the race) by marrying whiter partners to ensure any form of Blackness, or Indigeneity for that matter, is eradicated from the family lineage.

Hernández suggests that the anti-Black cultural prejudice held by some Latinx families is so deeply internalized that it seeps out into other realms of life, with significant material, social, psychological, and financial impacts on the lives of Afro-Latinxs and African Americans in diverse metropolitan cities across the United States such as Miami, Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, and El Paso, and even in Puerto Rico. Chapter 2 details the various ways Latinxs exert their anti-Blackness in public spaces, as clerks and managers refusing to serve African Americans and Afro-Latinxs at gas stations or restaurants and at schools as teachers and principals by denying African American students resources and opportunities and refusing to consider their perspectives in schools. Chapter 3 documents how Latinx anti-Blackness has resulted in discrimination toward African Americans and Afro-Latinxs in the work force, which for them has resulted in not being hired for jobs they are qualified for, being paid lower wages, constant harassment while at work, and denial of promotions. Chapter 4 focuses on how Latinx

landlords and homeowners enact practices grounded in anti-Blackness to discriminate against African Americans and Afro-Latinxs by not selling to them (or selling above asking price), by claiming that vacant rooms are occupied, or by not giving them access to amenities and facilities like the pool, jacuzzi, gym, and so on. As detailed by Hernández, Latinx landlords and homeowners discriminate against African Americans and Afro-Latinxs to ensure their neighborhoods remain free of Blackness and stay as white as possible. Chapter 5 sheds light on the violence inflicted on African Americans and Afro-Latinxs by non-Black Latinxs through the criminal justice system and gang-related anti-Black-driven hate crimes. In addition to providing instances of Latinx police officers harassing, discriminating against, and murdering Black people, and of Latinx judges dismissing cases of racial discrimination enacted by other Latinxs against Black people, Chapter 5 also recounts recent occurrences of Latinx gangs specifically targeting and terrorizing Black families in their neighborhoods to force them out of a neighborhood perceived as Latino. Chapter 6 concludes the book with an important conversation about successful coalition-building efforts to disrupt anti-Blackness in Latinx communities and urges Latinxs—across all fields, occupations, and careers, especially legal actors such as judges and lawyers—to acknowledge the anti-Blackness ideologies that drive their cultural prejudices and discriminatory practices.

To be sure, an important contribution put forth by Hernández relates to the conversation surrounding whether Latinx should be considered a race or an ethnicity in the United States Census. While some argue that making Latinx a racial category would resolve any confusion resulting from having to check the “Non-white Hispanic” box on the census, Hernández insinuates that “collapsing Latino/Hispanic ethnic identity into the list of racial categories with Black in particular risks obscuring the number of Afro-Latinos and the monitoring of

socioeconomic status differences of Latinos that exist across race” (p. 126). This is very important, because Hernández has shown through empirical data that darker-skinned Latinxs and Afro-Latinxs have lower life chances and opportunities. To conflate all Latinxs into one racial category will not allow us to recognize and effectively address the Latinx racism that is “a deeply intertwined intersection of biases based upon color, race, and ethnicity” (p. 62).

In the epilogue, Hernández provides a powerful testimony as an explanation for why she wrote this book: she is a daughter of an Afro-Puerto Rican mother who was almost given away by her family because of her Blackness. Latinx anti-Blackness is not only dreadful for Black people, but also deadly. It is important for Latinxs to recognize that being “Latinx” or a “Person of Color” does not automatically make a person “woke” about racial justice, and it certainly does not make a person *racially innocent* of being a racist.