

Bomba and Chicken: Afro-Latinas in the United States

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Overview and Narrative

“It is estimated that between 10 percent and 80 percent of Latinos who hail from countries like Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Colombia, Panama, Venezuela, Belize, and the United States Territory of Puerto Rico have African Ancestry”.. Alan Hughes and Milca Esdaille, *The Afro-Latin@ Reader*

DENIAL

“In 2001, a Black Argentine Woman attempted to board a plane to Panama when immigration officials denied her boarding because they did not believe her passport was real. These officers, her own countrymen, told her that her passport couldn’t be hers because she is Black. They, like many other Argentinians believed that “No hay negros en Argentina”. (There are no blacks in Argentina) (1)

When I chose this topic, I had no idea that so little has been written about a very large group of women who hail from a multitude of Spanish and Portuguese speaking countries and yet, it’s almost as if they don’t exist. One woman said to me that she feels as if she and other women who look like her are being erased, ignored and certainly hidden. My own daughters, whose grandfather is from Cape Verde, have just recently begun to identify as Afro Latinas. For them, it is a statement of solidarity, of recognizing a kinship with their sisters in Brazil and Cape Verde.

I also thought of one of my students, a chocolate brown beauty who became visibly uncomfortable when I complimented her on her beautiful name. She dropped her head when I asked her to pronounce it for me. (She barely whispered it). She later told me that she didn’t want “The Questions,” never considered herself Latina, (especially “Afro Latina”), and knows very little about her Latina Heritage. She’s “just Black. that’s all.” So I write this unit for my daughters, for my student, and students like her, who somehow got a message that they don’t “Fit” their last names and do everything possible to avoid being questioned about how they “don’t look Spanish “. As you read my writing, please bear in mind that I have infused and intertwined African People’s presence and involvement in the formation and creation of the Americas throughout this paper.

IN SEARCH OF LAND AND GOLD

Once upon a time in many different places, men called conquistadors from Spain sailed the oceans in search of gold and other forms of wealth. They bore names such as Hernan Cortes, Juan Ponce de Leon, Francisco Pizarro, Lucas Vasquez de Ayllon, Panfilo de Narvaez, Hernando de Soto, and Vazquez de Coronado. These men populate the pages of history, celebrated for their “discoveries.” But what most people today do not know is that there were Africans traveling with them at every juncture of these expeditions (which began prior to 1500 CE). They were with Panfilo de Narvaez when he landed near Tampa Bay in Florida. There was the noted Esteban, a Spanish-speaking African, who survived an ill fated expedition and “served as their primary go-between.....constantly in conversation, finding out about routes, towns, and other matters we wished to know”. (2) (The “We” refers to the Spanish officer Alvar Nunez Cabeza de Vaca, who along with Esteban and the other two survivors had sailed with Narvaez). Out of the original 400 soldiers, only Esteban and three others made it to Mexico City in 1536. But Esteban was not free, and, as the story goes, was sold to Governor Antonio de Mendoza, who then presented him to Marcos de Niza, a Spanish Friar. Sent by the friar on yet another expedition (because of his knowledge), he never returned. He died looking for the famed Cibola. And then there was Gomez, a West African, belonging to Vasco Goncalvez, who was forced to take part in de Soto’s forays into the American Southeast. He eventually escaped and reportedly lived with a young Indian woman.

Africans were at the first permanent European settlement in North America: St. Augustine. Africans were present at all junctures and many escaped to live among the Indian peoples already here for thousands of years before *any Europeans ever set foot on these shores*.

U.S. IN THE CARIBBEAN AND PACIFIC

“If your inclusion or exclusion from a regime of rights or entitlements is based on your race or ethnicity, as defined by law, then this becomes a central defining fact for you the individual and your group. From this point of view, both race and ethnicity need to be understood as political- and not cultural, or even biological identities” (3)

History bears out that European monarchs were busy sending out these men, (some not even native to the monarchs’ countries, such as Christopher Columbus), in search of enlarging and enriching their empires, and seeking to dominate the oceans. The United States arrived late in this game of Empire. When European nations were dividing the “African Cake” among themselves, agreeing not to fight one another over land claims, and King Leopold was carving out his own personal kingdom in Central Africa, the United States was not present at the table. She was too busy subduing Native peoples here on the mainland, taking their lands, and recovering from the Civil War.(4) But looking out into her own backyard, she saw small countries and islands in the Caribbean and Pacific, which could be missionized and made “American” (code White). The peoples native to North America had already provided her with the experience of replacing of one culture with another, through “Kill the Indian save the Man,” and Indian Schools, both official U.S. policy. However, Manifest Destiny did not just apply to the West; it was a policy that was part of a Divine Plan giving White Americans the right, even the obligation. to bring civilization to people of color”. (5)

GOODBYE SPAIN (HELLO INDIANS. AGAIN.)

