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Whitening citizenship
Race, ethnicity, and documentation status as brightened boundaries of exclusion in the U.S. and Europe

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Introduction

The resurgence of overtly racist, nationalistic, and anti-immigrant sentiment in the United States and Europe demonstrates that these societies are no longer as solidly democratic and socially progressive as they were once perceived to be. As the world’s largest immigrant-receiving country, the U.S. has grappled with its contentious race relations alongside being considered a “welcoming” nation to immigrants (Feagin 2000; Foner and Alba 2015). European countries like Great Britain, France, and Germany have also seen a substantial increase of immigrants, especially refugees, to their predominantly white countries amid the Syrian Civil War, other Middle Eastern crises, and the global recession (Foner and Alba 2015; Tyler 2018; Wrench and Solomos 1993). In both regions, immigration and subsequent more ethno-racially and religiously diverse societies have yielded increasing xenophobia towards individuals perceived not to be American, British, or more broadly white European (DeGenova 2018; Gupta and Virdee 2018). These societal struggles also entail determining who legally belongs to the nation, has rights to public benefits, and contributes to the nation socially, economically and politically. This chapter examines how race, ethnicity, and documentation status have stratified and continue to stratify populations in the U.S. and Europe. Such a comparative examination is important now, as both regions receive the world’s largest number of immigrants – from predominantly non-white Global South countries – amid intensifying economic inequality, socio-political conflicts, and climate change. Drawing on boundaries and citizenship scholarship, I argue that the presumption of citizenship being synonymous with whiteness reflects both explicit and implicit boundaries drawn around citizens racialized as white, separating them from citizens and non-citizens of color who are racialized as domestic and foreign outsiders. To demonstrate these boundaries, I incorporate scholarly accounts and events of racialized anti-immigrant discrimination in policies, interpersonal interactions, and institutional structures in both regions. This chapter contributes to scholarship on race, ethnicity, immigration, boundaries, and citizenship by highlighting how race,
ethnicity, and documentation status brighten boundaries between white citizens and citizens and immigrants of color.

To make this argument, I first provide an overview of the ethno-racial demographics related to immigration in the U.S. and Europe. I then review relevant literature comparing immigrant integration in both regions. Next, I demonstrate my argument about stratification on the basis of race, ethnicity, and documentation status in both regions using recent scholarly accounts and events, namely the: (1) racialization of immigrants and citizens of color as foreign others; (2) retrenchment of immigrants’ public benefits; and (3) increased securitization of borders, detention, and incarceration of people of color. To conclude, I briefly discuss the social implications of this increased intersectional stratification for both regions.

**Literature review**

**Migration and shifting ethno-racial demographics**

Economic recessions, the shifting demand for global labor, environmental changes due to climate change, and political conflicts have facilitated significant migration from the Global South to the Global North (IOM 2018). As of 2015, there were an estimated 244 million international migrants, which is three percent of the global population (International Organization for Migration (IOM) 2018). This number includes an estimated at 22.5 million refugees, one million of whom sought refuge in Western Europe in 2015 alone, generating a refugee crisis (International Organization for Migration (IOM) 2018; Holmes and Castañeda 2016). Countries receiving the most migrants are the U.S., Canada, Germany, the United Kingdom, France, Italy, and Spain with a sizable number of migrants being unauthorized and refugees. The U.S. has the highest number, with an estimated 11 million unauthorized immigrants, while the European Union (EU) had an estimated eight million (International Organization for Migration (IOM) 2018). This has created debates regarding pathways to citizenship and immigrants’ eligibility for obtaining social services like health care and welfare (Cappelen and Peters 2018; Fox 2016; Joseph 2016). In response to backlash and anti-immigrant sentiment, legislators in the U.S. and Europe have implemented policies limiting the number of refugees and restricting non-citizens’ access – both authorized and unauthorized – to social safety nets (Cappelen and Peters 2018; Fox 2016; Joseph 2016).

