

A photograph of the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco, California, viewed from a high angle. The bridge's red-orange towers and suspension cables are prominent against a clear blue sky. The water below is a deep blue-green, and the city of San Francisco is visible in the distance. The text is overlaid on the bridge's tower.

# Narratives of racial fear and resentment among white California youth

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A photograph of the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco, California, viewed from a high angle. The bridge's iconic orange-red towers and suspension cables are prominent against a clear blue sky. The bridge spans across a body of water, with the city of San Francisco visible in the distance. The overall scene is bright and clear.

# Introduction

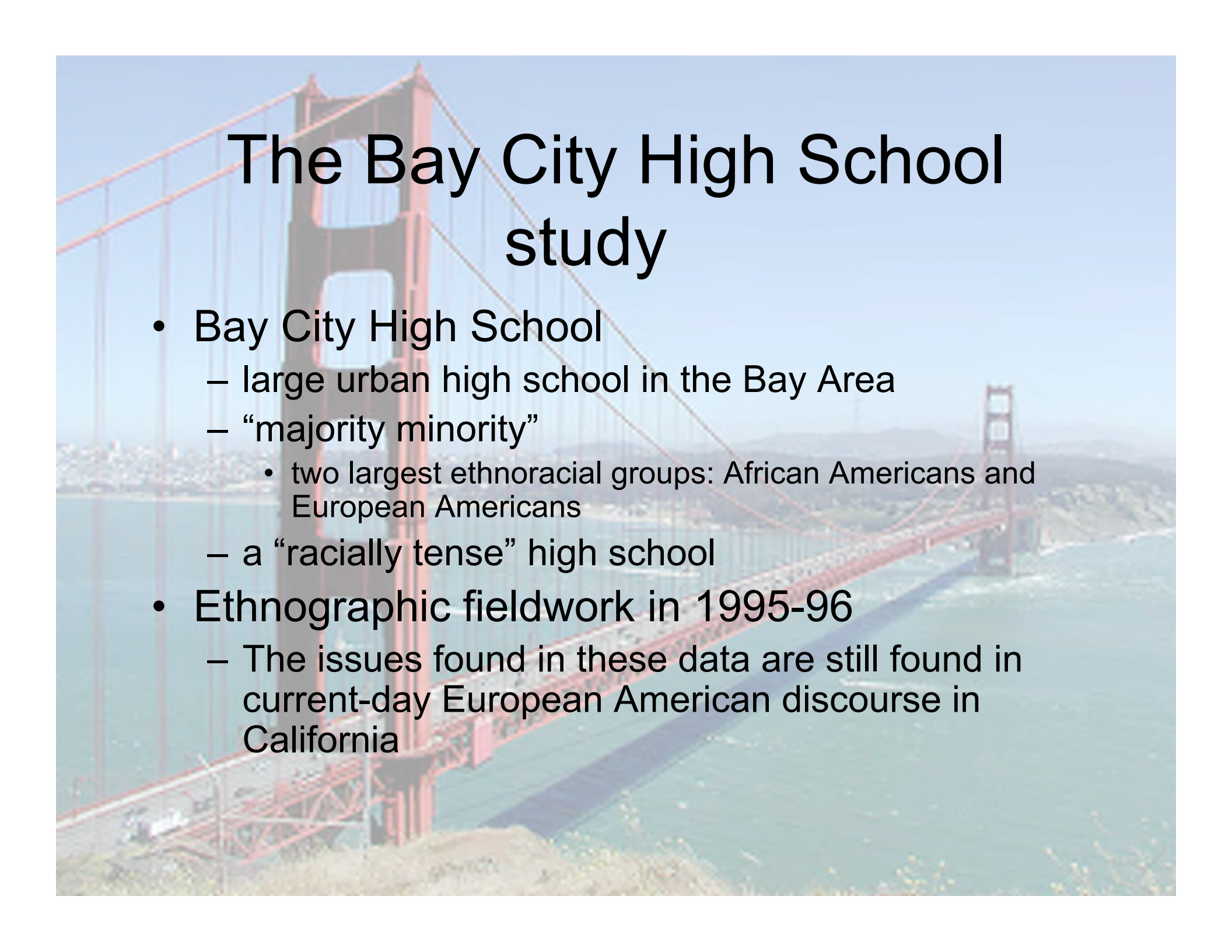
- race talk
  - discourse about race and ethnicity
    - Myers 2005; van den Berg et al. 2004;
  - key site for the production and circulation of racial ideologies and identities
  - may be a resource for constructing identities in contrast to racial others