“The prototype of settler violence in the history of modern colonialism is the near extermination of Amerindians in the New World” (6)

“In a few short months in 1898, in what is known as the Spanish-American War, the United States replaced Spain as the ruling power in the Philipines, Cuba, Puerto Rico and Guam” (7) She annexed Hawaii and American Samoa that same year. Millions of people were affected. “This war and its aftermath marked the emergence of the United States as a global power, pursuing interests and prerogatives far beyond its own territory”. (8)

As the available land for settlement had, for the most part, already been claimed, the U.S. government’s first act was to seize *more* land from Native Americans. They did this through the Indian Appropriation Act of 1871, which nullified all treaties between the United States and Native peoples, and opened up huge new areas of land to White settlement. The Seminole and Creeks lost 1.9 million acres in 1889 to the Oklahoma Land Rush and the Sioux in South Dakota lost eleven million acres in 1890 to White settlement. The Sioux resisted, and on December 28, 1890, at Wounded Knee, the U.S. Seventh Cavalry massacred 153 Indian men, women and children. “Over the next few years, similar losses of land were suffered by the Crow, Cherokee, Potawatomi, and other Indian peoples.(9)

So by the mid 1800’s, the United States no longer had an internal “frontier”. It was all gone. No further possibilities for expansion existed on the North American Continent.

However, industrial production continued to grow and expand to the point where production outstripped demand. New markets had to be secured. The U.S. was producing more than England, France and Germany combined, and had become the world’s leading economic power, but without a market large enough to absorb what it produced. At the same time, farmlands in Argentina, Canada, and Russia were opened causing the price of U.S. wheat and corn to drop. Add to this the financial panic of 1893 and subsequent depression. The gold standard was threatened and the United States sought to restore economic stability. She needed to open new markets and new territories. (10)

Why is this important you ask? As the United States opened new markets and set up residence in the new countries, American ideals were exported along with goods and services. And part of this exchange of goods and services was people. When people leave their home countries and go to other countries or come to the United States to work/live, they don’t leave the ideas that shaped them behind. Many of these ideas had been deeply embedded culturally for generations, such as the “Whitening” of History, of leaving out the stories and the people who took part in the making of places; the deliberate “forgetting” or worse, outright denial. And so, the descendants of these people are reduced to non-existence, to never having contributed to the cultural fabric and political life of the nations in which their descendants live. Oftentimes they have been relegated to the role of “takers” and viewed as a “blight on society”. But they left their footprints.

PUERTO RICO

“The need people have to place my face on a map as if I am an afrolatina thumbtack is unbelievable. Yes yes I get that you’re black but you ain’t black black sweetheart. You from some island somewhere. I can tell. Well yes but, Black black. Huh?! Well, I’ll be

damned folks. I didn't realize that based on where you come from in the diaspora equals the number of blacks you are required to add to your identity. Which country is black black black? I want to visit there".....Dorothy Bell Ferrer

In the early 1940's the United States Navy seized 2/3 of the land in Vieques, one of Puerto Rico's islands. Under U.S. rule Puerto Rico has become one of the most militarized territories in the world greatly affecting the lives of the inhabitants. (11) The people tried to resist the takeover of their lands by the U.S. Navy through political action. The naval exercises were killing the fish, and the local people needed to fish to survive. So they protested. They continued to protest through the 1980's. Many of them were arrested for these acts of resistance.

Prior to the U.S. takeover, Puerto Rico had endured 365 years of slavery. There was also a large population of Free African Descent Puerto Ricans. Because of African people, the African influence is very pronounced in Puerto Rico, from the food, to the music, to words in the language. And this is also where the most popular dance in Puerto Rico, rooted in Africa was born: BOMBA ! Living in close proximity to African enslaved people, were mulatos and mestizos, who worked in a variety of occupations such as agriculture, domestic laborers, artisans, merchants and ship hands. Many of these joined the struggle against racism and slavery. As a result, all of these free people became abolitionists and freedom fighters.

CARIBBEAN DREAMS OF AMERICA, "THE LAND OF OPPORTUNITY"

As of 1991, those who migrated from Puerto Rico to the United States faced social, educational, housing, and employment discrimination. For women factory workers, it was worse. They were paid lower wages than their White counterparts. "Discrimination came from all directions, including, initially, unequal treatment and even exclusion from labor unions." (12)

For the Black Puerto Rican woman, it became (and still is) even more suffocating. Let me explain: the environment she grows up in is hostile to her because of her phenotype. She is constantly reminded of her hair texture and size of her lips, seemingly such little things, but to her it is a source of being reminded that she is living proof that she failed her family and cannot meaningfully contribute to the dictum, "Adelantar la Raza". She is boxed in on so many levels, a three fold oppression embodying color, sex, and cultural identity. She is a minority within a minority. Seeking out playmates or companions who look like her, she is told, "Con esa no juegues! (Don't play with that one!) Like my chocolate skinned student, her surname identifies her as Puerto Rican: but her actual *felt* identity? That is another story.

"The Puerto Rican obsession with adelantar la raza makes it impossible for her to make a choice independent of the consideration of color...the family has reaffirmed the inferiority of her blackness and the need for her to change that situation by marrying someone very light , if not white. With such a marriage, the Black Puerto Rican woman experiences the embrace of a loving family" (13) "Any intimacy with a Black American male is absolutely taboo, and to engage in such a relationship is to be forced to assimilate socially into that group, essentially giving up her identity as a Puerto Rican" (14)

MEXICO

“ Gradually, interest is being sparked about the black African presence in Mexico. Nevertheless, one can say that the identity and historic and cultural heritage of Afro-Mexicans in Mexico will neither be recognized nor sufficiently valued as long as society purports that the value of a person depends on the lightness of his/her skin”, Sagario Cruz-Carretero, “The African Presence in Mexico”.

