**Racial Arithmetic:
Ethnoracial Politics in a Relational Key¹**

Michael Rodríguez-Muñiz
Department of Sociology and Latina/o Studies Program
Northwestern University
michael.rodriguez@northwestern.edu

Abstract

Societies invested in the quantification of race are rarely, if ever, free of racial arithmetic, the practice of using statistics to legitimate and justify political decisions along categories of race and ethnicity. Despite this, scholars have tended to focus on the production rather than the use of ethnoracial statistics. This paper argues that the study of racial arithmetic—an understudied feature of contemporary politics—requires a relational approach. To illustrate the purchase of this approach, this paper presents an analysis of Chicago’s most recent bout of aldermanic redistricting. In this case, racial arithmetic rested on the ubiquitous juxtaposition of “Latino” and “Black” demographics, as captured in the 2010 census. By casting Black and Latino political power as a zero-sum game, this juxtaposition helped longstanding white overrepresentation on the City Council escape public scrutiny.

Introduction

Over the past two hundred years, the ever-intensifying quantification of race has shaped politics in profound ways. This chapter focuses on one way: *racial arithmetic*.² This concept refers to the use of ethnoracial statistics in political argumentation and decision-making. In other words, it names situations where such knowledge is invoked by political actors to determine or justify the distribution of resources and rights.

Although the United States is far from unique, its history offers many examples of racial arithmetic. This practice is visible in the infamous 1790 “three-fifths” compromise that rendered black slaves three-fifths of a person for purposes apportionment, as well as the work of eugenicist movements in the early 20th century to establish racial quotas for immigration. In both these examples, as in the majority of cases prior to the civil rights era, ethnoracial statistics were almost exclusively used to institute and legitimate white supremacy. Since then, racial arithmetic has also become central to political and legal efforts to address ethnoracial exclusion and inequality.³ For instance, Black, Latino, and Asian-American civil rights organizations have long relied on data to advocate for greater political representation.⁴ A recent example is the Department of Justice’s use of ethnoracial statistics to prove the existence of “racial bias” within the Ferguson, Missouri Police Department.⁵ In short, divergent political entities and projects have actively engaged in racial arithmetic.

While there is no shortage of past or contemporary examples, scholars have had little to say about racial arithmetic and the role of statistics in ethnoracial politics, more generally. Research on racial categorization and censuses provides a starting point, but this work tends to focus on the process of producing data, rather than on the ways that this knowledge is used in political contests. The objective of this chapter, therefore, is to turn attention to the practice and politics of racial arithmetic.

In the pages to follow, I pursue this objective in two interlinked steps. First, I argue that the study of racial arithmetic demands a *relational* approach. In contrast to more common,

group-centric or comparative analyses, this approach treats race as “a mutually constitutive process and thus attends to how, when, and to what extent groups intersect.”⁶ This orientation makes it possible to recognize that racial arithmetic is an inherently relational practice. Second, I illustrate this point with an empirical analysis of a recent case of racial arithmetic. Drawing primarily on media coverage, I examine Chicago’s 2011 aldermanic redistricting, and narrate how elected officials mobilized census data to make competing claims on the ethnoracial composition of the City Council. This particular case of racial arithmetic, I argue, rested on the ubiquitous juxtaposition of “Latino” and “Black” demographics, as captured in the 2010 census. Casting Black and Latino political interests as a zero-sum game, this juxtaposition helped longstanding white overrepresentation escape public scrutiny.

Race, Relationality, and Statistical Knowledge

Racial arithmetic and the broader topic of ethnoracial politics can be studied via several analytic approaches. The major approaches are *group-centric*, *comparative*, and *relational*. The limitations of the first two have lead me to adopt the third.

The historical and social scientific study of ethnoracial politics remains largely bound to a group-centric approach. This approach has produced rich analyses of the histories and politics of specific ethnoracial groups and communities. It is, however, not without limitation. The focus on individual groups encourages a conception of ethnoracial politics composed of isolated and autonomous constituencies. Group-centric analyses are often rooted in a “substantialist” ontology that treats social phenomena as intrinsic and bounded.⁷ As sociologist Matthew Desmond argues, this ontology “imposes static and atomistic categories onto a world made up of bunches of intertwining interconnections.”⁸

Growing awareness of the limitations of group-centered analyses have led some scholars of race to adopt a “methodology of comparativism.”⁹ Yet, while this approach has produced important insights, comparative analyses of race treat ethnoracial identities and movements in

isolation. As a result, they too are unable to capture intersections and exchanges between different ethnoracial formations. To recover these intersections requires a relational analytic.