Migrants to the U.S. and Europe have diversified over time, with the majority coming from Latin America, Asia, and Northern Africa (International Organization for Migration (IOM) 2018). Differences in religion and national security concerns have sparked anxiety about how these immigrants are transforming the ethno-racial, religious, and cultural fabric of these host nations (Foner and Alba 2015; Virdee and McGeever 2018). Despite being a nation with predominantly immigrant origins, the U.S. legally restricted migration and naturalization for people of color until 1965 with an immigration act that removed explicitly racist immigration quotas (Feagin 2000). The country’s troubled history with its legal citizens of color (i.e. African Americans, Mexican Americans, and Native Americans) continues to shape contemporary discussions of race and immigration (Feagin 2000; Flores-Gonzalez 2017). This has elicited concerns about how the “browning” of America will transform the longstanding racialized social order (Flores-Gonzalez 2017; Tavernise 2018). Scholars argue that white racial anxiety about shifting demographics aided Donald Trump’s election to the presidency (Bobo 2017; Lamont et al., 2017; Strolovitch et al., 2017).

Unlike the U.S., European nations have been predominantly white and racially homogeneous for most of their history. Many of these nations’ ties to people of color were
consequences of colonization (Bosworth and Trumbull 2015; DeGenova 2018; Virdee and McGeeever 2018). Decolonization efforts and resulting economic destabilization in newly independent nations (previous colonies), in the Caribbean and Africa facilitated waves of migration to Western Europe in the 1950s and 1960s (Bosworth and Trumbull 2015; Virdee and McGeeever 2018). Subsequent conflicts in the Middle East pushed migrants first to Eastern and then Western Europe (Foner and Alba 2015; Wrench and Solomos 1993). Most recently, the Syrian Civil War has yielded the highest number of displaced individuals since the Second World War (International Organization for Migration (IOM) 2018). This also sparked debates about the “assimilability” of Syrian refugees and other migrants and if they would drain social safety nets and transform Europe into a Muslim state (Cheliotis 2017; International Organization for Migration (IOM) 2018; Virdee and McGeeever 2018). Rising anti-immigrant sentiment, nationalism, and fiscal concerns have also produced anti-democratic, fascist, and far-right political candidates and elected officials promising to stop immigration and targeting citizens who are ethno-racial, religious, and LGBTQ minorities (DeGenova 2018; Gupta and Virdee 2018; Schierup et al., 2018).

**Immigration integration in the U.S. and Europe**

Amid shifting ethno-racial demographics in these regions, scholars have conducted various studies to assess the integration of immigrants. Foner and Alba (2015) define integration as the ways in which immigrants (and their children) obtain similar socioeconomic status and inclusion in various societal institutions as the native-born population. Some studies have primarily examined the U.S. post-1965 migration wave and their U.S.-born children (Foner and Alba 2015; Portes and Rumbaut 2014). Others focus primarily on Europe after the Cold War and into the present (Crawley and Skleparis 2018; Wrench and Solomos 1993). Increasingly, scholars from both regions have conducted comparative studies yielding insights into how contexts facilitate different incorporation experiences (Foner and Alba 2015; Imoagene 2017). One primary difference between the U.S. and European countries is divergent immigrant integration policies. These policies fall into three categories: (1) differential exclusion – immigrants are excluded based on certain characteristics (i.e. Germany); (2) assimilation – immigrants take on cultural and social characteristics of the host society (i.e. Great Britain) and (3) multiculturalism – immigrants may retain aspects of their culture while acquiring those of host society (i.e. U.S.) (Freeman 2004; Joppke 2007). The U.S. has “laissez-faire integration” where immigrants are expected to utilize their own resources, social networks, and ties to local community organizations to adapt to the country (Foner and Alba 2015). Conversely, Western European countries have taken more explicit approaches to integration by investing in language acquisition and other integration programs for immigrants (Freeman 2004; Joppke 2007).