Mexicans, the earliest Latinos in America, moved into the United States much earlier than their Puerto Rican cousins. In the early 1800’s, “twenty one orphan children were sent to California by the Spanish colonial government to populate the farthest reaches of its American Empire.” The Spanish had already been in what became the United States for more than three centuries. One hundred years after Columbus’s arrival, the Spanish conquistadors and priests pushed North in search of gold and missionizing for the Catholic Church. Indian communities suffered in the missions the Spanish set up as they were the source of labor for the empire and were severely punished if they did not meet their “obligations.” When the missions were broken up, the lands were parceled out into ranchos and given to a few hundred families-the Californios, the original migrants, who “viewed themselves as Mexican but not Mexican. ...” They established for themselves a sort of hybrid culture. Most were mestizos or mulattos who then became mixed with the local population. They assimilated into Spanish culture, marrying Californian women, adopting Catholicism, etc.

This land-holding elite insisted on being seen as European or Spanish. and did not identify with their servants, the Christianized Indians from the missions” (approx. 10,000 of them bound to a few “Elite” families) (15)

They soon learned that even though *they* saw themselves as European- Spanish, the Americans (Whites) who came later, did not share this vision. The Americans they encountered at first were from Boston, and business dealings went well for the most part. However, later came another group, a rather rough sort, not the genteel Easterners like the men organized by Captain John C. Fremont, who arrived at the home of Vallejo, Military Commander of California to arrest him. (Being an elite himself, what happened next would dictate how property would be handled, and defined how Mexicans and others would be treated in the United States from that moment forward).

Vallejo feared for his life and the lives of his family. The men ransacked his home after he signed the Capitulation Papers and carried him off to prison where he remained for two months. Upon his return home, he found squatters in his home and his cattle slaughtered. This act shattered Vallejo’s and others like him, long held ideas of being “White”, no matter how much assimilation had taken place, in the eyes of the Americans.

The backdrop to this was that President Polk wanted to expand the Western Borders to the Pacific Coast. The Mexican American War was raging over disputed territory between Mexico and Texas. The war lasted two years. As a result, the U.S. doubled in size and the wealth that came with it was enormous. (16)

Mexicans who became U.S. citizens were promised the same rights and privileges extended to all Americans. However, the Anglos (Whites) were given preferential treatment in most if not all cases, where Mexicans felt their rights trampled, especially

during the Gold Rush. At least three hundred Mexicans were lynched. Stereotypes against Mexicans began to spread. They became the “Other”. As the gold ran out, their land grants were challenged and squatting was commonplace. The courts were not much help and many simply lost out all around. (17)

TRI-CULTURAL ROOTS

“Political identities are the consequence of how power is organized” (18)

All in all, “Mexicans are proud of their mestizo culture, proud of the mixture of indigenous and European heritage that most Mexicans share. But there is another source of mestizo heritage that is less recognized-African slaves”. (19) Estimated to number less than one percent of Mexico’s population of 105 million, their descendants today can primarily be found in the Costa Chica Coastal Region in Southern Mexico.

The story of how they came to be dates back hundreds of years. According to Lisa Hoppenjans and Ted Richardson, the story has been passed down by mothers and grandmothers for generations. It is said that a slave ship crashed at Punta Maldonado, a rocky beach about twenty miles from Cuaji. The slaves ran into the nearby hot and dense bush and formed small, isolated communities. The largest one was Caujinicuilapa. Over time they mixed with native Mexicans. Their descendants are believed have grown from the original two hundred or so to now populate the entire Costa Chica (20) Their existence is not well known in Mexico. But there are remnants of African culture. Studies have been done on the origins of these people. Historians believe that “Blacks were too dispersed to have come from the same shipwreck” (21). Historians studying slave trade routes from Africa to central and South America, say that the slaves are believed to have “come from Congo and Guinea by way of Patagonia and settled more widely and more systematically in the Costa Chica” (22) and, African slaves worked on sugar plantations

African settlers have been in Central Mexico and the Carolinas since the 1520’s from olive-complexted Muslims to dark skinned West Africans. Many Spaniards carry African ancestry. “Very few Spaniards of European lineage were available to newly conquered regions and this task fell primarily to Hispanicized natives , mixed bloods of all kinds, and Negroes.....In 1774 a royal official asserted that the Hispano population of Northern Mexico was of Negro, Indian and European ancestry and were so intermixed as to make it difficult for anyone to trace their ancestry”(23)

Generally speaking, “as the status of a person improved, his race changed. He may begin life as a Negro, pure or otherwise and end life as a mulatto or Eurafrikan. mestizo or Eurindian or even Espanol” (24) Because of this, “many prominent white Californians are descendents of Africans, including some who boast of of the “purity” of their “Castilian” ancestry (25)