A relational approach to social analysis give “ontological primacy, not to groups or places, but to configurations of relations.”¹⁰ It does not presume the existence of independent, already formed groups. For research on race, this analytic approach holds that ethnoracial boundaries, identities, and political affiliations do not precede, but instead are the *effects* of these relations. Thus, rather than operating in a vacuum, racial projects, to use the language of Omi and Winant, are entangled and enmeshed within a wider field of political activity.¹¹

This approach is indispensable for the study of racial arithmetic. First, it orients analysis towards the interface between different ethnoracial constituencies. Racial arithmetic, or the use of ethnoracial statistics to make political claims, is undertaken by political actors to advance their agendas over or in alignment with the agenda of others. As such, it presupposes more than a single ethnoracial project or constituency.

Second, the approach allows us to capture the intrinsic relationality of ethnoracial statistics. Ethnoracial statistics, or what political scientist Kenneth Prewitt has aptly called “statistical races,” are political abstractions that represent a way of thinking and enacting “race” in numerical, aggregate terms.¹² Prewitt reminds, “there is no such thing as a ‘race’ without a classification scheme with more than one race category.”¹³ In other words, there is no singular statistical race, only statistical *races*.

Linked to a classificatory scheme and a quantitative ratio, ethnoracial statistics enable interested parties—politicians, marketers, journalists, activists, and the general public—to imagine and talk, for example, about “African American” and “Asian-American” populations, as well as to compare “how fast their numbers are growing, how many have jobs, graduated from high school, are in prison, serve in the military, are obese or smoke, own their own homes, or marry each other.”¹⁴ As such, statistical races are relational entities, whose meaning

and numerical significance is forged in relation and reference to statistics about other ethnoracial populations. In this way, racial arithmetic cannot be but a relational enterprise.

Equipped with a relational orientation, I devote the remainder of this chapter to a recent case of racial arithmetic. The case I will examine is political negotiations and struggles over how to redraw the boundaries of Chicago's 50 aldermanic wards. Redistricting, as I show, provides a clear example of racial arithmetic, as political leaders anchor claims on the statistical races produced by the decennial census.

Redistricting Chicago

In Chicago, and elsewhere in the country, race and racial interests have historically overdetermined the process and politics of redistricting. As a site of racial arithmetic, redrawing ward boundaries literally divides the metropolis. This act, informed technically and rhetorically by ethnoracial statistics, can weaken or strengthen existing racial distributions of political influence and determine the lifespan of racially-marked incumbents. White machine politics have long used redistricting to diminish and dilute the electoral power of non-dominant ethnoracial populations. Against this, over the past several decades, Black and Latino leaders have fought—independently and collaboratively—to increase their presence in the City Council.

In 2011, following the release of data from the 2010 census, Chicago's City Council once again undertook redistricting. In contrast to redistricting in 2001, which was lauded as harmonious, there was near consensus that the process would be, this time around, racially contentious. Indeed, months before negotiations began or a single map proposed, journalists and elected officials expected a fight. By all accounts, the conflict centered around the demographic portrait painted by the census. Writing for the *Chicago Tribune*, the city's largest daily, journalists John Byrne and Hal Dardick put the problem in the following terms. "Two of the biggest challenges involve race: The city's African-American population dropped by more

than 181,000, while the city's Latino population grew by about 25,000 according to last year's federal census.”¹⁵ For the next several months, this juxtaposition would become ubiquitous in media coverage of negotiations. For some elected officials, these statistics were interpreted and deployed as warrant for more “Latino” wards. Conversely, census data, for many, pointed towards the seemingly *inevitable* loss of local African-American political power.

The next several sections narrate, in a roughly chronological manner, how redistricting unfolded in Chicago’s City Council. Although I do strive to provide a comprehensive account, my relational analysis of racial arithmetic highlights an important, even defining, aspect of the process. To understand the juxtaposition between Latino and Black demographics, it is important to begin the story just before negotiations began, when the results of the 2010 census became objects of local and national media coverage.

