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Bullying in The Age of The Wall: Trump and the digital radicalisation towards Latino students in the US

El acoso en La Era del Muro: Trump y la radicalización digital hacia estudiantes latinos en los Estados Unidos

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Abstract

This study seeks to examine the role of social media in the construction and circulation of extremist narratives; in particular, to understand how these narratives encourage harassment against Latino students in the United States of America. Fieldwork will be addressed toward studying posts, comments and news shared on Facebook in both English and Spanish. The narrative method was chosen as the main frame selecting and analysing data. This methodology affords the option of giving a voice to actors with direct involvement in the events. Hence, this project will focus on analysing a variety of points of view, from democrats to republicans, and from people against and in favour of migration. The results reveal that, in these extremist digital narratives, traditional and new forms of harassment towards minorities converge, and that, to diminish traditional and virtual bullying, innovative and wide-ranging approaches should be implemented.

Keywords

Cyberbullying; Donald Trump; extremist narratives; Latino students; peace-building; social media.

Resumen

El propósito de este trabajo es estudiar el papel de las redes sociales en la construcción y circulación de narrativas extremistas: particularmente para comprender cómo estas narrativas fomentan el acoso contra estudiantes latinos en los Estados Unidos de América. El trabajo de campo se centrará en el estudio de publicaciones, comentarios compartidas en Facebook tanto en inglés como en español. Se hará uso del método narrativo como marco principal para seleccionar y explorar datos, esta opción abre la posibilidad de dar una voz a los actores que tienen una incidencia directa en los eventos. Por esa razón, este documento se centrará en abarcar diversos puntos de vista, desde los demócratas a los republicanos, así como personas en contra y en pro de la migración. Los resultados finales mostrarán que dentro de estas narrativas extremistas digitales convergen las formas tradicionales y novedosas de hostigamiento hacia las minorías, y cómo, para disminuir el acoso tradicional y virtual, deben llevarse a cabo enfoques novedosos y de gran alcance.

Palabras clave

Ciberbullying; Donald Trump; narrativas extremistas; estudiantes latinos; construcción de la paz; redes sociales.

1. Introduction

In recent years, there has been a huge increment of extremist political movements on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean. These groups blame legal and illegal migration for criminality and economic crisis. Then they claim for more security, commercial blockades and border controls. Surprisingly, many of those factions have reached important electoral triumphs encouraged by disenchanted social sectors that have lost confidence in traditional political parties. This is the case of Donald Trump's presidential electoral winning. Trump characterized his political campaign by a frontal attack on social media against free commerce and migration. In one of his first public discourses as candidate, he blamed Mexico for sending rapists and criminals then he proposed to build a wall on the Mexican-US border to stop the bad guys. However, these kinds of extremist comments are not the just products of electoral times, but a galore of assumptions shared among many people of the country. Trump just took a step further and adopted this toxic rhetoric grounded on fear, upsetting and hate (Slaughter, 2016). For many radicals Donald Trump's discourse represents an open door to abandon public correctness and to freely express racist comments against minorities, particularly the Muslim and Latino population. It is not just a matter related with illegal immigration, because many victims of these incidents are indeed US citizens, but the re-emerging of a nostalaic nationalism (Guterson, 2017) that praises for the recovery of an idealised white American working class that will MakeAmericaGreatAgain (McMillan, 2017). This context has reached schools in where Donald Trump's phrase, Build the Wall, has frequently been used as a racist insult against Latino students. In fact, high schools and colleges are becoming ideal spaces for right-wing political radicalization. Since September of 2016, The (Anti-Defamation League, 2017) has registered more than 100 incidents related with white supremacist group's recruitment in schools. The main aim of this research is to understand the role of social platforms, mainly Facebook, in the strengthening of extremist discourse in the context of Donald Trump's arrival to The White House, and how this discourse is used in the construction of scholar bullying narratives against Latino students in The United States of America.

Fieldwork will be addressed to study posts, comments and news shared on Facebook in both English and Spanish. The narrative method was chosen as the main frame to select and analyze data, this methodology opens the possibility to give a voice to the actors that have a direct incidence in the events. For that reason, this paper will focus in embracing diverse points of view, from democrats to republicans, and from people against and in pro-migration. Final outcomes will show that in these digital extremist narratives converge traditional and novel forms of harassment towards minorities. In addition, this document questions the effectiveness of the strategies applied to reduce the problem. They are isolated and limited. In order to diminish the problem, it is mandatory to sponsor novel strategies, besides the imposition of penalties, to enable sustainable solutions inside the communities that promote mutual understanding and social peace.