Research suggests that race – specifically being racialized as non-white – in the U.S. and religion – specifically Islam – in Europe presents integration barriers in socioeconomic stability, educational attainment, and interracial marriage (Foner and Alba 2015). In the U.S., integration outcomes vary by race and ethnicity, with Asian-descended Americans demonstrating high integration tied to socioeconomic status with more limited gains experienced by Americans of Latino and black immigrant heritage (Foner and Alba 2015). In Europe, conflicts in the Middle East and African nations spurring non-white immigration to Europe, have made race, ethnicity, and religion highly visible in European socio-political discourse.
**Boundary-making in societies**

In the U.S. and Europe, social scientists have developed the concept of boundaries to better understand how distinctions are made and perpetuate inequality between individuals (Alba 2005; Crawley and Skleparis 2018; Lamont and Molnar 2002; Wimmer 2013). There are two types of boundaries: (1) symbolic boundaries which are used to categorize individuals and (2) social boundaries that yield unequal access to the distribution of resources among those individuals. In some cases, symbolic boundaries can become so salient in vindicating social boundaries that they eventually replace them.

Lamont and Molnar (2002) also posit that individuals are aware of the social and symbolic boundaries which stratify society and that institutions are important in creating and perpetuating boundaries. Wimmer’s (2013) study of ethnic boundary-making argues that governments, as state institutions, have the power to determine who is a citizen and also use laws to differentiate the rights of citizens and non-citizens. Thus, governments use citizenship status as a symbolic boundary to categorize and stratify their populations (Lamont and Molnar 2002; Wimmer 2013). Such rights are social boundaries because governments allocate resources based on one’s citizenship status. The reification of citizenship status categories perpetuates social and symbolic boundaries that stratify U.S. and European societies. In recent years, scholars have highlighted the increasing social and symbolic boundaries separating immigrants from citizens and whites from people of color, generating stratification and inequality along those boundaries (Flores-Gonzalez 2017; Waters and Kasinitz 2015). Thus, the concept of social and symbolic boundaries is ideal for examining how race, ethnicity, and documentation status shape perceptions of citizenship and belonging in the U.S. and Europe.

**Citizenship and belonging**

Much scholarship on the social, political, and civic construction of citizenship argues that differentiated forms of citizenship exist in most nation-states, where factors such as race, ethnicity, proximity to immigration, gender, social class, and sexual orientation stratify citizens (Bloemraad et al., 2019; Flores-Gonzalez 2017; Smith 2015). Legal, state, or political citizenship is the legal recognition of an individual as formally belonging to a particular nation-state. Legal citizenship formally entitles citizens to benefits and privileges (i.e. voting, welfare) from which non-citizens are excluded (Marback and Krumen 2015; Smith 2015). However, all legal citizens may not be social or cultural citizens who are fully socially, culturally, and civically included within a nation-state (Bloemraad et al., 2019; Flores-Gonzalez 2017; Smith 2015). Ngai (2014) uses the term “alien citizen” to describe birthright citizens whose immigrant ancestry physically marks them as racialized foreigners, diminishing their status as citizens. Thus, race and ethnicity become important for shaping social citizenship and belonging to the nation-state. In both regions, the racialization of U.S. and European citizenship and national identity are socio-politically constructed as white (Bloemraad et al., 2019; DeGenova 2018; Flores-Gonzalez 2017). Individuals marked as ethno-racially different are not regarded as full social citizens, regardless of their legal citizenship status.

In the U.S. and Europe, public policy has played an important role in facilitating de jure and de facto differentiated citizenship. In the late 20th century, Soysal (1994) and Hollifield (1992) argued that formal citizenship was becoming less significant in Europe, as immigrants gained more civil and legal rights. Interestingly, at the same time, the U.S. was beginning to curtail immigrants’ (of various documentation statuses) access to public benefits and increase border security, particularly with 1996 immigration and welfare reforms under President Bill
Clinton (Fox 2016). In the 21st century, both regions’ public policies have become less generous to immigrants and also some formal citizens perceived as less deserving amid fiscal and security concerns (Bloemraad et al., 2019). Some policy changes have been tied to perceptions that “othered” legal citizens and non-citizens of color did not fully belong to the nation and were undeserving of access to public benefits like white citizens (Bloemraad et al., 2019; Crawley and Skleparis 2018; Fox 2016).