A photograph of the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco, California, viewed from a high angle. The bridge's red-orange towers and suspension cables are prominent against a clear blue sky. The water of the bay is visible below, and the city skyline is faintly visible in the distance. The text of the slide is overlaid on this image.

# Race talk in California

- a few California-based studies of this issue
  - e.g., Alim 2004; Pollock 2005
- important topic of study
  - state's vast ethnoracial diversity
  - rapidly changing demographics
    - “majority minority”
  - race relations and racial ideologies

A background image of the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco, California, spanning across the water. The bridge's iconic orange-red towers and suspension cables are visible against a clear blue sky. The water below is a deep blue-green, and the distant hills are hazy.

# The Bay City High School study

- Bay City High School
  - large urban high school in the Bay Area
  - “majority minority”
    - two largest ethnoracial groups: African Americans and European Americans
  - a “racially tense” high school
- Ethnographic fieldwork in 1995-96
  - The issues found in these data are still found in current-day European American discourse in California



A background image of the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco, California, viewed from a high angle looking down the length of the bridge towards the city. The bridge's iconic orange-red towers and suspension cables are prominent against a clear blue sky and the greenish water of the bay. The city skyline is visible in the distance on the left side.

# Racial reversal

- widespread local white discourse of racial conflict
  - whiteness as disadvantaged and perilous
  - blackness as privileged and powerful
- despite structural asymmetries favoring whites
- “Sincere fictions” of race discursively sustain racial inequality
  - Feagin & Vera 1995: 135

A background image of the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco, California, viewed from a high angle looking down the length of the bridge towards the water. The bridge's red-orange towers and cables are prominent against the blue sky and water.

# Narratives of racial reversal at Bay City High School

1. narratives of “reverse discrimination”
  - institutional favoritism of blacks over whites
2. narratives of racialized fear and persecution of whites by blacks
3. interracial fight stories



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# Narratives of racial fear

- underlying ideology of white vulnerability to black violence
  - “Negrophobia and reasonable racism” (Armour 1997)
- often interacted with the racial ideology of “colorblindness” (Bonilla-Silva 2002)
  - racial others not overtly labeled
    - whiteness frequently mentioned (cf. Trechter & Bucholtz 2001; Whitehead & Lerner forthcoming)



