

Dear Mom and Dad,

Hi! I hope you are doing well. I know it has been a while since I last wrote to you. But, as it relates to our heritage, I thought you'd like to hear about the class I am currently taking. It's called "Afro-Latinidades." Put simply, the class explores modern ways in which African Heritage and Latin American heritage intersect, as well as historical events and context for why these intersections exist. We also explore examples of how the influence of the two groups affects the culture of Afro-Latinos and Latin American countries overall. This is an important intersection to explore because it is often overlooked or rejected on both sides. People in Latin American countries sometimes believe that race does not exist for them because they share heritage and culture nationally, unlike North America where most people's ancestry and heritage can be traced back to other countries. That separation makes many Afro-Latinos unable to directly trace or relate to their 'Black Heritage'. As a result, many Afro-Latinos go extended periods of their lives believing that they are Latin American and therefore cannot also be Black. On the other hand, the experience of Afro-Latinos is often ridiculed by African descendants of non-Latin countries who believe that their experience isn't "Black Enough". This context makes it important to explore this intersection without bias toward either side, both aspects of their heritage are important.

One of the readings we talked about in class was "Reflections about Race by a Negrito Acomplejao" by Eduardo Bonilla-Silva. Bonilla Silva is an Afro Latino born in Puerto Rico. He is also a sociologist and a professor at Duke University. This reading was his reflection on the realities, and often difficulties, of having to learn about and balance both of his identities growing up. A significant moment in forming his identity was when Bonilla-Silva gained what he called a "racial conscience." He says "Although gaining partial racial consciousness gave me

a tool to understand things and fight back, “seeing” how race mattered in my life was also extremely painful for me. The insults and affronts to my dignity and self-esteem experienced during my youth demonstrate that race matters deeply in our Americas.” (447) I found this quote to be important because Bonilla-Silva is expressing pain and frustration with the way he was treated even by his family members. From a culture that affirms that race is not important, he must deal with soft segregation and micro-aggressive or outwardly racist comments. However, because the culture refuses to talk about race, without his ‘racial conscience,’ young Bonilla-Silva did not have the context or vocabulary to describe why he felt discontent. This relates to the theme because despite facing very obvious consequences of race, his black identity is ignored or belittled by the same people who are treating him wrong because of it. Another important part of Bonilla-Silva finding his identity is his comparison between how Puerto Ricans see him and how Americans see him. He says, “The life of Afro-Latinos in the United States, therefore, entails a triple rather than “double consciousness.” We are Latinos, but we are Afro-Latinos. And we are people of African descent, although many African Americans see us as not of their kin. Thus, we navigate life as Blacks, Latinos, and as a special segment of the American people with a special sight (now, after much pain, I see this sight as a gift).” (448) I thought this quote was important because despite facing all of the discrimination that African Americans do while in America, he cannot achieve kinship with them because they don’t accept him as Black because of his accent. Rejection from both sides of his identity makes him hyper-aware of each of these groups and their relations to each other, hence his special sight.

Another reading we talked about in class is a chapter of a book entitled “Genocide: The Social Lynching of Africans and Their Descendants in Brazil” by Abdias do Nascimento. Do Nascimento was a Brazilian artist, politician, and scholar. This reading summarized the efforts of

Brazil post-slavery to try and to make the country more resembling that of a European country. However, the biggest issue was that, as a country with one of the biggest influx of slaves from the African Slave Trade, Brazil's population was mostly Black, with white people in power. One method used to achieve this was to remove African influence from their history. Do Nascimento states, "Another deadly tool in this scheme of immobilizing and fossilizing the dynamic elements of African culture can be found in its marginalization of simple folklore: a subtle form of ethnocide. All of these processes take place in an aura of subterfuge and mystification to mask and dilute their significance or make them seem ostensibly superficial." (61) In reducing African culture and its significance in Brazil, brings Brazil closer to the goal of assimilating with Europeans because what's left of the culture is what aligns with European culture and values. However, it also minimized the culture of more than half the Brazilian population and made it inaccessible to them. As a result of white Brazilians controlling the historical narrative to their favor, there is a separation or alienation between Afro-Brazilians and their African heritage. In the late 1900s, some Brazilians didn't know they were African descendants or learned of their heritage as an adult. Another method for assimilating with Europeans was the sexual exploitation of African Slaves. Do Nascimento states "In an attempt to assuage their guilt in this aggression, the Aryan male dominant forces heralded the mulatto as the key to the 'racial problem:' the beginning of the liquidation of the Black race and the whitening of the Brazilian population." (66) White Brazilians perpetuated the sexual violence against African slaves generationally, drastically increasing the mulatto population, and then posing it as a good thing because this means that future Brazilian generations will be less black. Not only is this outwardly racist, but the sentiment was only superficial, as mulattos were mistreated and rejected the same as Black people. Despite this mistreatment, their lack of knowledge about African culture pushed Black

people and mulattos towards wanting to be like their white counterparts. These quotes relate to the theme because they are examples of overlooking and erasure of African-ness in Latin America.

The last reading I'll tell you about is "Transnational Renderings of Negro/a/x/*: Re centering Blackness in AfroLatinidad" by Omaris Z. Zamora. Her essay explores the meaning and uses of the word 'negro' transnationally, as well as blackness transnationally, and how to define Afro-Latinidad. One crucial point she makes is how often Afro-Latinidad spaces are taken up by people who might be Latin American but wouldn't be considered Black. For example, she states "When Puerto Rican Bronx rapper Fat Joe says in an interview, "We are all Black," or when White Latinos/as/xs say, "I'm AfroLatinx too," they are invisibilizing and minimizing the socioeconomic and violent everyday realities of visibly Black Latinos/as/xs."(95) This relates to her point that 'negro' is a word that directly refers to the African diaspora and encompasses specific sociocultural experiences such as anti-Blackness. Someone like Fat Joe feels so comfortable relating to and taking up space in the Afro-Latinidad community without facing the same experiences or discrimination that visibly Black people do. The way you look is essential to the way race functions and how people treat you, so Zamora's point is that you lose the true meaning of Afro-Latinidad when you take visibly Black people from the center of that identity/conversation. Another point she made is that Afro-Latinidad is often boxed into a specific definition or image when by nature it is very fluid. She describes the concept of *decalage* and states "The gap is a space of multiple possibilities, fluidity, and transientness. The gap, as Edwards describes, is also an imbalance—the imbalance of not being one yet not quite the other. "Rectifying" this imbalance means that for AfroLatinidad to fit in and be an imbalance, it must be corrected, surveilled." (98) This quote is especially significant to the way Americans think of

and refer to Afro-Latinidad identities. Because of they think of Black a specific way and Latinidad a specific way, they place limits and expectations on what Afro-Latinidad should look like. These expectations are the ‘artificial addition’ that calls for decalage. The African diaspora is ‘disjointed,’ and therefore its descendants shouldn’t have to fit a set of limits or expectations.

I have two main takeaways from this class so far. Firstly, even though not everyone in Latin America is Afro-Latino, Latin American countries are different from America in that their citizens shared heritage. It is not as simple to define and enforce race in countries that both have a more blended society and missing history/context to refer to in these conversations. However, leading into my second point, this is not something that undermines or takes away from the experiences of Latinos who are visibly Black. When Afro-Latinos are misinformed or don’t understand that they can be both Black and Latino, our goal should be to inform and accept them, not to shame and exclude them. I hope the rest of the class addresses some more modern perspectives. We talked a lot about historical context, but I find the modern addresses easier to relate to.

I hope you enjoyed hearing about my class, and I can’t wait to know what you think!

Hugs and kisses,

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