**Discussion**

To illustrate how citizenship and belonging have become more explicitly synonymous with whiteness through brightening social and symbolic boundaries between whites and people of color in the U.S. and Europe, I examine three specific phenomena, drawing from scholarly accounts and recent events. First, I discuss the racialization of immigrants and citizens of color as foreign others in both regions. Second, I examine government retrenchment policies that reduce immigrants’ access to public benefits. Finally, I consider legislators’ efforts to increase government funds for the securitization of national borders amid the detention, deportation, and/or incarceration of immigrants and citizens of color.

**Racialization of immigrants and citizens of color as foreign others**

Recent events in Europe and the U.S. reveal the increasing racialization of immigrants and citizens of color as “foreign others,” who do not fully belong to the envisioned nation. Each event demonstrates how the symbolic boundaries categorizing legitimate members of these regions have brightened to separate them from illegitimate members. This boundary brightening also highlights distinctions between legal and social citizens whereby legal citizens of color are not perceived as social citizens and are sometimes treated like immigrants. While race and ethnicity have been central in establishing boundaries in the U.S., religion – particularly being Muslim – has been a marker of difference in Europe, although increasingly so in the U.S. (Foner and Alba 2015; Selod 2018). The recent events I assess from the lens of boundary-making and citizenship are: (1) the United Kingdom’s Brexit Vote; (2) the political campaigns of current U.S. president Donald Trump; and (3) the political rise of extreme right leadership in various European countries.

Regarding the June 2016 Brexit vote, scholars have argued that the UK’s referendum vote to leave the EU was tied to the politics of racism against a backdrop of the global recession, terrorism concerns, and migration woes from the Syrian refugee crisis (Gusterson 2017; Inglehart and Norris 2016; Virdee and McGeever 2018). Virdee and McGeever (2018) posit that the “politics of Englishness” were an invisible driver of the vote: the relationship between English national feeling and longing for Empire was racialized concretely through whiteness. Britain’s structural decline globally caused downward mobility that facilitated a “politics of nationalist resentment” among Britain’s white working class (Virdee and McGeever 2018). Concerns about ethnically diverse EU migration to the UK generated campaign rhetoric about protecting the UK from vilified undesirables who would destroy the nation (Bhambra 2017; Virdee and McGeever 2018). Such rhetoric also highlighted anti-immigrant sentiment towards Jewish, Caribbean, and Asian multigenerational citizens, who lacked social citizenship because they were not Christian or white (Virdee and McGeever 2018). Collectively, these factors brightened symbolic racial and social citizenship boundaries between white Britons – “the true Brits” – and brown and black Britons while simultaneously separating white British legal citizens from non-citizens. The Brexit vote aftermath
accentuated these brightened boundaries amid increased racist rhetoric and hate crimes against black and brown (citizen) Britons who were told to leave (Komaromi 2016; Virdee and McGeever 2018). The Brexit vote and aftermath highlighted the true belonging of “Englishness” in terms of legal and social citizenship as racially white and exclusive to immigrants and citizens of color.

On the other side of the Atlantic Ocean, another event demonstrating significant boundary brightening in the United States was the political ascendancy of current U.S. President Donald Trump in 2016. Identifying as a political outsider and self-made billionaire, he crafted an unorthodox and socio-politically divisive campaign that drastically transformed the political landscape. He began his campaign by threatening to build a wall on the U.S.-Mexico border and vilified Mexican (and other Latino) immigrants as criminals and rapists who threaten national security (Lamont et al., 2017). Throughout his campaign, individuals perceived as “others” were targeted, derided, and ridiculed as criminals (African Americans), threats (Muslims), and not conforming to hegemonic sexist gender standards (“nasty women”) (Bobo 2017; Lamont et al., 2017; Strolovitch et al., 2017). Yet, Trump’s campaign slogan “Make America Great Again,” implying the U.S. had lost its greatness, appealed to many less educated white Americans who felt they had been left behind in a rapidly changing and more ethno-racially diverse world (Inglehart and Norris, 2016; Lamont et al., 2017).

