

All told, Yalidy Matos offers a sweeping analysis of the relationship between white Americans' commitment to whiteness as a social role and their anti-immigrant attitudes. Her book demands a greater societal reckoning with white supremacy in all its forms, including the effects that whiteness has on how US politicians and voters receive and perceive immigrants.

Response to Asad L. Asad's Review of *Moral and Immoral Whiteness in Immigration Politics*

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— Yalidy Matos 

I focus my response on the questions Dr. Asad asks toward the end of his review. I completely agree that expanding the analysis beyond non-Hispanic white Americans will showcase the ways in which whiteness travels. The ideology of whiteness, as I argue in my book, is not tethered to the phenotypical. As Asad mentions, communities of color can engage in whiteness. In fact, I would argue against the claim that it is about “respectability politics.” Some individuals in communities of color are taught inherently white supremacist understandings of group relations. For example, the ideology of *mestizaje* rampant across the Americas and the Caribbean emphasizes and glorifies mixedness in ways that are inherently anti-Black, because the mixedness intentionally leaves out African ancestry. A preference for whiteness is part of the socialization of the ideology of *mestizaje* that many in Latin America and the United States today continue to extol and enact. And so to answer the question that Asad posed—What would the “argument have looked like if it were not limited to white-identified people and their ideological commitments?”—I would say that we would find individuals who would be recognized as people of color using whiteness for upward mobility at the expense of other groups of color, especially Black Americans. But we would also find communities of color working together against ideologies of whiteness.

Asad also worries about the distorting impact of “social desirability bias” when it comes to trusting white Americans' reported attitudes on racial issues. But what makes immigration unique is that it is a rare issue that allows white Americans to endorse punishment without worrying that

they may seem racist, especially when answering anonymous survey questions. As Cristina Beltrán states in her 2020 book *Cruelty as Citizenship*, anti-immigrant practices offer whites a “rare opportunity to combine practices of overt racial domination with the invocation of law” (23). In this respect, I am not that concerned about social desirability bias on the topic of immigration, even among those who demonstrate high levels of awareness of their racial advantage. But as Asad suggests, future research certainly can push this further by asking what else sets these racially progressive whites apart from the rest of white America. Is it donations to certain organizations? Is it voting consistently Democratic? Or having progressive policy preferences in all other political and social issues?

What is to be done? In all honesty, I have struggled with this very same question. After writing this book, I was left wondering whether things will ever change. Perhaps cynically, I do not think many white Americans will, in fact, choose a “moral life” over the psychological and, for some, material wages they get from whiteness. Hence, institutional reforms might be the way to go. But as a society, we seem to be getting further and further away from those as well. For example, Asad mentions reinvesting in public education. Yes, that would surely be wonderful, but as it stands, white Americans barely accept that racism exists and that critical race theory is an important aspect of college and high school education. Textbooks are watering down the transatlantic slave trade: some by calling enslaved Africans, who were forcibly and violently removed from their homes, “workers.” So even as I write this response, I am at a loss. What is there to be done? For what it is worth, I would hope for a cross-racial and ethnic coalition that is committed to placing the most marginalized at the center and that can tackle issues from numerous fronts, including through the law, mass participation, voting, and representation. Such political work, of course, will necessitate rejecting the ideology of whiteness and anti-Black attitudes. The question Asad poses is of vital importance—and is one that the small minority of whites aware of their racial advantage should figure out how to answer.

I end by thanking Asad L. Asad for his generous reading of my book. His sharp and poignant questions surely allowed me to think more deeply about my work.