In addition, the intermarriage of European and Anglo-American men with Spanish -speaking women in California had a tri-fold effect. As they tended to choose from the more prosperous and lighter-skinned women, the aristocracy began to further lighten in skin color, “prejudice against the darker skin color was reinforced and knowledge of Indian or negro ancestors was gradually suppressed. After the United States conquest, violently racist attitudes were introduced into the region and the spanish speaking Californians, quite naturally, disassociated themselves from their hybrid past.” (26)

“MY MELANIN AND ME: A COMPLICATED LOVE STORY MADE UP OF POEMS AND DRUMMING”Dorothy Bell Ferrer

Going to a university on Long Island in the late sixties and early seventies was a time of great change in my, the author's, life. Not only was I away from home for the first time but I was also heavily influenced by a form of dance that would forever stamp my identity. One of my classmates would travel to the city each week and study under immigrant African dancers. She managed to convince the drummers to come out to Adelphi and play for our class. After years of learning and practicing eurocentric forms and struggling with my instructors who kept telling me that I didn't have, "The Line," (my rear was a "bump" whenever I stretched my legs, back and arms into an arabesque), I felt like I was finally free. And I excelled. Along with others who looked like me, we attended every class the university offered in African Dance, (and I taught it when I returned home to Philadelphia).

It was a time of liberation for thousands of young men and women of African descent. Heavily influenced by Pan Africanism, Black was Beautiful and we wanted anything African - dance, drumming, clothing, food, afro hairdos. We were "Black" back then. And we became political. This frightened most of our parents, who had settled into a sort of "Parallel Society" to Whites. We went off to college Negro/ Colored boys and girls and came back home young Black Men and Women, talking about Pan Africanism and the need to unite. We began to see our struggle as a global one that encompassed Afro Descendants in the United States, the Caribbean and Africa. And we scorned those who didn't identify with "The Struggle". Imagine when we met Afro-Latinas who didn't identify with us ! The response to them was generally, "Hmpf, anything but Black huh?" And so, many of *them* began to identify as Black too. It seemed to be much easier.

WE DIDN'T KNOW YOU EXISTED !

The first time a group of women drummers from Cuba came to Philadelphia to perform was an eye-opener for many African Americans. They spoke no english. They were definitely dark skinned with hair that had that telltale "Kink". And they played drum rhythms hundreds of years old, rhythms that came from Africa. Years later, I traveled to the Bahamas and, standing outside the hotel one evening before Junkanoo, I heard rhythms I knew to be from the Congo in Central Africa. I followed the sounds and came upon a group of young Bahamian men, (who had never left the islands), practicing for the parade due to take place the next day. They told me that they have been playing that rhythm "since forever," that all they knew is that it came from Africa. They were surprised and elated when I told them the *exact* country where it is played. This started them wondering how they got it. Of course, one of them came to the obvious conclusion: it came with the slaves.

The African Diaspora is HUGE. Diasporan Africans number in the millions. Yet, many exist on the fringes of their respective societies, lacking access to healthcare, education, housing and opportunities for upward mobility readily available to others, but not to them.

In her essay, "Afro-Boricua: Nuyoricana de Pura Cepa," Marta Morena Vega states that . "The primary vehicle for affirming racist and discriminatory theories and practices is the educational system of our countries. The historical narratives that generally frame our experience start solely with our enslavement. The general absence of our pre-enslavement and post enslavement history is a major factor in determining the information we use to define our individual and group identities." (27) Vega further goes to state that the "lack of recognition and omission of the history, contributions and lives of more than 150 million people of African ancestry, many of whom reside in the United States, renders their contributions and lives irrelevant". (28)

According to Ana-Maurine Lara, "The term *Whiteness* is used to refer to the socioeconomic and political privileges and powers ascribed to people who are phenotypically European or Caucasian. Because it is a concept that has been ascribed power and meaning, it has concrete violent ramifications on the lives of people who do not participate in whiteness, directly or indirectly". (29)

Mechanisms of this concept are evident in terms which define the parameters that Puerto Rican Latinas live. Angela Jorge, in her essay, "The Black Puerto Rican Woman in Contemporary Society," states that "A Black Puerto Rican woman is raised differently in Mainland U.S. than in Puerto Rico. Covert racism in Puerto Rico is overshadowed by the issue of social class differences and colonial status. Racism in Puerto Rico is covert. The woman raised in the United States is raised in an openly racist society." (30)

These terms then define racial differences according to gradations of color, i.e. mulata, jaba, triguena, grifa, negra and prieta. (31) (African descended women were similarly classified in 18th and 19th century Louisiana and Alabama, i.e. octoroon, quadroon, fancy griffe, black.) Color gradation is so important in that society that one's children are often admonished to go through *adelantar la raza*, a "Whitening" process, by which you marry someone light skinned, (if not White), which only serves to reinforce a feeling of guilt for being born Black. (32)

Yet, Puerto Rican society denies that racism exists among them. (The same can be said for many societies in the Caribbean and South America).

What this does to the Black individual who assimilates in the United States is that she will no longer identify, or be identified with the Puerto Rican community. Not socially. Not emotionally.