Scholarly analysis of Trump’s divisive rhetoric reveals that he successfully used an overt “us-them” strategy to stoke the fears of his political base who perceived foreigners as competition and threats to hegemonic (white) American life (Gusterson 2017). Trump’s rhetoric also indicates how race, ethnicity, and citizenship have been reconfigured to distinguish “real Americans” from outsiders. Trump’s strategy relied on redrawing symbolic and social boundaries between “us” and “them” to exclude Americans of color, immigrants, Muslims, LGBTQ individuals, and other minorities from social and legal citizenship. His tough “law and order” stance regarding policing and immigration enforcement represents a clear distinction between social and legal citizenship in two ways. For African Americans who are disproportionately overrepresented in the criminal justice system and likely to be shot while unarmed by police officers, their legal citizenship does not entail full social citizenship. Trump’s support of racial profiling alongside other denigrating remarks about African Americans demonstrates that he does not view them as social citizens. Relatedly, for immigrants of various documentation statuses, Trump’s anti-immigrant rhetoric has become draconian immigration policy, resulting in record deportations, reduced work visas and refugee/asylum seekers, and limiting who can receive legal permanent residency (Pierce et al. 2018). He has also ended protected status for certain nationalities, is removing pathways to legal citizenship for immigrants, and minimizing social citizenship for legal citizens of color. Overall, Trump’s rhetoric and policy initiatives have hardened boundaries between his predominantly white citizen supporters and everyone else, as evidenced by 2016 presidential election exit polls and the 2018 midterm elections (Beauchamp 2018; Tyson and Maniam 2016).

While Trump’s U.S. election seemed unlikely, he has joined the ranks of an increasing number of elected and would-be populist politicians in Europe (Gusterson 2017; Inglehart and Norris 2016). Politicians like Marine Le Pen (France), Norbert Hofer (Austria), Nigel Farage (UK), and Geert Wilders (Netherlands) have run on similar platforms for increasingly populist political parties (Inglehart and Norris 2016). Similar to the U.S., anxieties about a shifting economic order and related inequality, increasing migration, and concerns that ethno-racially homogeneous societies no longer exist influenced the shift to populist leaders. Research suggests that populist support is strong among individuals who are older, male, less educated, religious, and ethno-racial minorities (Gusterson 2017; Inglehart and Norris 2016;
Virdee and McGeever 2018). Anti-immigrant attitudes, mistrust of national governance, and support for authoritarian values also influenced populist support (Inglehart and Norris 2016). Similar to the UK Brexit vote, concerns about racialized and foreign others increased support for populist candidates expressing explicit xenophobia and racism. These candidates tapped into ethnic majorities’ resentments by highlighting racialized symbolic boundaries between “us” and “them” and between legal and social citizens in Europe.

**Government retrenchment of public benefits for immigrants**

European and American legislators have also curtailed non-citizens’ access to public benefits like health care and welfare (Baldi and Goodman 2015; Fox 2016). This process began in the 1970s and has continued into the present due to economic downturns, increasing costs of benefits for aging populations, and attempts to reduce immigration over concerns that generous welfare systems attract lower-class immigrants (Baldi and Goodman 2015; Fox 2016). Recent retrenchment measures have been austerity responses to the 2008 global recession and rising immigration (Cappelen and Peters 2018; Häim 2018). Studies have shown that increasing ethno-racial diversity, whether of native-born or immigrant populations, is associated with lower support for social welfare spending in both regions (Alesina and Glaeser 2004; Xu 2017). Such legislative changes demonstrated brightened social boundaries between white Americans and Europeans and those of color, and, also between legal citizens and non-citizens.

In the U.S. before 1972, there were no legal distinctions or social boundaries determining eligibility for benefits between citizens and non-citizens. However, between 1972 and 1996, the U.S. Congress passed legislation barring unauthorized immigrants from receiving various public benefits (i.e. social security Medicaid), representing a restrictive shift that brightened social boundaries between unauthorized immigrants and everyone else. In 1996, passage of immigration and welfare reforms curbed unauthorized immigration, reduced eligibility for welfare benefits for nearly all immigrants and further securitized the U.S.-Mexico border (Fox 2016; Park 2011). These 1996 reforms brightened social boundaries between citizens and long-term residents and immigrants of other documentation statuses. These reforms remain in effect and are why most immigrants are ineligible for healthcare benefits under the 2010 Affordable Care Act, which aimed to increase health coverage for most Americans (Joseph 2016). Despite most immigrants’ ineligibility for public benefits, the general public believes the contrary – that immigrants are reaping public benefits while hardworking Americans struggle to survive (Haynes, Merolla, and Karthick Ramakrishnan 2016). This falsehood has fueled anti-immigrant sentiment, with scholars arguing that harsher policies signify a more hostile and exclusive context towards immigrants of various statuses (Fox 2016). These shifts represent brighter social boundaries between legal citizens and non-citizens of different documentation statuses.