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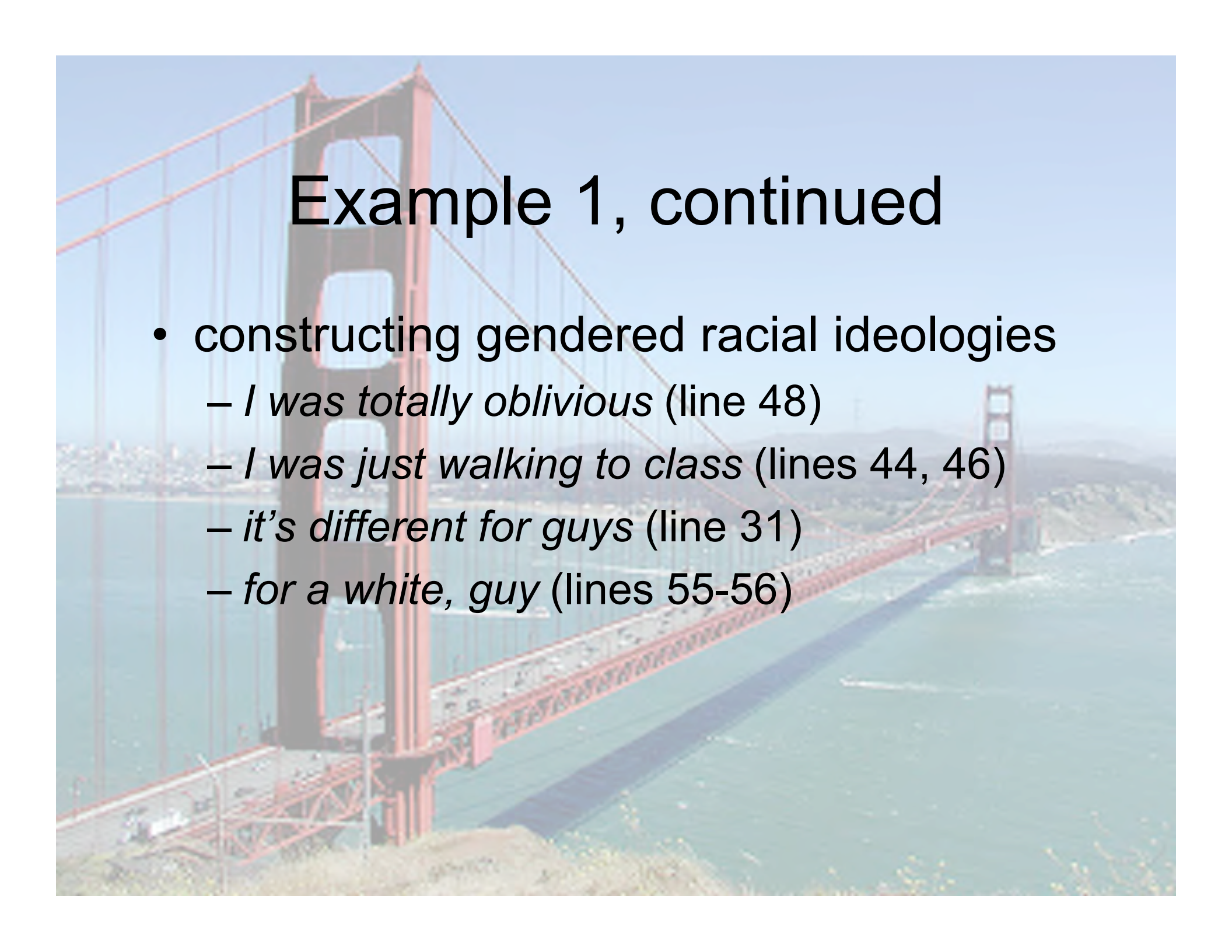
# Example 1

- Zoe and Josie
  - preppies
  - discussion of the expression “watch your back”
    - backpack theft stories

# Example 1, continued

- referential vagueness of racial other
  - *this guy* (line 2)
- overt mention of whiteness
  - *like for w- (1.0), Yeah. I don't know. For a white, guy* (lines 51-56)
- quoted speech for heightened drama
  - *And I was like, "Ah"* (lines 11-12)
  - *"Yeah I was afraid they were going to do something to me"* (line 26)



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# Example 1, continued


- constructing gendered racial ideologies
  - *I was totally oblivious* (line 48)
  - *I was just walking to class* (lines 44, 46)
  - *it's different for guys* (line 31)
  - *for a white, guy* (lines 55-56)

A background image of the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco, California, viewed from a high angle looking down at the water. The bridge's red-orange towers and suspension cables are prominent against the blue sky and water. The city of San Francisco is visible in the distance on the left side.