And so Dear Friends, the struggles that Afro Descended people experience in their home countries, present to them here in the United States as well when they interact within their own communities, only it is a struggle of the heart and mind. Let me explain: In Nirva Rosa Camacho Parra's essay "Afro-Venezuelan Cimarrones: Desde Adentro," internal racism is defined as "an auto discriminatory attitude in which a person undervalues the physical and cultural aspects that identify him, in this case as an Afro-descendant. At the same time, he over values the characteristics that could be interpreted as European, thus giving the person a false sense of superiority." (33)

Ana-Maurine Lara, in her essay, further states that, "The spaces that Afro-Latinas in the United States occupy are undefined spaces that result from the ways in which race has been constructed in U.S. society." Because of this, she posits that many Afro-Latinas are often not seen by Black Americans or other Latinos.....

and, that is important to first understand that race and racism are constructed differently in different societies, though their application may be the same (the control of colored female bodies by bodies that are not colored or female) (34)

Even though these same struggles face Afro Latino men, the impact may be more so for Afro Latina women, because historically women have less power than men.”

ACADEMIA

Some years ago I enrolled in a wonderful program at the PIER Institute at Yale University in New Haven Connecticut. My classmates comprised a rather international group, which I loved because they were all taking this seminar to help them be better educators, better social service workers, and generally be better able to understand the dynamics of working in diverse populations. Before we had our first lecture, the professor had us to view Chimamanda Achibie’s Ted Talks (available on YouTube), “The Danger of the Single Story.” That set the tone for our group to learn, *really* learn, the issues often overlooked by the dominant societies our populations come from. I would also gently suggest that you also watch this. You may be surprised that we all oftentimes have accepted that “Single Story” about those whom we serve.

LOOK MAMI, COUSIN IS ON THE T.V. SET !

I grew up during the 1950’s-60’s where the only Latin man who was regularly shown in my living room was Ricky Ricardo. And I loved him. I loved the show. I even loved Lucy. What a big hit ! He had a “Flavor” that was so different from say, Pat Boone. After Ricky came other Latin men, but none of them were dark skinned so therefore, I thought that all Latin men looked like Ricky- white with curly hair. Actually, I never even thought there could be dark skinned, kinky haired ones. Then I went to New York to Adelphi University as an undergrad student. More than once people would approach me and speak Spanish to me. At first I thought that they were “being funny”, and I was a bit put off. I had never considered that they might have thought that I was Latina. So once again, my limited exposure to Latin people was all predicated on this “Single Story”. Well, one day a friend and I were on the subway and a large group of people got on the car we were in. My friend spoke and understood Spanish. From her I learned that this was a family, and they spanned the color spectrum from two very blonde girls to three very dark, chocolatey dark girls, one with very long wavy hair, but the other two had hair with a definite “Kink”. It was now during the Black Power Movement Era. I thought my friend was pulling my leg but one of the cousins spoke to me and, in a nice way, told me that they were all cousins on their way to a game. That day I learned that all Puerto Ricans do NOT look alike. And further, that the same color gradations exist in African American families. I was at once fascinated by the thought of ,“How did they get that hair? “

So who’s on T.V.? Here are some names you may be familiar with. You may or may not know that they are Afro-Latinas:

Arlenis Sosa, Cecelia Tate, Cecelia Cruz, Dania Ramirez, Eva Allyon, Gina Torres, Gwen Ifill, Judy Reyes, Christina Milian, Tona la Negra, Stacey Dash, Ilia Calderon, Nancy Morejon, Soledad O’Brien. There are more, but this list will suffice for

now. One surprise I came across when researching this paper was that Sammy Davis Jr. was Afro-Latino (mother was Afro-Cuban). (35)

As a young Black woman of the 60's, my identity was formed through the lens of the Black Power Movement and my self image, like those of my sisters in solidarity, was one of strength, beauty and power. Because of this I have a strong sense of self emanating from within. Afro Latinas are just now beginning to emerge as a group who are moving toward self realization and social justice. I am watching these young women, politically astute and articulate, and I am learning from them, their stories of many layers as they tell of life before and after finding their voices.

I have recently discovered that a young Latina woman is currently making a documentary called, "Negrita" in which the voices of Afro Latina women will speak about what it means to be classed in such a way that almost makes them second class citizens among their own people in the United States. This is the subject of the following: **NEGRITA Documentary - Fundraising Trailer 2014-YouTube**

DIVIDED ISLAND-TWO COUNTRIES

To be forced to fit oneself into an "either or" category is very disturbing to many people who are Black in Latino countries. A country or a culture is not a race and yet people identify themselves as racially Dominican, or racially American, etc..

I have often had to have my students understand that "American" is a nationality; that we live in a plural, multi-ethnic, multi-racial society, while Puerto Rico is a *country*. Dominican Republic and Haiti are *countries*. (Years ago, I spent twenty minutes in Dominican Republic, arguing with the doorman at a resort about my race/ethnicity. He absolutely refused to accept me for who I said I am and based his argument solely on the hue of my skin).

Some years later I watched the documentary, "*Black in Latin America*", by Dr. Henry Lewis Gates Jr. He traveled to Dominican Republic and interviewed people on the street with what we here in the U.S. would call, obvious African features , i.e. dark brown skin, kinky hair or hair that is not straight, and *not one person admitted to having any African descent in his bloodline*. They all said that their bloodlines hailed from Spain. The good professor himself stated that to his host, who then told him that he didn't relate to being African descended until he came to New York . As the gentleman continued to explain, he spoke of the history of Hispaniola and how this "Hispanicity" developed.