In Britain, beginning in the 1970s, legislation passed requiring all newcomers to demonstrate the ability to support themselves without state assistance. Policies passed in 1994, 1999, and 2009 implemented further requirements on immigrants to obtain public benefits such as: (1) proving UK residency for a required length of time; (2) being ineligible for certain benefits if subject to immigration control; (3) increasing residency requirement to eight years for progression from residence to citizenship; and (4) requiring that residents applying for citizenship demonstrate self-sufficiency. In 2017, the UK government issued a Memorandum of Understanding in which the National Health Service would begin charging different health service rates for those not deemed “ordinarily residents” – those “not living on a lawful,
voluntary, and properly settled basis” (Hiam 2018, 108). To enforce this policy – informally referred to as the “hostile environment” – healthcare providers were required to obtain documentation status information from patients. Consequently, undocumented immigrants stopped seeking medical treatment. Cumulatively, such policies represent government retrenchment, which reduces immigrants’ access to public benefits, drawing social boundaries around immigrants and brightening social boundaries between immigrants and citizens when allocating resources.

In Germany, as the country received one million refugees in 2015, there have been debates about the deservingness of, fiscal responsibilities for, and integration of refugees and migrants (Holmes and Castañeda 2016). In recent years, legislators have shifted the country’s naturalization policy to become more inclusive while at the same time implementing civic integration requirements (Baldi and Goodman 2015). Up until the 2000s, acquiring German citizenship was very difficult for immigrants given the country’s jus sanguinis policy. Starting in 1999 and with successive laws in 2004 and 2005, Germany reduced the residency duration required for naturalization and introduced jus soli for children who could obtain citizenship if one parent was a long-term resident. German language proficiency and civic integration were also required for residency. But naturalization applicants also had to demonstrate self-sufficiency without public benefits. While the German government sought to extend legal citizenship to immigrants, the conditions for citizenship were tied to retrenchment of public benefits for immigrants and requirements that immigrants demonstrate social membership (i.e. German proficiency). Thus, like the U.S. and Britain, Germany’s policies represent a brightening of social boundaries between citizens and immigrants that make obtaining legal citizenship and public benefits more difficult for immigrants.

**Increased securitization of borders, detention, and incarceration of people of color**

Symbolic and social boundaries are also drawn between white citizens and people of color (citizens and non-citizens) in the U.S. and Europe via border securitization, immigrant detention, and incarceration (Abrego et al., 2016; Alexander 2012; Bosworth and Trumbull 2015; Cheliotis 2017). In both regions, immigration has been racialized as an ethno-racial minority issue, where people of color or ethnic minorities not perceived to “belong” to the nation are considered threats (Abrego et al., 2016; Bosworth and Trumbull 2015; Cheliotis 2017). Thus, policies regarding national security and securitization of borders from racialized foreign (and domestic) others have been implemented since the 1990s (Abrego et al., 2016; Bosworth and Trumbull 2015; Cheliotis 2017). Consequently, boundaries separating citizens and non-citizens of color from white citizens have brightened considerably, generating diminished formal and social citizenship for people of color (Abrego et al., 2016; Flores-Gonzalez 2017).