2. Theoretical framework

Bullying, in a wide sense, is the systematic abuse of power (Smith & Sharp, 1994), and it has been present in almost every social relation since probably forever: in the workplace, in churches, inside families and, of course, in schools at all academic levels (Nansel et al., 2001). Though, what has been special since recent decades is the growing importance of the topic in between teachers, students, parents and academics. Modern approaches to the problem perceive bullying, traditional and virtual, as a shared problem that has a profound impact not only on the victim, but in the school and community (Rosen, DeOrnellas & Scott, 2017). Acts like intimidation, mistreatment, harassment and discrimination are no longer anecdotic episodes or justified rites of passages to be remembered after graduation, but serious problems that destabilize students' performance in class, and their behaviour at home. It could also reach far worse outcomes, in both the intimidator and the victim, like depression, suicide (Bauman, Toomey & Walker, 2013), and even, in extreme cases, school shootings like the Columbines High School or the Sandy Hook Elementary school incidents. But besides the media attention that these cases have brought to the United States of America, scholar bullying is a global phenomenon (Jimerson, Swearer & Espelage, 2009). It is present in practically all educative institutions in every country. Though, more than to talk about bullying in singular it is important to do it in plural (Rivers, 2011), since the manifestation of the problem is diverse: by genre, because of the physical and mental condition of the victim, the social and economic status of the subjects involved, or it could be triggered by racial motivations. A bullying incident could be physical, verbal (face to face) and virtual (Brank, Hoetger & Hazen, 2012). But many times, the same event could include more than one form.

The inclusion of information technologies in classrooms, particularly in between young students, has provided excellent opportunities to improve academic performance: thanks to WhatsApp, students, professors and parents can create groups to share information and to support each other. Academic institutions use Facebook to stay in contact with their communities. Students do their homework in a collaborative way using applications like Dropbox or Google Drive, and so on. However, these

technological advances not only portray positives aspects, but undesirable outcomes as well. Young students are exposed to unappropriated information through virtual spaces like pornography, violence and extremist politics speeches, and they are vulnerable to suffer a bullying episode on the Internet also (Shariff, 2009). Many times, a virtual incident of this kind could have a very deep impact in the life of students, far beyond the Web, causing educational, emotional and health problems in between others.

The action to exert systematic abuse of power through by electronic means has been labelled under different names: bullying via Internet, online bullying, Internet bullying or digital harassment (Vandebosch & Van Cleemput, 2008; McQuade III, Colt & Meyer, 2009; Mishna, 2012). But it is generally known as cyberbullying. At the end, what is important to recall is the fact that this word embraces all the incidents in where information technologies are used to embarrass, harass, intimidate, or cause harm to a victim or victims (McQuade III et al., 2009). Social media and smartphones, however, did not create cyberbullying, it has existed since the beginning of the global spread of the Internet in the mid-nineties of the last century, and it has changed across the time following the constant evolution of information technologies from email, to messenger applications like MSN Messenger and Myspace up to the age of Facebook, Twitter and Snapchat. The impact of novel information technologies in the problem of scholar bullying could be stated in two main ways, a) Thanks to the Internet's inner qualities, bullying is no longer confined to physical spaces like classrooms or public parks, now it is ubiquitous. A bully could exert violence anonymously, harming a victim using diverse digital elements like a meme, a photograph, a video or a screenshot. An incident could become viral, travelling across virtual platforms like Facebook, Instagram or Snapchat, in a matter of a few minutes affecting the entire social life of a young boy or girl. Occasionally, these spaces have served to broadcast on live the suicide of victims that were unable to stand the situation anymore, and b) novel technologies, on the other hand, have helped to bring some light and to undercover several bullying cases that, under other circumstances, would remain veiled. Sometimes social media has been the place in where the victims expose their affections, finding relief and support.

