

**THE TRIPLE DOUBLE:
RACIALLY AMBIGUOUS AFRO-LATINO IDENTITIES IN AMERICA**

**A Literature Review
Presented to
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By

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Traditionally, racial and ethnic classifiers have been codified as one category under the binary system of racial observance in America. In an attempt to address this issue in an educational setting, the following is a proposal for a first year Learning Community exploring the ethno-racial ambiguity of Afro-Latino identities in America for the 2015 Fall semester. The proposed Learning Community is intended for 20-25 full time students and will satisfy the general education degree requirements for first year students. The community will be made up of 2 courses: a KSU 1111 first year seminar and AADS 1102, Issues in African and African Diaspora Studies. The first year seminar is designed to enhance students' success in a higher learning setting while exploring the trends associated with the seven global challenges and how they affect contemporary and future global societies. These global challenges include population, resource management, technology, information and knowledge, economic integration, security and conflict, and governance.

As the other component of this learning community, students will be required to enroll in AADS 1102. Through this course and in congruence with the first year seminar, students will explore themes and issues regarding contemporary Afro-Latino identities in America. This course will also highlight the evolution of Afro-Cuban identities from their Diasporic colonial origins to their movement to, and infusion with, North American space and culture. Primarily this course will explore the conflicts associated with the collision of Afro-Cuban and African American cultures and identities, as well as the challenges that Afro-Latinos face in attempting to assimilate into American civilization. In alignment with the existing catalogued objectives for AADS 1102, students will be exposed to political, economic, racial, ethnic, and religious themes in order to confront the issues surrounding Afro-Latino identity as it intersects with socio-racial categorization in the United States.

Regarding the objectives of KSU first year seminars and the seven global challenges, the combined themes of the two courses in this learning community will provide students with exposure to global and domestic issues intended to introduce a comprehensive understanding of intercultural competence and an acquisition of skills necessary for success in a global society. Through an interdisciplinary approach, students will participate in a series of modules, projects, critical thinking activities, and experiential learning opportunities aimed at generating awareness about Afro-Latino perspectives of identity in an American racial binary system. Learning Community participants will observe the “Multilevel Process Change Model of Intercultural Competence”¹ to enhance the awareness of intercultural perspectives and transition to the levels of intercultural adaptation and integration. During the ensuing Spring semester, students will also have an opportunity to apply their learning to a real world context through an alternative Spring break abroad trip to Havana, Cuba.

Historically, racial identities in the United States of America have operated on a binary platform of ethno-racial consideration. In turn, this system has classified most racially ambiguous members of society into categories that fail to acknowledge the complexity of their ethnic and racial identities. These pre-determined classifications have lasting effects on the accessibility of opportunities and the social spaces available to ethno-racially unidentifiable members of society. These groups of racially ambiguous Americans, however, challenge the efficacy of an ‘either/or’ binary system.

As suggested through this research, the Learning Community will explore the social spaces available for Afro-Latinos in either predominantly African American or non-black Latino societies in the United States. The curriculum content for the AADS 1102 course will explore

¹ Diana Deardorff. *The Sage Handbook of Intercultural Competence*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications Inc., 2009: 31.

whether Afro-Latinos, in effort to assimilate, are led to abandon their familiar cultural identities to adapt to their surroundings. Also, this section will examine the patterns of racial identification for Afro-Latinos, and whether those identities are chosen personally or if they are influenced by the societies the group or individual occupies. Are Hispanics approaching assimilation by strategically choosing when and where to be black or white versus Latino and how do these choices affect their ability to assimilate?

By use of literary works, historical literature, music, and film, the content for the Learning Community will examine the legitimate social space for Afro-Latino identities in the United States, or whether these groups of Latinos are forced into a previously defined ethno-racial category; and if so, what are the societal implications? Additionally, this curriculum will explore whether Afro-Latinos are categorically viewed as Latinos/Hispanics or just simply black or white; and whether these categorizations are imposed externally as a subjective racial classification or as a self-identifiable means of positioning themselves at a higher social advantage in American societies. In conclusion, this review will investigate the social vehicles through which many Afro-Latinos use to navigate their assimilative efforts. Given the nature of the binary system of racial classifications in America, how does Latino hybridity affect the assimilative process of racially ambiguous Latinos?