The ancestors of the Dominicans and the Haitians shared this island of Hispaniola for over 500 hundred years. This was the first place in the New World to import Africans as slaves. Yet these two countries are as different as night and day. The Dominicans are Spanish speakers and the Haitians, Creole . The Dominicans are proudly "Mixed Race" and the Haitians, proudly African. Even their times are different. If it is 6'0'clock in Dominican Republic, it is 5'o'clock in Haiti. Yet they are on the same island !

Both countries have music that clearly has African roots brought there by African slaves. The documentary, "*Black in Latin America*", opens with a Merengue, which everyone dances to. "The slaves mixed together the instruments to create this form of music. Spanish guitar and the Guido figure prominently. I guess you could say that the Merengue is the National Dance of Dominican Republic". According to Dr. Gates, the Dominicans feel that the Merengue is the "Soul of the People".

During his time there, in the city of Santo Domingo, Dr. Gates stated that the city “feels” Spanish. The Dominicans are especially proud of this Spanish Heritage. And if they are not exactly “White”, they most certainly are not Black either.(36)

Ninety percent of them are Afro Descendants. The really brown ones refer to themselves as “Indio”, (even though the indigenous people were almost wiped out during the Columbian Exchange). They use this term as a way to negate their African Ancestry in the face of their phenotypes.(37) However, once they leave D.R., and come to the U.S., they become Negro-Black. As stated by Dr. Juan Rodriguez, Director of Cultural Diversity, they are in denial of their African-ness. He says, “No one will identify as Black here, and will argue the point. (Hence the conversation I had with the doorman at the hotel). But looking around, you can see the phenotypes of African descendants, NOT Anglo Saxons. The images displayed in shops and windows are of Sambo Types with exaggerated features , so no child would want to be associated with that”. (38)

The term, “Indio” covers all of the different gradations of Brown, from the very light to the very dark. The people do not consider themselves as being the descendants of an African Motherland, but a Spanish one. This ideology stemmed from the early colonial days.

What began as a sugar based economy only lasted about a hundred years and then collapsed when Brazil became the largest sugar producer(a result, I suspect, of the Haitian Revolution). So, the Dominicans turned to cattle ranching, and that’s when the racial identity began to evolve.

Masters and slaves both rode horses, carried machetes, and wore the same clothing. Very little difference in who was who was visible- Master or slave. So their relationship began to change and became like no other in the Caribbean.

“Slavery in Plantation Society works differently than slavery in Cattle Ranching Society. The behaviors between the two, master and slave changed. There was less antagonism from Masters toward the Blacks. Therefore, many Whites left the island when sugar collapsed. As a result, Blacks and Mulattos filled the ranks of the army, the Church and the bureaucracy. They came to be known as, “Whites of the Land” , and their loyalty was to Spain.

Dominican Republic was known as, “The Most Spanish of All Colonies in the New World”, (even though the population did not look that way at all)

As stated by Dr. Frank Maya Pons, President , Dominican Academy of History,” an ideology was born from this, a “Spanicity”, that still embraced them no matter how dark one’s skin was.(39)

However, there are places in Santo Domingo where the African Heritage has survived, for example, a Catholic Brotherhood who believe that the Holy Spirit miraculously gave their ancestors certain African musical instruments. In Dr. Gates’ documentary, Roman Minier (Congo Drums of Villa Mella) talks about this Brotherhood that has been handed down from generation to generation for over 500 years. They have been declared by UNESCO, part of the “Oral Patrimony of Humanity”, a protected status given to endangered cultural practices.

Many Dominicans reject their African heritage and are shy about claiming this identity because of their struggle for independence from their Haitian (French) fellow islanders. Dominican Patriots raised their own flag of Independence at “The Gate of the

Count”, on February 27, 1844, after the Haitians imposed French as the language of instruction.

Haiti was founded in 1804. She occupied Dominican Republic in 1822. This had a profound impact on Dominican National Identity. Haiti took economic actions against the Catholic Church. (The Dominicans are devotedly Catholic). Haiti furthered angered Dominicans by levying taxes on the people and their institutions. Once they threw off the yoke of Haiti, the Dominicans rejected everything Haitian, from language to skin color. They have even gone so far as to “Whitify” their national heroes if they appear “too Black” (40)

Some years later, under the Administration of President Woodrow Wilson, the United States occupied Dominican Republic (1916), and allowed for the Haitians’ return to D.R. as destitute migrant workers, part of the extension of America’s influence, in her so-called, “Back Yard”.

Well, much like other areas under occupation, the Americans appropriated large tracts of land needed to expand the profitable sugar industry. The wages were abysmally low and no Dominicans would do the work, so the U.S. imported tens of thousands of Haitians to work the sugar plantations.

According to the documentary film, “*Black in Latin America,*”The Haitians were dehumanized. They became destitute. At this point, the Dominicans began to see themselves as superior because the Haitians took on jobs that according to Dr. Gates film, “no self respecting Dominican would do”, which in turn created a new socioeconomic class. But because they all shared a particular “Hue” of Blackness, easily identifiable as *not* being Dominican, they became a factor of Dominican Identity.