As it will be possible to note further in this text, some actions have been undertaken to denounce and punish traditional and virtual bullying by limiting the use of mobile devices in class up to applying severe penalties to the perpetrators. However, those strategies do not offer an integral solution. It is important to contemplate the problem of cyber-bullving as a multi-factorial issue and, therefore, to implement longlength sustainable solutions (Smolian, 2003). In this context, peacebuilding approach is an important tool to improve social conditions and to enable the resolution of problems like cyber-bullying towards minorities, is an invitation to understand community glitches as a consequence of traditional unsolved conflicts related with economic and migration issues among others (Hayes, Lundy & Hallward, 2016). Some of these alitches are not new, but they have survived throughout the decades mainly due to the absence of integral and sustainable solutions. Actually, problems like racism and xenophobia have gained international prominence due to the increment of terrorist attacks in Europe, the rise of populist far-right parties and the recent migration crisis (Dahlman, 2016), but they have been inside many communities for many decades. It is not the case that actual extremist political parties invented issues like racism, or that there were not any bullying incidents before the arrival of the Internet. But factors, like far-wing populism, fake news, the economic crisis and the massive use of information technologies have intensified this social problem. What is different now regarding cyber-bullying is, not only the exacerbation of the number of those cases, but that many of those cases have been invested with a political label. Minorities, like Latinos, are considered under the extremist discourse as aliens in their own homeland, and for many politicians and their supporters in the United States, their mere presence in their neighborhoods is a threat to the country.

3. The case

Latinos are one of the fastest growing population in the United States of America, according to some estimates (United States Census Bureau, 2015), there are about 54 millions. That means that one of every six people living in this country belongs to this ethnicity. From that number, about 35 million are Mexicans or have Mexican origins, and since that 35 million about 5 million (near the 50% of the entire illegal migrants) do not have a legal permission to remain in the country (Gonzalez-Barrera & Lopez, 2013). Mexico, however, plays an important role in the United States' economy as well, since the Latin American country is one of the most important business partners of the country. This background explains why Mexico was a key topic during the presidential campaign of 2016, and now, a hot topic in the President's official Twitter account. During the campaign and after victory, one of the main targets of Trump's discourse has been Mexico. He not only accused the country of sending bad people but of stealing American jobs, especially in the manufacture sector. Some of the actions established by the new administration to amend these problems have been to increase deportations, to threaten, with the new set of tariffs, towards Mexican exportations, to end the free trade agreement with Mexico and Canada (NAFTA), which has been renewed in November 2018, and to impulse the construction of a 20,000 mile wall in the Mexico-US border, indeed this was the

main promise during Trump's campaign (Martin, 2017). This context of high stress regarding Mexico has had a profound effect in between Latino students in general, at least in two ways a) because it compromises the permanence in the country of many young students protected by the DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals), and b) It has raised the number of bullying incidents, traditional and virtual, towards Latino students, no matter their legal status. For many of them, their daily lives have turned awful, they must stand not only a hostile atmosphere at school, but also live in the uncertainty that they or a relative could be deported without any kind of legal support (Sulkowski, 2017).

4. Methodology

On its very foundations, narrative research stands on the fact that there is no a universal and correct interpretation of a social phenomenon. On the contrary, this method appeals to pluralism, relativism and subjectivity (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach & Zilber, 1998). Using the narratives exploration opens the possibility to aive a voice to actors, allowing them to tell their own histories (Miller-Day et al., 2015) and to comprehend how individuals conceal the incidents in their social life as a galore of stories with a plot, actors, and a specific context where the story is performed before a determinate audience or public (Josselson, 2011). For that reason, this paper will spend important efforts in collecting and analysing testimonies, commentaries and recounts shared on Facebook by diverse narrators (Rogan & de Kock, 2005), including views from democrats to republicans, people against and in pro-migration, in English and in Spanish. Data analysis will put special attention not only in the content but in how the narrative is produced and broadcasted (Andrews, Squire & Tamboukou, 2013), considering the special circumstances that frame the creation of narratives on virtual environments, in where the milieu allows a more collaborative form to generate stories than in traditional media which is more unidirectional. From a certain point of view, narratives in social media are not finished tasks, on the contrary, every user could be, at the same time, a narrator and a character, and the story could remain in a permanent state of change, always a subject of reinterpretations and additions (Page, 2015). Though, this collective participation could lead to the addition of fake and malicious information to distort the perception about an event. However, less to consider this partiality and subjectivity as a lack, it is important to make it patent and to discuss it. At the end, the final objective is to explore and to understand through the analysis of narratives the world of individuals, their identity, personality and the basis that supports their understandings. In this context, the narrative is a conduct to understand deeper truths and meanings (Greenhalgh, Russell & Swinglehurst, 2005; Jones, Shanahan & McBeth, 2014).