Through critical analysis, engaged classroom activities, and experiential learning opportunities, the AADS course will attempt to identify possible social advantages of the hybrid use of multiple identities. Students will consider whether the duality of ethno-racial identities is working to establish new racial categories or an expansion of the current binary platform in America. Is there an ongoing shift towards honorary racial categories determined by socio-economic factors versus skin color and physical characteristics? The course will analyze the

social and political effects of the imposed categorization of Afro-Latinos and non-black Latinos in America. The two courses are designed to communicate with each other by generating critical discourse connecting the idea of culture and identity with the international trends associated with the seven global challenges. By enhancing their level of cross cultural competency, students will be able to draw connections between ethno-cultural perspectives and how they relate to global issues.

Community Learning

According to Philosopher Paulo Freire's *The Pedagogy of The Oppressed*, "Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other."² Considering the intercultural theme of the proposed Learning Community, Freire's pedagogical theory resonates with the varied levels of intercultural competence where both student and teacher contribute to the learning environment. Regarding Freire's idea of the "banking concept," knowledge is transferred directly from whom is considered to be the source of information to a group presumed to be completely ignorant of the content and therefore not relevant to the interchanging of ideas. Freire describes these characteristic as an ideology of oppression that does not consider the process of inquiry as contributing to a holistic educational setting, where the exchange of ideas serve to enlighten the instructor as well as the student³. He described how the reconciliation of the "teacher-student contradiction" intends to create a more comprehensive

²Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed. 30th Anniversary Edition*. Translated by Myra Bergman Ramos. New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc., 2005: 71.

³ Ibid, 72.

environment of education in which both teacher and student simultaneously learn from each other⁴.

As Paulo Freire pointed out, the information acquired through traditional teacher-to-student methods of instruction does not fully enable critically analysis. Students receiving information in this manner are led to merely regurgitate its imposed reality, rather than being able to challenge it from their own perspectives. The nature of this Learning Community is intended for students to draw links between the global challenges they are introduced to with alternative perspectives and their personal experiences. Unlike the banking concept of education, existential educational experiences found in community learning serve to critically engage participants into a process of transformation. Students contribute to the curriculum as co-creators of the world they possess rather than one they merely exist in⁵. Instead of just being narrated to, students outside of a banking setting of pedagogy act as participant members of reciprocal exchanges that organically empowers student learning.

Aligned with Freire's idea of comprehensive educational settings for students, are the various models of approach for enhancing students' levels of intercultural competence. According to *The Sage Handbook of Intercultural Competence*, authors Brian Spitzberg and Gabrielle Changnon highlight the importance of being culturally competent in a progressively evolving global society. It is becoming increasingly apparent that in order to compete globally, individuals must now also be equipped with cross-cultural knowledge and communication skills. "Inevitably, cultural diversity manifest within the global marketplace, making intercultural competence an extremely important skill."⁶ Regarding the future employability of graduating students, "The ability to relate to and with people from vastly different cultural and ethnic backgrounds is an

⁴ Ibid, 73.

⁵ Ibid, 75.

⁶ Diana Deardorff, *The Sage Handbook of Intercultural Competence*, 4.

increasingly important competency both domestically and abroad.”⁷ As our business world becomes smaller through technology and easier access to trade and travel, employers overseas seek out individuals with an ability to comfortably adapt, work, and communicate internationally. The challenge with approaching the pedagogy of cultural competence is the subjective inability to truly assess one’s comprehension of cultural awareness, tolerance and comfort. Indeed, sheer comprehension is, by itself, not an accurate measure of how culturally competent an individual actually is. The authors describe how there is no one legitimate method of assessing cross-cultural competence, as what contributes to aptitude in one particular circumstance or nation does not necessarily equate towards being competent in another. Just as the knowledge of one language does not equate to proficiency in other languages, so do the skills of one particular cultural context also not translate to another⁸.

Language professor Alvino Fantini defines intercultural competence as “complex abilities that are required to perform effectively and appropriately when interacting with others who are linguistically and culturally different from oneself.”⁹ Fantini describes four dimensions of approach to intercultural competency, including knowledge, affect, skills, and awareness. As Fantini describes it, through self-examination and consideration, the application of the four dimensions works to enhance a progression towards cultural competency. The first three dimensions of knowledge, attitude, and skills serve to enrich the dimension of awareness, which in turn, works to enhance the other three dimensions in an effort to increase levels of intercultural development¹⁰. Traditionally, educators focus on providing and assessing the consumption of knowledge and the skill sets attached. Regarding cultural exposure, however, the

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid, 6.