# Interracial fight stories

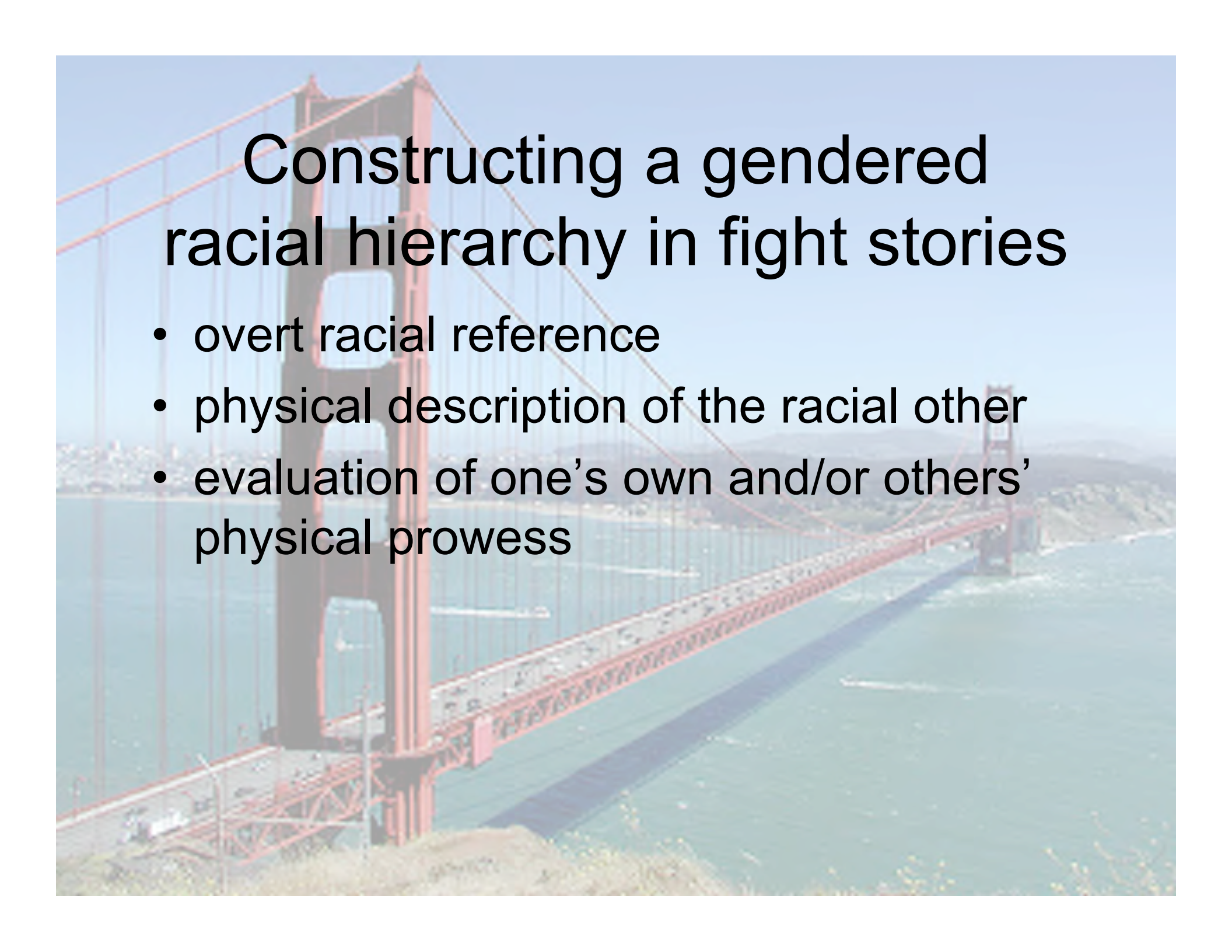
- narratives of interracial violence (actual or potential) told only by boys
  - Many white boys perceived themselves as open targets of black male violence
- fighting ability tied to an ideology of masculinity as physically powerful
  - Connell 1995; Edley & Wetherell 1997; Kiesling 1997



The background of the slide is a photograph of the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco, California. The bridge's iconic orange-red towers and suspension cables are visible against a clear blue sky. The bridge spans across a body of water, with a hilly landscape visible in the distance. The text is overlaid on this image.