The following categories are proposed to examine data: a) settings (the context in where the plot is played), b) narrator or narrators (the story tellers), c) characters (actors: bad guys, heroes, etc.), d) plot (the argument that sustain the story), e) intentions and motifs, (What is behind the story? What moves actors and narrators?). Fieldwork focuses on two incidents. The first one happened just one day after the election of Donald Trump, in November 10 of 2016, in the Royal Oak Middle School, in Detroit. In a video, wide shared across the Internet, it is possible to observe a group of students singing Build that Wall during the lunch time as a form to intimidate some Latino students that were present. The second one refers to an event that occurred near the 5 of Mayo celebration in 2017. A Baylor University fraternity in Waco Texas, Kappa Sigma, organized a party called Cinco de Drinko, in the celebration there were some students dressed as construction workers and maids, employments associated traditionally with Mexican migrants. During the party, some of them started singing the same phrase used in the Detroit's incident, Build the Wall. To explore the data related with the videos, three Facebook profiles were selected CNN (Liberal), FOX news (Conservative) and a Spanish Language news portal Univision (see Table 1 and Table 2).

Table 1: Detroit incident (D), November 10th, 2016

The Media.	Post Headline.	Dispersion of the post. Shares (S), Commentaries (C) and Reactions (R)	Code.
CNN	Royal Oak School is responding this morning after a video showing middle school students chanting Build the Wall started attracting attention online.	9, 320 (S), 4, 693 (C), 24, 714 (R).	D1
FOX (47 news, Local site. The main profile of this media did not post the news.)	Students at a Michigan middle school started chanting, Build the Wall.	32 (S), 27 (C), 71 (R)	D2
Univision	Un grupo de estudiantes grita "Construyan ese muro" durante un almuerzo en Michigan/A group of students shouted out Build that Wall during lunch time in Michigan.	850 (S), 529 (C), 6, 537 (R)	D3

Source: Author.

Table 2: Waco incident (W), April 29th, 2017

-	()/	Dispersion of the	
The Media.	Post Headline.	post. Shares (S), Commentaries (C) and Reactions (R)	Code.
CNN	A Baylor University frat is suspended for a Cinco de Drinko party. According to local reports, some who attended were dressed as construction workers and maids and chanted Build that Wall.	2,770 (S), 2, 060 (C), 8, 684 (R).	W1
FOX (4 news, Local site. The main profile of this media did not post the news.)	The suspension follows a Cinco de Drinko party that included students chanting Build that Wall, along with others who wore costumes featuring sombreros and serapes.	202 (S), 419 (C), 6, 979 (R)	W2
Univision	Para conmemorar el 5 de Mayo unos estudiantes de la Universidad de Baylor en Texas caracterizaron a la comunidad mexicana en el país de una forma que algunos consideran despectiva y racista. /To celebrate 5 de Mayo some students from the Baylor University at Texas portrayed, to some opinions, the Mexican community in the country under a pejorative and racist way.	20 (S), 60 (C), 176 (R)	W3

Source: Author.

5. Outcomes

5.1. Settings

After Donald Trump' victory, the arrival of a hostile ambient was eminent, not only towards the Latino population, but minorities in general: the damage of Jewish cemeteries, the acts of vandalism against Mosques, the murder of an Indian-born engineer in a bar in Kansas and so on. For many far-right groups, the actual president of the United States is a kind of legitimation of their beliefs and an opportunity to openly commit illegal acts against people that do not fit in their definition of an American citizen. In this context, two phrases have been used by people involved in hate crimes and bullying incidents. The first one is Go back to your country and the second is Build the Wall. Adam W. Purinton, the man who killed the Indian citizen in Kansas, shouted Go back to your country before opening fire. In another incident vastly shared on social media in Arkansas, in a grocery store a female customer had a discussion with both a Latino and an African American woman to whom she used the N-word to insult one and then the phrase Go back to Mexico to do the same thing with the other. This ambient of intolerance has permeated schools as well. In

the two cases selected in this study, the phrase *Build the Wall* was used to bully Latino students. However, these are not isolate incidents but just remarkable examples of the quick spread of far-right narrative across the nation (Bouie, 2017). What is possible to observe in the frequent use of the two expressions is a hidden intention, that under the excuse of protecting borders and improving security, tries to legitimate harassment to minorities. In order to secure the country, all exogenous elements that do not belong to a specific *class* of *American* should be segregated (*Build the Wall*) and deported, (*Go back to your country*).