⁹ Ibid, 458.

¹⁰ Ibid, 459.

outlying factors of awareness and a student's attitude or responses to them are equally considered in measuring cultural competency. The issue, as Fantini describes it, is the ability to quantifiably assess the subjective levels of awareness and affect towards intercultural exposure. Similar to Paulo Freire's pedagogical perspective, Fantini describes the process of inquiry and development that leads to a progression in cultural competency as an organic learning process of reciprocal exchanges between student, teacher, and classmate.

In accordance with Paulo Freire's perspective on pedagogy, students enter this cross cultural approach from different starting points and varied levels of pre-exposure. Accordingly, competency is an "appropriate and effective management of interaction between people."¹¹ Given a groups' spectrum of national, racial, and ethnic diversity, this communal interaction of cultures become a principal component of the process of growth in intercultural awareness and comfort¹². In this scenario, the different examples and levels of cultural exposure among students contributes to a widespread platform for the exchange of intercultural information and skill sets. Patricia Calderwood, professor of Curriculum and Instruction, also discusses a similar style of pedagogy that goes against the grain of traditionally hierarchical methods of teacher to student interaction. She discusses the effects of community learning and the desirability of communal relations in higher educational institutions. This belief in forming learning communities is directly aligned with Freire and Fantini's engaged perspective of education. Along with the recognition of the benefits associated with community learning (especially in an intercultural setting), Calderwood's work also highlights the social process involved in shaping the culture of an educational community. She describes that community, itself, is a "slippery state of social

¹¹ Ibid, 7.

¹² Ibid, 7.

relations”¹³ and is established through practice and maneuvering through intercultural exchanges. Accordingly, there is no prescription for the climate surrounding a learning community; rather, its culture is constructed with the diversely personal contributions and relations of the members within the cohort.

Regarding diversity and differences of a learning community, Calderwood signifies the importance of recognizing how educating the whole person intersects with the school setting. She discusses how every aspect of a student’s life and environment is directly related to their status as a student and their ability to learn. Through the example of a remedial writing class, the social conditions of each student are significantly considered into what contributes to the development of the writing skills for students¹⁴. Similarly, in constructing a learning community centered on culture and social issues, it becomes essential to create opportunities for participants to include their own perspectives as much as they are exposed to others’. This exchange of ideas and viewpoints enhances the communal aspect of the learning experience, serving to unilaterally educate the whole student and facilitate transition from a mere tolerance of differences to a genuine embrace of diversity and a continual progression towards cultural awareness and competency.

Triple Consciousness

The notion of community learning and the exchange of ideas seem particularly relevant to the topic of racial ambiguity and American Identity. Racial ambiguity is when an individual or a community is perceived as having a variety of physical characteristics to which their racial

¹³ Patricia E. Calderwood, *Learning Community: Finding Common Ground in Difference*. New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 2000: 2.

¹⁴ Ibid, 53.

uniqueness is unidentifiable. In a Western context, racial ambiguity can be understood as an inability to categorize a person into a pre-existing racial template. This series of literature are intended for use in the socio-cultural aspect of the Learning Community to provide awareness of the racial ambiguity of Afro-Latinos. Students will examine the cultural spaces that black Latinos occupy in the United States. Afro-Latinos represent a group whose racial/ethnic classifications are blurred between the socially constructed categories or expectations of Latinos and African Americans in the United States. The notion of a genuine social sphere accessible to all Latino Americans is challenged by the image of black Hispanics, whose physical characteristics exclude them from complete acceptance into a Latino space and, correspondingly, whose culture and language defies their recognition into social spaces designated for native black Americans.

One of the primary concepts this curriculum will explore is the idea of Triple Consciousness. The Afro Latin@ Reader documents the experiences of several Afro-Latinos navigating through their respective American societies with their socially interpreted racial ambiguity. The stories in the book provide a firsthand description of triple consciousness as it relates to W.E.B. Dubois's theory of "double consciousness." Dubois's theory describes the duality that African Americans face in a society that forces them to socially operate by use of two identities: as a black man or woman and as an American. Under the lens of triple consciousness, however, Afro-Latinos are faced with yet a third assumable identity in America by identifying with being a black person, an American, and a Hispanic. The stories in the book describe how blacks and Latinos are socially positioned as being racially distinct from one another.