# Ideologies of race and masculinity

- black masculinity as hyperphysical and hyperviolent
  - Collins 2005; Ferguson 2000; Jackson 2006
- Asian masculinity as physically deficient
  - Eng 2000; Espiritu 1997; Shek 2006
- white masculinity as ideologically normative and normal
  - may be positioned as inferior to black masculinity (especially among youth) (Staiger 2006)

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# Constructing a gendered racial hierarchy in fight stories

- overt racial reference
- physical description of the racial other
- evaluation of one's own and/or others' physical prowess






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# Racial reference

- contrary to ideology of colorblindness
  - Racial labels occur early in narrative
    - overt
    - on-record
- provides an account for narrator's own behavior as appropriately masculine

# Example 2

- Example 2a: Brand One 
  - white Jewish hip hop fan
- Example 2b: Mr. Frisky 
  - white boy with alternative style (goth/skater)
- Example 2c: Nico Caen 
  - hip hop fan
  - blond, blue-eyed, light-skinned Puerto Rican
    - perceived as white by others



# Example 2, continued

- early mention of racial labels
  - Example 2a: *this black dude* (line 11)
  - Example 2b: *fifty to ... sixty black kids* (lines 9-12)
  - Example 2c: *some little Asian fools* (line 6)

# Discursively constructing a formidable opponent

- superior size
  - Example 2a: *this black dude was like six, maybe like fi:ve ten, he was big, he was a lot bigger than me* (lines 10-14)
- superior numbers
  - Example 2b: *about fifty to, you know, sixty black kids suddenly swarm after him* (lines 9-12)
  - Example 2c: *just two of us, and like thirty of them* (lines 8-9)



A photograph of the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco, California, viewed from a high angle looking down the length of the bridge towards the water. The bridge's iconic orange-red color is prominent against the blue sky and water. The suspension towers and cables are clearly visible, and the bridge spans across the water towards the city in the distance.

# Racial ideologies in interracial fight stories


- the “Big Black Man Syndrome”
  - Vogelman 1993
  - Example 2a
- vermin imagery in xenophobic and racist discourse
  - Santa Ana 2002
  - Example 2b
    - *out of the woodwork* (line 4)
    - *swarm* (line 12)
- cf. Example 2c: *little Asian fools* (line 6)

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## Example 3

- Peanut
  - Asian American hip hop fan
- only description of physical superiority of Asians in my data



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# The racialized hierarchy of masculinity

- top: African Americans
- middle (“normal”): European Americans
- bottom: Asian Americans
  - for non-Asian American narrators
- See also Chun 2001