Population Loss and a Changing Metropolis

Census data became publicly available in the early months of 2011. Beginning in February, the press began to report on the results of the census in Chicago. The major story told by the media was population loss. The *Sun-Times*, for example, led its census coverage with the headline, “Shrinking Chicago.”¹⁶ Its accompanying text opened with the sentence: “Chicago’s population plunged by 200,418 people—a 6.9 percent decline from 2000, according to the official census count released Tuesday.” Its competitor, the *Tribune* used similar language and statistics.¹⁷ Media coverage of the city’s demographic decline was not limited to local outlets. The topic was also covered in *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *USA Today*, and the *Huffington Post*, among others.

Within local and national media, Chicago’s demographics were described and discussed in relation to numerous issues, such as the economic and political impact of demographic decline. However, few—if any—of these issues rivaled the attention directed at the city’s loss of African-American residents. According to the census, there was a significant drop in Chicago’s

Black population and that of other “traditional black strongholds” like Atlanta, Washington D.C., and Detroit. Monica Davey of the *New York Times* wrote, “As Chicagoans prepare to vote next week for their first new mayor in decades, the city itself looks different from how it did during much of the era of Mayor Richard M. Daley, who is retiring: it has shrunk, and black people in particular have left.”¹⁸

Similar narratives appeared in both of Chicago’s major newspapers. Presenting census data, a *Sun-Times* article stated: “Chicago’s black population fell the most, nearly 17 percent. Today, blacks make up only 33 percent of the city’s population, down from 36 percent 10 years ago.”¹⁹ Black population loss was represented visually in various ways, from photos of boarded up businesses to infographics pregnant with statistics. For example, *Tribune* produced a map of community areas to illustrate neighborhood population loss. The map’s caption described the city’s overall loss as “fueled in part by a decrease in [its] black population.” Black population was also a major theme of editorials and commentaries.²⁰

Given that ethnoracial statistics are relational entities, news of Black population loss was often discussed in reference to other ethnoracial populations. In particular, it would become consistently contrasted against the population growth of the Latino population. Whereas media discourse on national trends ubiquitously juxtaposed “white” and “Latino” demographics, press coverage of urban contexts often focused on “Black” and “Latino” demographics. In April 2011, *USA Today*, for instance, published an article with the headline: “Census: Hispanics surpass blacks in most U.S. metros.”²¹ The opening line of the article stressed the political implications of this trend: “Hispanics now outnumber African-Americans for the first time in most U.S. metropolitan areas, shifting the political and racial dynamics in cities once dominated by whites and blacks.” Media outlets made note of local Latino population growth, and increasingly positioned it in relation to the African American population.

As redistricting drew near, the juxtaposition of these populations intensified and become politically charged. For example, in August 2011, just as redistricting negotiations were to begin, the *Huffington Post* ran an article in which Latino population growth was described as a “notable counterweight to the black exodus.”²² The article focused primarily on Chicago’s Black population, but noted that the “Latinos are increasing their share of Chicago’s population, and there are 25,000 more Latinos in the city now than in 2000.” Quoting the *Sun-Times*, it framed these divergent demographic trends—the respective growth and decline of the city’s two largest non-white populations—as a major reason that redistricting could be “among the most contentious in recent history.”

Ethnoracial Proportionality

As aldermen and alderwomen began making preparations for redistricting, there was consensus that one of the major challenges would be how to reconcile Black and Latino demographics. There were, to be sure, other potential sources of conflict, but it was arguably debate about the City Council’s ethnoracial composition that was the most intense. This debate pivoted, often explicitly, on the notion of ethnoracial proportionality, an idea that is intrinsically relational. As a form of racial arithmetic, this notion stipulates that the ethnoracial composition of a given elected office should be commensurate with the ethnoracial demographics of its corresponding jurisdiction. This idea, Prewitt notes, emerged in the 1960s as a “new way of thinking about racial fairness.”²³

To my knowledge, no calls were made for complete ethnoracial proportionality. Instead, media producers and mapmakers seemed to share an aspiration for a *more* proportional map than was quietly achieved in the decade prior. For some, greater proportionality would help the map survive legal challenge and prevent the city becoming embroiled in expensive and protracted lawsuits, such as those that marked redistricting in the 1980s and 1990s. Others sought greater proportionality in the name of making the City Council more reflective of the

city's residents. Even so, enthusiasm for this aspiration was not universal, as increasing proportionality could also create a more contentious council for the mayor, challenge the political careers of incumbents, and even severely threaten the existing concentration of political influence and power, whether of longtime white aldermen or of the Black Caucus. The "new" map had to be different from the "old map," but, as one alderman noted, the "devil is in the details."²⁴