In the third part of the book titled, "Afro Latin@s on The Color Line," author Evelio Grillo spoke of his life experiences as an Afro-Latino immigrant in Tampa Florida's cigar making boom at the turn of the 20th century. Evelio describes the hybrid approach that Afro-Cubans had

to take in order to assimilate into America culture. Although Grillo and his Afro-Cuban constituency were all physically black and were thus treated according to the social context for African Americans in the south, still, “Spanish speaking Negroes were viewed as outsiders.”¹⁵ On the other hand, though black and white Cubans appeared to have sound relationships with one another at work, they seldom lived near each other or shared any social and/or religious spaces¹⁶. Language was another obstacle that presented difficulties in fully assimilating to black America; because black Cubans primarily spoke Spanish, full integration with African Americans was often limited¹⁷.

Interestingly, however, Grillo notes that just like African Americans, black Latinos only attended historically black colleges. Subsequently, Afro-Cubans who went to college in the segregated south were fully integrated into African American life and society¹⁸. In this example, assimilating to black culture in America was more than just finding a familiar space, it was also a manner of social positioning and upward mobility by way of their black identity. Evelio Grillo summed up his racial and socio-political outcome by stating that, “our choices became clear: to swim in black American society or drown in the Latin ghettos of New York City, never to be an integral part of American life.”¹⁹

In support of the theory of triple consciousness and multi-racial identifiers, Sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva notes that the system of racial binary in the United States is unlike any other racial system in the world. More notably, this system is changing into “a complex and loosely organized tri- racial stratification system similar to that of many Latin American and

¹⁵ Miriam Roman Jimenez and Juan Flores, *The Afro-Latin@ Reader: History and Culture in The United States*. Duke University Press, (2010): 97.

¹⁶ Ibid, 100.

¹⁷ Ibid, 103.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid, 104.

Caribbean nations.”²⁰ Eduardo’s research proposes that the United States’ binary system of racial classification will eventually evolve into a tri-racial system of categorical observance. According to this 3 leveled template of racial grouping, there will be a top level reserved for whites and “honorary whites,”²¹ while the lowest level would be occupied by a “collective black” group²². Interestingly, however, this forecasted pendulum of racial clusters might not be entirely made up of the same groups that have traditionally occupied these spaces in American culture. Rather, as racial ambiguity continues to expand in American societies, so will the existing racial binaries widen to make room for a growing number of multi-racial Americans. Ultimately, ethno-racial hybridism poses a sharp conflict with the existing American class order.

Regarding this form of socio-racial consideration, the current group of white Americans will transition into considering new white immigrants, including white Latinos or those with lighter shaded skin colors. This collective white group will also include several groups of Asian Americans (Chinese, Japanese, Koreans, and Filipinos), Indian Americans, and most Middle Eastern Americans²³. The collective black group will consist of traditional African Americans, along with darker Latinos and other Asian groups, such as Vietnamese, Cambodians and Laotians²⁴.

The group that occupies the ambiguously large mid-level of racial categorization poses the greatest challenge to the current binary template. This middle class presents a conflict in that the varied characteristics of the members of this group have the potential to “Become more salient

²⁰ Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, "From Bi-racial to Tri-racial: Towards a new system of racial stratification in the USA," *Ethnic & Racial Studies* 27, no. 6 (2004): 932.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*, 932-933.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 933.

factors of stratification.”²⁵ Being that Latino and Caribbean immigrants represent a wide variety of colors and other physical characteristics, this mid-category can itself contain levels of racial categorizations with a wide enough spectrum to complicate both individual and group assimilative processes in the United States.²⁶ Bonilla-Silva notes several reasons that support the development of what he describes as “An intermediate racial group,”²⁷ which reinforces the ideology of white supremacy by buffering the existing racial conflict while expanding the group of whites, as well as, placing more ethnic immigrants within the equally expanding “collective black strata.”²⁸

As a measure of self-identification, the United States census is an example of the change in racial categorization in America and the expansion of honorary racial categories. The census has continuously modified its racial categories in order to accommodate for the racial ambiguity of the various ethno-racial groups in what Bonilla-Silva’s research considers as a “Dilution of racial data or the elimination of race as an official category”²⁹. Furthermore, Eduardo investigates the possibility of what Stephen Steinberg regards as a “racial retreat,” which can lead to the reconsideration of American “race-based social policy” as a determining social classifier³⁰. As a result, racial matters will become less significant to the status of various minorities. However, Eduardo’s thesis also suggests that even as racial categorizations become less of a factor in social positioning, they may in turn “maintain or increase the level of racial inequalities” for the respective society³¹.