The U.S.’s troubled history of race relations has meant that the implementation of law and order through local police departments and federal agencies (FBI and CIA) have disproportionately harmed communities of color (Abrego et al., 2016; Alexander 2012; Golash-Boza 2015). Racial profiling of black and Latino Americans and increasingly those with Middle Eastern or Muslim phenotypes usually leads to escalated encounters with law enforcement (Golash-Boza 2015; Selod 2018). Such encounters can result in eventual incarceration, part of a huge corporate regime known as the prison industrial complex (Alexander 2012; Golash-Boza 2015). Despite having four percent of the global population, the U.S. has the largest incarcerated population at 22 percent of the global population, the
majority being black and brown bodies (Alexander 2012; Kuhn 1996). U.S. citizens convicted of felony crimes are legally disenfranchised, losing their right to vote and access to public benefits even after serving their sentences (Alexander 2012). The prison industrial complex has also expanded into the immigration detention regime, intimately connecting the immigration, criminal justice, and penal systems (Golash-Boza 2015). Growth of the immigrant detention and incarceration regimes—via the legal and social disfranchisement of immigrants and citizens of color—demonstrates diminished citizenship and hardened social boundaries between them and white Americans.

In Europe, the criminal justice system is less punitive compared to the U.S. (Kuhn 1996). But, more resources have also been allocated to border security and detaining immigrants (Bosworth and Trumbull 2015). This trend has been followed in the UK, which established “Immigration Removal Centers” (IRCs) in 2001. Although immigration detention is “geared toward the ejection of unwanted citizens from British soil,” it is not legal punishment (Bosworth and Trumbull 2015, 50). However, immigrants detained in IRCs experience their detention as punitive because IRCs are structured like prisons, with immigrants detained alongside criminal offenders. As in the U.S., multinational prison corporations operate prisons and immigrant detention centers in the UK, with white men guarding a disproportionate number of detainees and prisoners who are young men of color (Bosworth and Trumbull 2015). However, detainees’ non-citizen status is brightened by their ability to be detained indefinitely without legal recourse, to which British citizen prisoners are entitled. IRCs also operate with fewer legal mechanisms than criminal prisons. Detainees are typically from countries where the UK had an active military presence, highlighting the impacts of post-colonialism and imperialism (Bosworth and Trumbull 2015). Bosworth and Trumbull (2015) argue that “detention is one among many techniques that maintain the whiteness of the nation by separating those who ‘belong’ in Britain from those who do not” (62). Thus, the UK’s IRC system does the legal work of brightening boundaries between (white) citizens and (non-white) non-citizens.

Conclusion

Race, ethnicity, and documentation status have become crucially important for establishing social and symbolic boundaries, and legal and social citizenship in the 21st century U.S. and Europe. These distinguishing factors are also the bases for de jure and de facto exclusion primarily for citizens and non-citizens of color compared to white counterparts in both regions. Those who are not ethno-racially perceived as “belonging” are likely to be targeted and mistreated for not being legitimate members of their respective countries. This chapter has outlined recent socio-political events that demonstrate brightened social and symbolic boundaries that make whiteness synonymous with legal and social citizenship. In response to global economic disorder and increasing migration, explicitly racist and anti-immigrant rhetoric and politicians have become part of our current socio-political discourse. Subsequently, public policies have become more restrictive towards non-citizens and citizens of color, reducing their access to public benefits, and making them more subject to detention, deportation, or incarceration. People of color’s marginalization has increased in these regions and legal citizenship does not guarantee social citizenship. But rather, being a person of color or immigrant makes an individual more likely to experience de jure and de facto discrimination from the state and white citizens. These recent events reveal that one must be racially white to be fully socio-politically included, experience the full rights of formal citizenship, and perceived as belonging to the U.S. or Europe. Unless the U.S. and Europe can blur brightened
boundaries based on race, ethnicity, and documentation status, extend social citizenship to legal citizens of color, and treat non-citizens as members of their nations, the divisiveness of recent years will intensify. The consequence will be persistent inequality, social disparities, and conflict and hardened boundaries between white citizens and everyone else.

Notes

1 Populism is a philosophy that accentuates the wisdom of ordinary people over establishments, engenders cynicism of existing authority, has authoritarian leanings, and usually emphasizes xenophobia nativism (Inglehart and Pippins 2016).
2 Amid legislative battles between the conservative and liberal parties in government, the ACA was not fully implemented in all U.S. states, resulting in some formal citizens not benefiting from the policy (Joseph 2016).

References