CUBA

“Sleep my little Black baby and I will buy for you a new crib..... Cuban Lullabye

When the Spanish first arrived on the Cuban Island, they found a large population of Taino Indians, a branch of the Arawaks. Tainos were also living in what came to be known as Puerto Rico, Jamaica, Haiti, and Dominican Republic. Hungry for gold, the indigenous populations were decimated, worked to death, enslaved or died resisting the Spanish explorer, Diego Velazquez. Chief Hatuey led the fight against the Spanish invaders as men, women and children were indiscriminately slaughtered. However, he too succumbed and was eventually captured and burned alive. He is still remembered as a symbol of resistance in Cuba.

After the indigenous population was destroyed, Africans (over a million)were imported to work the sugar fields, and as the sugar economy grew, so did the African enslaved population. By 1827, Africans accounted for 40% of Cuba’s population (upwards of 700,00), and by mid-century, Africans and their descendants outnumbered Whites (41)

However, not all Blacks were enslaved. Cuba had a “higher proportion of Free Africans than other colonies in the Western Hemisphere. They engaged in many different trades, attaining a social status that was barred to them in the British colonies”(43)

Many slaves ran away and formed their own communities(Palenques) located in Orient Province. Slave rebellions were not uncommon.

By 1840, Cuba had become the largest producer of sugar in the world, It previously was Haiti, which because of the revolution, no longer occupied that position. This brings me to the end of this writing, but before I go, I want to leave you with this poem written in 1942 by Fortunato Vizcarrondo

Farewell Good Friends
AND YOUR GRANDMA, WHERE'S SHE AT?

Yesterday you called me black
And today I answer back
My mama sits with the family
And your grandma, where's she at?
My hair is coarse and nappy
Yours combs silkily
Your dad's hair is straight
And your grandma, where's she at?
Your complexion came out white
And your cheeks shine rosily
Your lips are thin and fine
And your grandma, where's she at?
You say I have big lips
And a red and kinky do
But for the Virgin Mary, do tell
And your grandma, where's she at?
Since your baby girl is white
You strut her ceaselessly....
And me dying to shout out,
And your grandma, where's she at?
You only like doing the fox trot
I'm about some jitterbug jive
You will be acting like white folks
And your grandma, where's she at?
You are white painted white
Trying to move up socially
Afraid that they may know
Your mama's mama
Now over here if you an Indian
You're black...! Ha, ha!
That's why I keep asking
And your grandma, where's she at?
Yesterday you called me black
As if though trying to embarrass me
But my grandma sits in the living room
And your grandma, where's she at?
Poor old lady, quite naturally
Is dying of neglect
Even your dog barks at her
If she comes out to the living room

And you know I know her story
Her name is Mrs. Tata
You hide her in the kitchen
cause your grandma is sure enough black.

Farewell Friends....

Pa. Common Core Standards

Common Core Objectives for all lessons:

CC.8.5.6-8.A: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources

CC.8.5.6-8.B: Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions

CC.8.5.6-8.H Distinguish among fact, opinion, and reasoned judgement in a text

CC.8.5.6-8.G: Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts

Lesson Plans

Lesson One: There Were Other Kings

Present students with maps listed on Afriterra.org showing kingdoms, societies, place names, etc

Ask these questions: What do you see? What year do you think this is? Who do you think drew this map? Why do you think this map was drawn? Are there any distinctive markings on the map?

Have students locate where the ancient kingdoms of Mali, Songhai and Ghana are. Have them locate Ethiopia. tell them that Ethiopia was known in the Western World as far back as Biblical days. Why do they think that is?

Point out the Senegambia Region. this is where the people who knew the Rice Growing Culture lived.

Next give students choices of researching one of these ancient kingdoms:

Mali; Songhai using these guiding questions from Thinking Like An Historian:

How did people of _____ view their world?

How did their worldview affect their choices and actions?

What values skills and forms of knowledge did people need to succeed in that society?

Next have students to research (follow the trails of evidence) where the people were taken as a result of European slave incursions into the land. For instance, we know that many slaves from Nigeria and Benin ended up in Cuba because the religious practices, drum rhythms and names of deities exactly match those of Nigeria in West Africa.

LESSON TWO: Conceptualizing the Economic/Social/Political/Cultural Impacts on a Particular Person

Ask students to select one of the women listed in previously. They should work in groups of four. One student should be assigned to research her biography and bring it back to the group. Based on that biography, each of the other three students will research the economic conditions in which she was raised, another will research the social conditions in which she was raised, and the last will research the political/cultural conditions in which she was raised. The students are to locate images depicting these conditions. They are going to tell their “Story” through images with captions. Next, the students will get a large poster board. The biography and an image of the woman is to be placed in the center of the board. In the four corners of the board will house the images of each of the other sections of her life. When completed, you should be able to see the economic, social and political/cultural conditions that have impacted the subject who succeeded in spite of them.

LESSON THREE: TEXT RENDERING THE POEM, “AND YOUR GRANDMA, WHERE’S SHE AT ? Lesson 3.1 race and Identity, Resistance in Paradise)

Pass out copies of this poem to each student. Pass out three colored pencils to each student. Students should read the entire poem. When finished ask students to select one color and underline one sentence that “jumps out at them” or “grabs “ them. Next, in a different color, ask students to bracket one phrase that grabs them. Finally, using the third color, ask students to circle one word in the poem that grabs them.