# Physical description of the racial other

- providing of physical details
- evaluation via stance of fear





# Example 4a



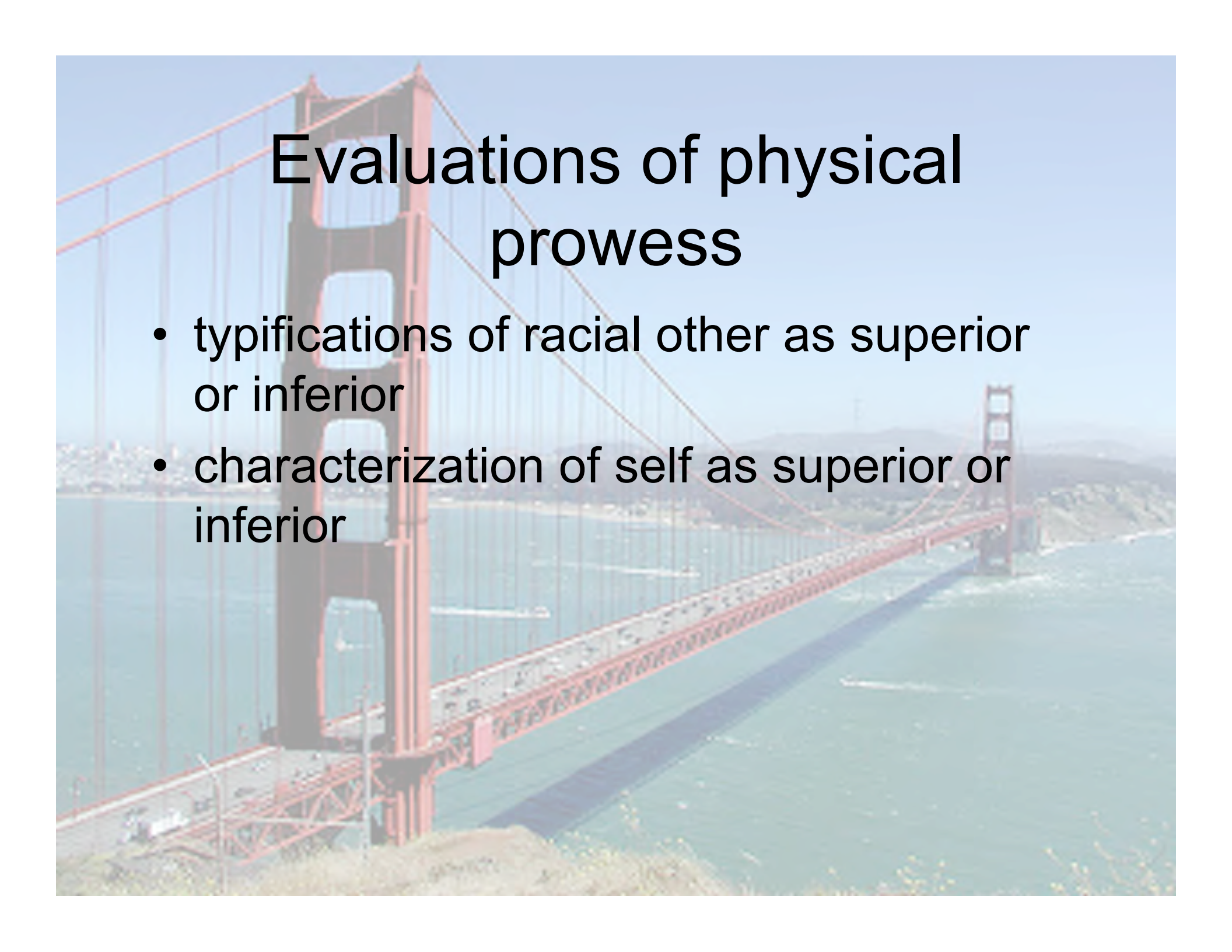
- physical details
  - *six, maybe like fi:ve ten* (Example 4a, lines 11-12)
  - *like six three:* (line 76)
  - *like five ten* (line 81)
  - *big ass, fool/fro* (lines 77-78)
- stance of fear
  - *hella sca:ry* (line 79)
  - *people are intimidated of him* (line 84)
- See also Bucholtz 1999 for further analysis of this narrative

# Example 4b



- physical details
  - *hella t:all* (line 3)
  - *He's extremely [stra-]* (i.e., strong) (line 7)
- stance of fear
  - *you would not fuck with him if you saw him* (line 10)



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# Evaluations of physical prowess

- typifications of racial other as superior or inferior
- characterization of self as superior or inferior

# Example 5



- typification of African Americans
  - hyperphysical and hyperviolent
    - *stro:nger* (line 3)
    - *quick to fight* (line 14)
    - *really hard to knock out and knock down* (line 16)
    - *warriors* (line 9)
- characterization of self
  - less physically adept
    - *it was over real quick* (lines 25, 26)
    - *“Ow, that, kind of hurt”* (lines 28-30)





# Example 6

- characterization of self
  - self as fearless and physically adept
    - *grinning* (line 2), *cackling* (line 5)
    - “*Come on, let’s do this*” (lines 10-11)
    - *I’d be ... just swinging and batting fools around like little play toys* (line 17)
- invocation of the racial hierarchy
  - “just Filipinos” (line 24) versus “black men” (line 28)