5.2. Narrators

When dealing with social media narratives, like those created and distributed in spaces like Facebook, it is important to understand that we are facing stories that many times are created by more than one narrator. In the case of the videos, the first storyteller is the producer of the material who had the intention of sharing the incident. In the Michigan case, the person that recorded the action was indeed a Latino student that was suffering the aggression. A second narrator was the media corporation which decided how to share the video in its social media profile: The CNN's intention was to maximize the diffusion of the notes (See D1 and W1 in Table 1 and Table 2), so it shared them on its main Facebook profile, on the contrary, FOX just gave little attention to the incidents, sharing the news only in its local media profiles, Detroit and Dallas (See D2 and W2 in Table 1 and Table 2). But, besides these narrators, it is possible to find many others when reading commentaries, since every reader could participate in the construction of the story and become a storyteller, modifying the original intention and length of the plots, providing new characters and contexts and giving additional information to clarify, or sometimes to obscure the plot and to influence other reader's opinions providing false, twisted or incomplete information.

5.3. Characters

In both bullying incidents, it is possible to identify the main characters at a simple glance: the bullies and the victims. In Detroit case (D), the victims were present in the incident, and the scholar administration that assumed some actions to amend the situation. However, characters in the narrative method not only refers to people or institutions but other things that play a role in the story. In this context, *The Wall* by itself is an important source of analysis. It has been portrayed in Trump's discourse as a symbol of security and protection, a response to a galore of social problems like employment, drugs, terrorism, crime. When the students chant the phrase *Build the Wall*, it is not just a matter of making a silly joke, but a straight association in between social problems and migrants, but not just any migrants, but Latino migrants. The word *Wall* is not associated with white migrants from Eastern Europe, for example. When reading the commentaries, more characters are inserted in the plot, most of them placed as responsible for the student's bad behaviour: Donald Trump (D1), Trump's supporters (D1), social media (D2). Indeed, many readers blamed the parents for the actions of their children (D1, D2, D3, W3), this is especially remarkable in the Latino media's profile (D3 and W3). This action of particularizing guilty, however, ends the possibility to understand these cases as an outcome of a deeper and complex problem.

5.4. Plots

Trying to set limits to a virtual narrative is a complex task. It is not the case that the plot simply begins and ends as it happens in a traditional interview. Virtual narratives are in constant evolution. Readers add new details and characters to the story. In the Detroit and Waco cases, the central narrative is founded in a short video of few seconds shared on Facebook, leaving many unknown details. However, when a video becomes viral is now a *living entity*, that travels across the Internet, sometimes changing its inner essence: from a video to photo or into a meme, and even occasionally users add new details, in this process the story changes as well. For example, many people who saw the videos set the beginning of the plot, not in the schools in where the incidents happened, but in the political campaigns of 2016 that encourages social divergence (D1, D2 and D3). Some others enlarge the plot by referring the existence of similar bullying incidents by those days (D3). In Waco, on the contrary, many readers provide some explanations for the students' conduct: bad judgement (W1), bad education at home (W2), and the use of drugs (W3). Other commentaries guaranteed that many students in the party were in fact Latinos being racist against other Latinos (W3). Some other provide a moral ending to the story, predicting that the students will have an unsuccessful professional life because of this act (W1 and W3).