The major detail would be how proportional should be the City Council be? This question was taken up in the *Tribune*, about a month before official negotiations began. In July 2011, journalists Hal Dardick and Kristen Mack describe what complete ethnoracial proportionality would look in light of the 2010 census. "If the ethnic and racial makeup of the city mirrored its population, the council would have 16 whites, 16 blacks, 15 Latinos and three Asians." This makeup, they acknowledged, was not politically feasible, but perhaps neither was the current configuration. "The council now has 22 white members, 19 African-Americans, eight Latinos and one alderman of Indian descent—a combination well out of sync with the makeup of Chicago following the 2000 census."²⁵

According to the analysis of Dardick and Mack, white aldermen were overrepresented by six positions and black alderman overrepresented by three, while Latinos were underrepresented by seven seats and Asian-Americans by two. It is important to note, as often stated in the press, that four "Latino" wards—wards with a Latino demographic majority—were represented by influential white aldermen. Despite having the greatest overrepresentation, media coverage rarely made much mention of the numbers of white aldermen, nor made much notice of Asian underrepresentation.

More often than not, attention focused on the relative representation of Blacks and Latinos in the City Council. Although Dardick and Mack, in the article cited above, mention that increases to Latino seats on the council would come at the "expense" of whites, this would be the case "especially" with African-Americans.²⁶ These journalists were far from alone in

making this assertion. For example, a December 2011 *Sun-Times* article stated, “Last week, a majority of aldermen appeared to be uniting behind a map that would give Hispanics three more super-majority wards as a reward for their 25,218-person population gain at the expense of blacks, who would lose two seats.”²⁷ Even when the word “expense” was not used, it was communicated nonetheless. A September 2011 *Sun-Times* article, for example, discussed efforts to “maximize an ever-shrinking African-American population and accommodate a growing but often low voting Hispanic population.”²⁸ Accordingly, the Latino population was often described as deserving of greater representation. The *Sun-Times*, for instance, consistently framed potential increases to the number of “Latino” wards as a demographic “reward.”

Arguments about Black expense and Latino gain helped to elide the historical overrepresentation of white aldermen. These claims restricted ethnoracial representation narrowly to the results of the 2010 census. The operative logic being that the population that suffered the greatest population loss should suffer, as a consequence, the greatest political loss. And conversely, the population with the greatest demographic gain should gain the most politically. This represented a kind of selective ethnoracial proportionality, which posited that Black and Latino political outcomes were causally linked, and locked into, a zero-sum game.

In the next section, I explore how members of the Black Caucus and the Latino Caucus responded and engaged in racial arithmetic for political representation. As I show, both caucuses were hesitant to embrace this logic, but were nonetheless committed to mobilizing census statistics to advance, at least to some extent, their competing aims.

Caucuses

Months before the official, August 1 start of negotiations, the 19-member Black Caucus made public the hire of attorney and former South Side alderwoman, Freddenna Lyle. Until her razor-thin loss just months before, Lyle had served in the City Council for 13 years. News of Lyle’s selection was the subject of a *Sun-Times* article titled “Dispute Over Boundaries Could

Get Ugly.” In the article, the chair of the Black Caucus, Alderman Howard Brookins of the 21st Ward, was quoted explaining the group’s selection. “She went through it 10 years ago. She’s an attorney. And she has an idea as to how City Council works and specific expertise with respect to drawing maps.”²⁹ The Black Caucus publicly stated its commitment to ward preservation. As narrated by Spielman, “Lyle will go to war for her former colleagues in the high-stakes battle to hold on to the 19 City Council seats and 20 majority black wards they have, despite a dramatic decline in Chicago’s black population.”³⁰ In May, when Brookins became chair following the contentious resignation of his predecessor, he told reporters that preserving African-American majority wards was his top priority.³¹