# Example 7



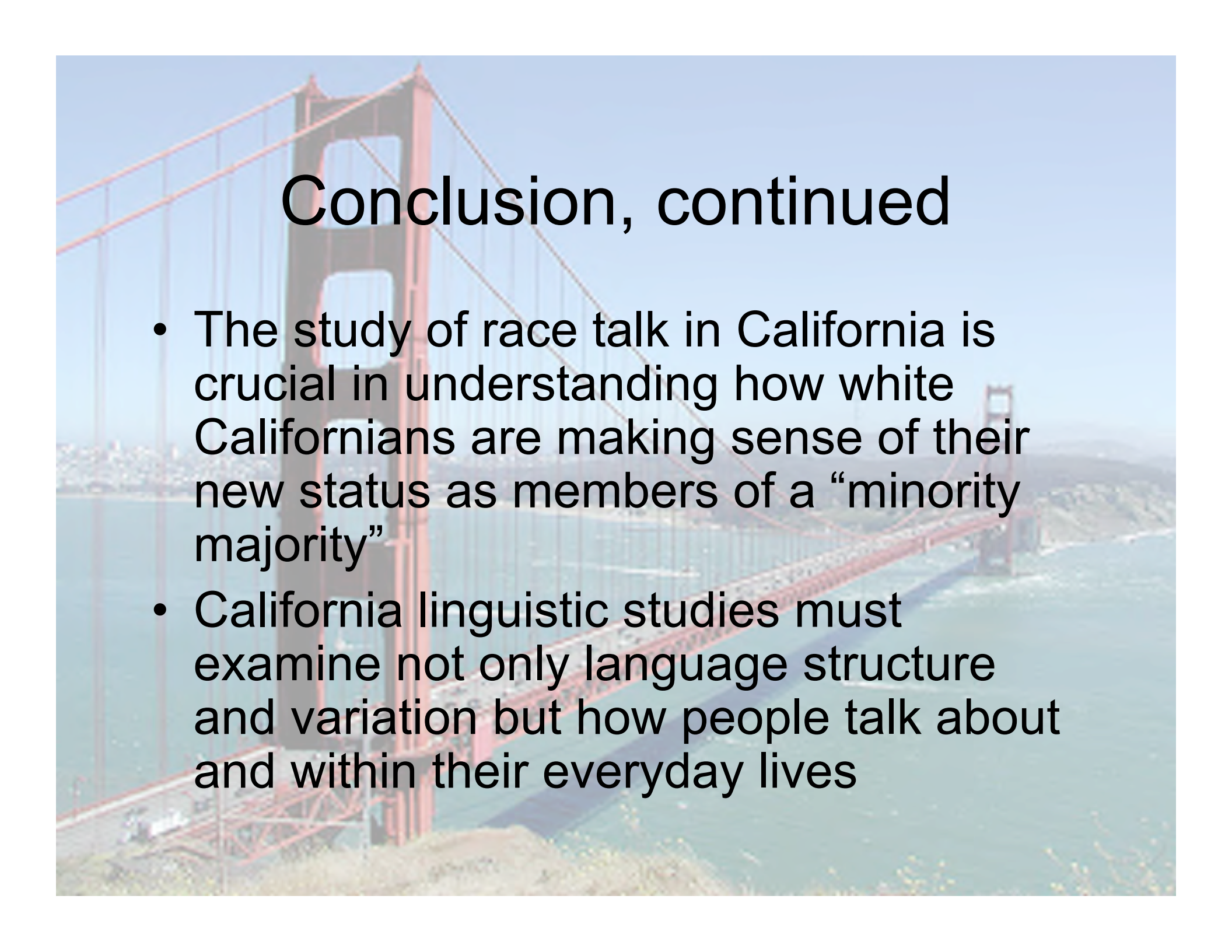
- narrative parallelism in Examples 6 and 7
  - “just swinging” at “fools”
  - characterization of self as physically adept
  - quoted speech
- two versions of the racial hierarchy
  - blacks > Mr. Frisky/whites > Asians
  - blacks > Nico/Latinos > Asians ≥ whites



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# Conclusion

- The white ideology of racial reversal:
  - is reproduced through narratives of race-based fear and physical conflict
  - ignores structural power differences between blacks and whites
- As a white researcher, I was viewed as—and acted as—a sympathetic audience for racial complaints by white students
- Not simply individual racism but part of broader racial discourses

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# Conclusion, continued

- The study of race talk in California is crucial in understanding how white Californians are making sense of their new status as members of a “minority majority”
- California linguistic studies must examine not only language structure and variation but how people talk about and within their everyday lives



A photograph of the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco, California. The bridge is a suspension bridge with two large towers and a long deck. The water is a deep blue-green color, and the sky is a clear, light blue. The bridge is the central focus of the image, with the city of San Francisco visible in the background on the left side.

# Acknowledgments

- Thanks to Brendan Barnwell and Mackenzie Chapman for assistance with transcription.