5.5. Intentions and motifs

In this context of high political polarization, it is possible to notice two main kinds of narratives, one that supports, or minimizes the seriousness of the actions, and other that condemns them. When reviewing commentaries, it is possible to find something notable. Most readers in the Detroit case criticized the actions of students (D1, D2 and D3). But in the event of Waco, that happened about 6 months later in 2017, comments were more heterogeneous, even in the Latino media it is likely to read conflicting opinions, some of them diminishing the impact of the event, and the responsibility of the students arguing that it was just a silly joke, accusing the media of overreacting (W3). Other finding shows how actual public discourse from the White House has pervaded the social media narrative related with these events. The following examples well illustrate this point. Regarding the construction of The Wall one user comments (D1): I'm a Mexican American living in the Midwest and I'm tired of my community being destroyed by methamphetamine and heroin and I say, Build That Wall! In the other example, a Latino mother complains how other students told her son to Go back to Mexico (D3). However, neither she or her son were from Mexico. She explains: Los aueros creen a con a tenaas cara hispana eres mexicano/ White Americans belief that if you have a Hispanic face, you must be Mexican. In the first example, it is possible to appreciate the connotation in between Mexico and US social problems related with drugs, and how The Wall will fix it. The other testimony confirms how some sectors embraces all Latin-Americans in the country as Mexicans, and how this aggressive context is not only a threat against one country but all the Latin Americans living in the United States.

6. Conclusions

There are two main policies that have been undertaken to dismiss bullying, traditional and virtual, from schools (Juvonen & Graham, 2014). The first one considers this phenomenon as a systematic social problem, therefore finding a solution is a collective mandatory task that must be constructed by all the community. The second is based on aimed interventions, focused on mediating in between individuals involved in the incidents. Regarding our cases, in Waco the Kappa Sigma Fraternity Chapter at Baylor University was suspended, but by now there is no evidence of additional actions to improve harmony at University, avoiding the appearance of similar events in the future. On the contrary, in the case of Detroit, the actions followed a more inclusive approach helping students to understand the real impact of their actions in their classmates and asking parents to continue these actions of public awareness at home. Both approaches, in a certain way, are complementary, and have their advantages and drawbacks. Conversely, both strategies must be reinforced with support and training (Mc Guckin & Corcoran, 2015), particularly in the case of young students that most of the time are alone when the virtual incident occurs. Though, affronting bullying in our actual context requires not isolated actions, but more collaboration in between school administration, parents and students and the settle of comprehensive solutions that do not stand in increasing sanctions or removing smartphones from classes or strict surveillance where young students are browsing in cyberspace (Riley, 2017). Local initiatives like David's Law in Texas that requires a direct involvement from educative administrations and parents regarding cyber-bullying incidents and gives more attributions to prosecute these cases are welcome, but they only partially attack the problem. Virtual school bullying against minorities is not only a problem between individuals, in between the victim and of the aggressor or aggressors, but a public issue with a socio-historical context. In order to restore confidence in ethnic minority students and to settle a durable peaceful environment in schools, further efforts have to be invested in erasing the obstacles that divide communities (Blagojevic, 2007). One of those efforts stands in the establishment of peace education dynamics (Brantmeier, 2007). It is necessary to increase tolerance, reduce prejudices, stereotypes, and misconceptions to reinforce the communal identity (Parker, 2016). But to understand that creating a peaceful environment to all students, in school and cyberspace, is a shared responsibility.

One of the most important difficulties when dealing with cyber-bullying is the changing nature of virtual spaces. At the early years of the new Millennium, cyberbullying occurred mostly inside students' personal computers at home (Englander, 2011) but now, with mobile devices, it could happen all the time. The ubiquity of novel information technologies stands diverse pending questions regarding the establishment of some institutional policies, like for example to let or not to let students use smart phones at class? or What are the limits of schools to punish student's bad conduct on social media outside the school? Though, what is important to understand is that information technologies, like social media platforms and mobile devices are no longer accessories, but students' vital spaces. Inside virtual places like Facebook, they not only interact with friends and relatives but create, share and collect narratives that makes sense to their entire social life and it is a shared duty to guide and protect them along this journey.

Regarding the spread of extremist discourse in social media towards ethnic minorities students, it is important to display educative dynamics tending to improve dialogue and to explain to students that the respect to

diversity is a basis to enable peaceful relations inside classrooms, communities and, of course, in cyberspace. It is important to provide young students with reliable information to dwell with extremist narratives on the Internet (Mascheroni, Jorge & Farrugia, 2014), to help them understand that those discourses are based on a reductionist and partial notion about social relations, and to recognize that harmonious daily life in US neighborhoods is based on the constructions of sustainable relations among people that do not necessarily resemble their ethnicity or share their religious belief.

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