To preserve wards, the Black Caucus practiced racial arithmetic. A key aspect of their practice involved using ethnoracial statistics to contest the thesis of Black “expense.” Leveraging alternative interpretations of the results of the census, the Black Caucus argued that the city’s demographic composition did not warrant *substantial* change to the number of “Black” wards. Lyle told the press, “As opposed to having 19 wards with 80 or 90 percent black population, you may have some wards that have 65, 70 or 80 percent. But we’re going into the process anticipating that we will retain the same number of African-American wards.” While acknowledging overall population loss, she claimed that, whereas the Latino population was “more spread out,” the Black population largely continued to live in “compact, single race neighborhoods.” Lyle also challenged the idea that Latino demographic growth should be charged to African-American members. “If there is to be an increase in Latino wards, it should come at the expense of wards represented by white alderman.” Lyle’s comment was one of the few public statements about white overrepresentation. The attorney justified her position, noting that the 2010 census found nearly 53,000 less white residents than enumerated in the previous census.³² Although less prominently than one might expect, the Black Caucus and its supporters also claimed that the Black population had declined but remained the largest demographic in the city. For instance, as narrated by *Sun-Times* columnist Mark Brown, former

Alderman Dorothy Tillman “complain[ed] that all the ward remap stories were citing the 181,453 decrease in the black population without mentioning that blacks still comprise the largest single population group in Chicago.”³³ These examples indicate that the Black Caucus—at least in public—did not call into question the results of the census. But they did contest the dominant narrative built upon them, namely that African-American political loss should follow population loss. However, their attempts to preserve “Black” wards met against the racial arithmetic of the Latino Caucus.

In early September, a month after Lyle was hired, members of the Latino Caucus gathered in City Hall to express their desire and resolve to increase the number of “Latino” wards. Standing before cameras and reporters, Latino alderman drew on census data to make a demographic case for additional wards. As widely reported in the local press, the 2010 census found 25,000 more Latino residents than enumerated in the previous census. Emboldened by this statistic, 25th Ward Alderman Danny Solis, the chairman of the caucus, told the press: “We’re looking to increase our representation. Right now we just know the numbers speak for themselves.” Another Alderman, Ray Suarez from the 31st Ward, echoed Solis: “We are just working to make sure that the Latino community is properly represented according to the census numbers we have seen... We’re looking at the numbers, and working with the numbers, to make sure the Latino community has proper representation.” By “proper” representation, the alderman and their attorneys meant more or less proportional representation—a conviction that undergirded a question posed by 22nd Ward Alderman Ricardo Muñoz. “If Latinos are one-third of the city, why are they one-fifth of the City Council?”

Although they did not specify a number at the press conference, the Latino Caucus made clear their belief that demographics mandated an increase in wards. Months before, beginning in July, they began articulating that the Latino population grew across the city and accounted for nearly a third of its residents. These officials also pushed back against some of the interpretations advanced by the Black Caucus and other members of the council. When

the influential white alderman Richard Mell, who oversaw redistricting, described the Latino population as “diffuse,” Alderman Muñoz shot back, “So is the white population. We no longer have the days of concentrated neighborhoods. There’s ways of cutting different wards for different purposes. It depends on what the political will is.”³⁴ These claims and counterclaims rested on census data, and the conviction that statistics were transparent, needing no translators. As anthropologist Jacqueline Urla has argued, “rhetorically, numbers function as pure description or inescapable ‘facts.’”³⁵ Indeed, the Latino Caucus maintained, as Alderman Roberto Maldonado of the 26th Ward once put it, “the numbers now speak louder than ever.”³⁶

While advancing their respective agendas, both caucuses publicly affirmed a willingness to dialogue and compromise as legally “protected classes.” Black Caucus members admitted that the number of “Latino” wards should increase, and the Latino Caucus affirmed that it was not targeting Black political power. Weeks before the Black Caucus made its first map public, Victor Reyes, the former leader of the controversy ridden Hispanic Democratic Organization, mused, “maybe there’s a solution that doesn’t require there to be losers.”³⁷ Yet, the juxtaposition of Black and Latino demographics made finding such a solution difficult. It was precisely at this moment that Chicago’s redistricting entered its most conflictual phase: mapmaking.

Dueling Maps

In September, after weeks of preparation and preliminary negotiations, members of the City Council began to propose and contest maps. Up until that point, demands for more “Latino” wards, appeals for boundaries to reflect demographic changes, and refusals to surrender “Black” wards were abstract. To become concrete, these claims had to be inscribed into a map—for ultimately, this is the object that elected officials and interested parties were struggling over and struggling for. While most of the mapmaking happens, at least in Chicago, behind closed doors, their public display and the press coverage they received provide further

insight into the practice of racial arithmetic in redistricting. Without claiming to present a comprehensive account, this final section employs a relational perspective to trace the cascade of “dueling maps” that consumed the City Council. Of particular relevance here is how mapmaking hinges on the manufacture of ethnoracial majorities. This is accomplished by shuffling existing boundaries to capture or expel certain populations, a process that homogenizes as much as it fragments.³⁸

