Like Felix the Cat’s bottomless black magic purse, American pop culture is an unending grab bag that contains innumerable cultural artifacts for scores of academics, social critics, and philosopher dilettantes to present the most facile arguments as well as the most insightful discussions ranging from racial pathos to immigrant anxieties topped off with a dollop of post-racial fantasies. Without a doubt, American pop culture has served as a space where racial and ethnic, fears, fantasies, and politics are engaged and imagined. Case in point, the new Spider-Man in the *Ultimate Spider-Man* comic book series is a black and Latino teenager named Miles Morales. Now not only is Spider-Man arguably Marvel Comic’s most signature character across the Marvel superhero universe and an iconic superhero in American pop culture but he is also black and Puerto Rican, a source of debate and popular discourse concerning race in America. (See Brian Truitt’s “Half-black, half-Hispanic Spider-Man revealed.”) However, all efforts that present blacks and Latinos in a cultural dialogue with one another are as intriguing as the amazing Miles Morales. Take, for example, the nearly unwatchable film *Our Family Wedding* (2010) that recycled just about every ethnic and racial cliche associated with Mexicans and African American prejudices. The film ostensibly was about the merging of two major minority groups into one pan-ethnic family through marriage. Arguably, underneath the comic misfire was a trite attempt at some sort of social commentary addressing demographic anxieties shared by both whites and blacks concerning Latinos becoming the second largest minority in America. Yet, the awkward and sophomoric ethnic jokes worked less as social commentary and more as a cover for the venting of racial hostility via the black protagonist, Brad Boyd (Forest Whitiker). Brad is the main black character...
of the film and mouths ethnic putdowns like a poor imitation of Archie Bunker, America’s favorite bigot from the 1970s television show *All in the Family* (1968–1979). Ultimately, *Our Family Wedding* was guilty of cutting, pasting, and milking racial and ethnic diversities for cheap laughs, was questionable as entertainment, and was most likely motivated by potential profits.

Prospective profits along with economic anxieties make the nexus of Afro-Latino representation a provocative pairing for deconstruction, cultural critique, and analysis concerning racial taboos and racialized ideology. For example, the romantic pairing of black lead actors with Latina actresses was/is a trend that demonstrates how race and economics are transparently tied to unstated issues around race. Will Smith in *Wild Wild West* (1999), *Hitch* (2005), *I am Legend* (2007), and *Seven Pounds* (2008) along with Denzel Washington, most notably in *Training Day* (2001) and to a lesser extent *Out of Time* (2003) are emblematic of this tendency. Put another way, having two black leads in a sci-fi, dramatic, or comedic film make it a “black” film. Ostensibly, a Latina figure assists in making sure not to alienate potential white viewers who might pass on what might be considered a “black” film if both leads are clearly African American. Consequently, Latinoness in this case is used to undercut the blackness represented by two black actors as the principal characters and helps assure a crossover potential for audiences. The latter example demonstrates how the intersection of blackness and Latinoness often signifies dubious racial politics in form and content when the unquenchable cravings of capitalism and the vulgar pragmatics of mass marketing take root.

My contribution to this volume enters into this peculiar but apparently pragmatic racial and ethnic fray as cultural criticism geared toward interrogating American pop culture. The essay maps the aesthetic boundaries of black racial representation and Latino ethnicity to closely examine the ideological import, role, and potential of the amalgamation of blackness and Latinoness (or *Blatinoness*) within the culture industry. That is, I explore how Blatinoness as ensconced in the symbolic discourse found in comics symbolizes broader racial discourse, social implications, tensions, and progressive possibilities in American society.

Before, however, delving into a deep discussion concerning Blatino identity in the realm of pop culture, the term itself and how I’m deploying it compels a preliminary analysis. “Blatino” is constructed from the literal combination of the words “black” and “Latino.” When the term is typed into an Internet search engine, it also appears as a highly sexualized term related to male homosexuality and a particular type of ethnic-racial niche gay pornography. Ultimately, history will be the judge as to which manner the term is canonized. Nevertheless, I view the phrase