When all students have completed this, tell them that they are now going to read out loud what they have underlined, bracketed and circled. Also, more than one student may have the same response. Read it aloud anyway. Starting at the beginning of one row (or table) of students, have each student read his/her sentence. Continue this reading down each row or group of tables until all students have read their sentences. Repeat this process for the bracketing and also for the circled words. At the end of the recitation everyone will most likely remain silent. This is usually a very sobering rendering of written text. It gives deeper meaning to what the author has written and deepens the students understanding of the piece.

End Notes

- (1) Ackerman, Ruthie, “Blacks in Argentina--officially a few but maybe a million,Chronicle Foreign Service, www.sfgate.com
- (2) Edited by Miriam Jimenez Roman and Juan Flores, “The Afro-Latin@ Reader, History and Culture in the United States”, p.21
- (3) Mamdani, Mahmood, “When Victims Become Killers”, p.22
- (4) American Friends Committee, “Resistance in Paradise”, p.8
- (5) *ibid*, p.6
- (6) Mamdani, Mahmood, “When Victims Become Killers”, p.10
- (7) American Friends Service Committee, “Resistance in Paradise”, p.v
- (8) *ibid*, p.2
- (9) *ibid*, p.6
- (10) *ibid*

- (11) ibid, p.69
- (12) ibid, p.71
- (13) Edited by Miriam Jimenez and Juan Flores, “Afro-Latin@ Reader”, p.273
- (14) ibid
- (15) www.YouTube, “The Latino Americans”
- (16) ibid
- (17) ibid
- (18) Mamdani, Mahmood, “When Victims Become Killers”, p.22
- (19) Edited by Miriam Jimenez Roman and Juan Flores,”Afro-Latin@
Reader”, p. 512
- (20) ibid, p. 515
- (21) ibid
- (22) ibid
- (23) ibid p. 28
- (24) ibid
- (25) ibid, p.35
- (26) Moreno Vega, Alba, Modestin, “Women Warriors, p. 83
- (27) ibid, p.77
- (28) ibid, p.25
- (29) Edited by Miriam Jimenez Roman and Juan Flores “Afro-Latin@
Reader”, p.270
- (30) ibid
- (31) ibid
- (32) Moreno Vega, Alba,Modestin, “Women Warriors of the Afro-Latina
Diaspora”, p.12
- (33) ibid, p.24
- (34) Gates Jr., Henry Louis, “Black in Latin America”,episode one
- (35) ibid
- (36) ibid
- (37) Gates “Black in Latin America”, interview with Dr. Juan Rodriguez
- (38) ibid
- (39) Gates, “Black in Latin America” episode one Interview with Professor
Silvio Torres Saillant, Syracuse University
- (40) Resistance in Paradise, p.31
- (41) ibid
- (42) American friends Service Committee, “Resistance in Paradise”,
Vizcarrondo, Fortunato, 1942, pp 76-77

Annotated Bibliography

Black in Latin America. PBS Distribution, 2011. DVD. I used the work of Dr. Henry Louis Gates Jr. with this unit because he travels to the places where the issues exist. I enjoyed the interviews he had with scholars and people who live the experience. I have traveled to Dominican Republic and I enjoyed the filming of the country as much as I enjoyed the interviews. Chock full of information. Great for student viewing.

Mamdani, Mahmood. *When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton UP, 2001. Print. I used this book because it gave me an insight into how inter-ethnic, racial politics work against those of marginalized groups. This book can be used outside of its study of Rwanda and genocide studies. There is much information that is applicable.

Vega, Alba, Modestin. *Women Warriors of the Afro Latina Diaspora*. Arte, 0. Print. Voted "Best Books of 2015 (so far)", this book reads like a breath of fresh air. Women have historically been rather quiet but this is a new day and women, especially those from groups not previously heard are speaking out and speaking up- in their everyday lives. Bravo !

Wei, Deborah. *Resistance in Paradise: Rethinking 100 Years of U.S. Involvement in the Caribbean and the Pacific*. Philadelphia, PA: American Friends Service Committee, 1998. Print. I worked three Saturdays in 1998 in order to get a class set of this book. I learned so much because it is written from "First Voice" and the peoples affected got to tell their own stories. I have used this book until it has quite literally fallen apart. You won't find as much information contained in this book easily all in one source. Therefore, if you can get a copy, it will make the teaching of these topics much easier for you. It even has lessons included.

N, Miriam. *The Afro-Latin@ Reader : History and Culture in the United States*. Durham [NC: Duke UP, 2010. Print. I found this book an excellent source for contemporary issues facing Afro-Latinas in the United States today. The women are speaking out about their own experiences here and in Latin America with an emphasis on African Descended Latinas. A real eye opener!

Ocana Perez, Damarys. "Negra and Beautiful: The Unique Challenges Faced by Afro Latinas." *Www.latina.com*. 27 Jan. 2012. Web. 1 June 2015. Excellent website for current viewpoints and interests of Latin People

MLA formatting by BibMe.org.