The Black Caucus introduced the first map. It was unveiled in late September, almost three months before the City Council’s December 1st deadline for map selection. The Black Caucus’ map conceded one majority “Black” ward and added two majority “Latino” wards. A *Chicago Tribune* article described it as a “politically easy” proposal for the caucus, being that their main concession—the 2nd Ward in the city’s South Loop—had already lost its majority Black population and was represented by a white alderman.³⁹ Press accounts of the map—and all subsequent maps—were saturated with data on the 2010 census, and particularly data on Black demographic loss and Latino gain. Structured by the pervasive juxtaposition of Black and Latino demographics, the media also recorded public responses from members of the Latino Caucus. For instance, caucus chair Solis stated, “We’re at least 29 percent of the city, almost a third, and that’s more than the 13 wards they presented.”⁴⁰ Another Latino aldermen, who spoke in anonymity, charged that the map had little “parity,” given that “blacks have a little bit more population than Hispanics.”⁴¹

The Latino Caucus proposed a map in mid-November, following two public hearings in Latino-dominant wards. At this stage, the map—similar to the Black Caucus map—was proposed, but not officially filed. The Latino Caucus map would create four new “super-majority” Latino wards and two “influence” wards. In super-majority wards, the Latino population would be at least 65% of the overall population. Influence wards would set the demographic threshold between 35-55%. The creation of these wards required pulling together “Latino” residents and moving out other populations. For instance, this map would transform

Alderwoman Toni Foulkes' 15th Ward from predominately African American to majority Latino.⁴² A similar effect would be had on a majority white ward on the North Side. Most controversially, the Latino Caucus map would decrease the number of "Black" wards by two, rather than the single ward proposed by the Black Caucus.

In early December, Alderman Mell and the Finance and Rules committee shared a draft map. This map generated the most tension seen during redistricting. Similar to the Latino Caucus map, the committee map would decrease "Black" wards by two. It would also decrease "white" wards by five and add three super-majority "Latino" wards and three additional influence wards.⁴³ In response, Black Caucus attorney Lyle cited a legislative motion that would prevent the map for securing enough votes. "If a map is passed that has 17 African-American wards, there will be another map introduced by 10 African-American aldermen."⁴⁴ A "flashpoint" of contention became the prospect of creating a super-majority "Latino" ward in the Back of the Yards neighborhood, which was then split into five South Side wards. As stated in the *Tribune*, members of the Latino Caucus made a demographic argument in favor of consolidation. "Latino aldermen point to demographics. Back of the Yards is now about 59 percent Hispanic, up from 51 percent in 2000. It's about 31 percent black, down from 36 percent a decade ago."⁴⁵ The article went on to note that the Black Caucus chair, Alderman Brookins, "pointed out that only around 43,000 people live in Back of the Yards, so forming a ward that approaches the population standard of roughly 53,000 residents per ward for the new map would require slicing off pieces of surrounding neighborhoods." One African-American alderman called the prospective "Latino" supermajority ward in the Back of the Yards a "racial gerrymander."

On December 15, the Latino Caucus filed a revised map. To signal its legal fortitude over the Black Caucus map, the map was titled, "The Taxpayer Protection Map." Unlike the original, this map reduced the addition of "Latino" wards from four to three, but still decreased "Black" wards by two. Alderman Solis told the press, "Now we have a map—that we

believe will pass muster, so to speak—a map that represents every ethnic and racial group in the city of Chicago in a fair way.” The map received the support from eight members of the Latino Caucus and eight white aldermen, but received no support from African-American members. At about the same time, a coalition of 32 aldermen introduced the “Map for a Better Chicago.” The map was spearheaded by the Black Caucus and Alderman Mell, who shifted his support away from the Latino Caucus proposal. The map included 18 “Black” wards and 13 “Latino” wards. However, this composition required that several North Side wards, largely composed of whites, would have larger populations than many South Side, heavily African-American, wards. Detractors raised that this “deviation” opened room for legal challenge, as it could violate the notion of “one person, one vote.”

Both the Black Caucus and the Latino Caucus maps fell short of the requisite 41 votes needed to approve the map. With negotiations halted, the City Council departed for winter recess without a compromise. In a somewhat tongue-in-cheek fashion, the *Chicago Tribune* editorial board urged the introduction of a “doomsday” map to resolve the impasse. Rather than divide the map to protect incumbents and secure ethnoracial representation, this map “simply divides the city into squares. Ward boundaries don’t meander all over the place to sort voters into predictable majorities.”⁴⁶ Groups calling for an end to ethnoracial gerrymandering promoted similar maps. With negotiations stalled, Mayor Emmanuel also threatened to introduce what the press called a “nuclear option”—a ballot question in next election that would give voters an opportunity to decide whether the City Council should be reduced to 25 members.⁴⁷

In early January 2012, the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF), a national civil rights litigator, submitted its own “Equity” map. The map created 14 “Latino” majority wards, one more than the Latino Caucus map, and also included the same number of “Black” wards present in the Black Caucus map. In addition, the map placed much of the Back of the Yards into a single ward and even did the same for splintered Chinatown.

However, no aldermen endorsed the map, because as one article described it, the map “ignore[d] the most important factor in redistricting: protecting incumbents.”⁴⁸ As this map entered circulation, Mell and members of the Black and Latino caucuses resumed negotiations.

On January 19, the City Council passed a slightly modified version of the “Map for a Better Chicago” map. As described in the *Tribune*, “less than two hours after putting the finishing touches on a new map of the city’s 50 wards, the Chicago City Council approved it over the vehement objects of some aldermen whose political futures are imperiled by the redrawn boundaries.”⁴⁹ Cobbling together sufficient support from the major caucuses, the map passed with a 41-8 vote. The map secured 18 “Black” wards, the primary objective the Black Caucus, and it also added three majority “Latino” wards. However, the map did not consolidate the Back of the Yards into one ward, which was one of the chief demands of the Latino Caucus.

Conclusion

The preceding sections present a relational account of Chicago’s most recent experience of redistricting. Long before negotiations began, elected officials and journalists shared in the premonition that the process would be, as one newspaper put it, a “racially charged political storm.”⁵⁰ In a sense, this premonition was correct. But in part, this was due to the ways that these same actors interpreted, displayed, and partook in racial arithmetic. Particular choices led to the focus on Black and Latino demographics rather than the historically cemented overrepresentation of whites in the City Council. Eventually, after intense and at times openly conflictual negotiations, the majority of the council agreed to new map, a map that was deemed more proportionally representative than its predecessor. As I detailed, competing practices of racial arithmetic sought to configure wards in ways that either preserved or augmented the number of seats for particular ethnoracial populations.

A departure from the dominant approaches in the study of race enabled this account. I sought neither to highlight a single population nor stage a comparison between two or more projects. Instead, I employed a relational orientation, which, as David Theo Goldberg writes, pursues the “(re-)production of relational ties and their mutually effecting and reinforcing impacts.”⁵¹ This approach, I argue, provides support for understanding the relationality of ethnoracial statistics, the chief weapon of racial arithmetic. It helps register that statistical claims about a particular population necessarily imply and are linked to claims about other populations. That is, these relations are a major source of their meaningfulness and discursive significance. This does not mean, however, that binary juxtapositions are the only form that these relations take, although they were in the case presented above. Moreover, a relational approach opens terrain not only for the study of racial arithmetic, but for ethnoracial politics, more broadly. As Natalia Molina argues, it invites us to rethink our questions, units of analysis, and assumptions about racial identity and group formation.⁵² In a social horizon marked by growing diversity, we especially need analytic frameworks that make visible the contextually specific conflicts, collaborations, and connections out of which ethnoracial politics grow and transform.

¹ I thank Michelle Mejia for her research assistance.

² The term racial arithmetic trades on the notion of “political arithmetic,” which was coined by the 17th century British political philosopher, William Petty. For Petty, political arithmetic was a method for “handling economic and political matters mathematically.” See Patrick Carroll, *Science, Culture, and Modern State Formation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

³ Ann Morning and Daniel Sabbagh, “From Sword to Plowshare: Using Race for Discrimination and Antidiscrimination in the United States,” *International Social Science Journal* 57, no. 183 (2005).

⁴ In the case of Latino civil rights, see G. Cristina Mora, *Making Hispanics: How Activists, Bureaucrats, and Media Constructed a New American* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014).

⁵ Civil Rights Division, “Investigation of the Ferguson Police Department,” ed. United States Department of Justice (Washington, DC., 2015), 4.

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