In his book *Down These Mean Streets*, author Priri Thomas recounts his experiences growing

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid, 934.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

up as a black Latino trapped in society unable or unwilling to validate both of his hybrid identities; as was custom in his community, Thomas could not simultaneously claim both black and Hispanic legitimacy. Although his mother and siblings were of much lighter skinned than he and thus identified as being racially white, Priri couldn't escape the societal perception of being regarded as a black man. He expressed his self-reflecting frustration through rhetorical questions such as, "why am I in the middle?"³² "Why did this have to happen to me? And "why couldn't I be born like them?"³³ Referring to his siblings and surrounding Puerto Rican community, Priri wrestled with how he self-identified versus how society viewed him. Adding to his confusion, most of the Latinos in his social circle identified as being racially white and strongly opposed the idea of being categorized as black. In Thomas' case, however, his dark skin color and physical characteristics would not afford him that option, as he was identifiably regarded as black by members outside of his Puerto Rican community.

His siblings and his dark skinned father harshly rejected Priri's association with black America and scorned at his attempt to redefine himself as a black Puerto Rican³⁴. These sentiments were juxtaposed by the reality of his surrounding world seeing him as a black man, regardless of his Hispanic origin. After being denied a job opportunity that an equally qualified white man received, Priri was reminded that in spite of his language and culture, society perceived him as being undeniably black and discriminated against him based on that image³⁵.

Thomas strongly resented being denied full legitimacy as a Puerto Rican (by black Americans), as much as he resented being unacknowledged as a black man (by Puerto Ricans). Inwardly, he was uncomfortable when lighter skinned Latinos made self-identifying claims to

³² Priri Thomas, *Down These Mean Streets*. New York: Vintage Books (1997): 109.

³³ *Ibid*, 121.

³⁴ *Ibid*, 146-147.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 104.

whiteness³⁶. As well, he expressed his innate connection with blackness in America and its accompanying societal implications. As a Puerto Rican, Thomas was instinctively sympathetic to the struggles of blacks in America throughout a period when most Puerto Ricans would not, especially members within his community. He described the innate sentiments he felt towards the subjugation of African Americans and regarded the black struggle as one that he, as an Afro-Latino, was also a part of. He expressed how much the outlook that black Americans felt about race made clear sense to him; he was intrigued when not having to emotionally venture outside of his empathetic jurisdiction for genuine connections, as the issues confronting blacks in America were innately just as much of a concern to him³⁷. Although Priri was able to use his ethno-racial duality to navigate through American societies containing a range of racial climates, he remained unable to fully integrate his two identities into one: society viewed him as being, essentially, too black to be regarded as Latino and too Hispanic to be classified as black.

In Priri Thomas' example there was never a defined social space that allowed for the simultaneous expression of black or Latino identities. Historian, David Gutierrez' article about the essence and establishment of a socio-political "third space" for immigrants and descendants in foreign arenas highlights the significance of socio-political spaces for underrepresented groups. The idea of a third space society becomes essential for meeting the communal needs of an underrepresented group of people in a respectively foreign society. In the case of Mexican immigrants and Chicanos in the Southwestern United States, the formation of such a space is primarily comprised of individuals who, by virtue of their migration or displacement, become foreigners in the land they have been displaced to, while simultaneously transitioning into becoming outsiders to the homelands they migrate from. Subsequently, these groups benefit from

³⁶ Ibid, 112.

³⁷ Ibid, 120.

the establishment of a sphere to address the social, political, and cultural concerns of immigrant and underrepresented groups in a society³⁸.

Categorizing Latinos in a Binary Racial System

For this research project, a primary group of Latino immigrants were observed who serve to complicate the categorization of black and white Hispanics in America: Cuban immigrants and Cuban-American citizens. Historian, Juan Gonzalez wrote that “There is no such thing as a typical Cuban refugee.”³⁹ Gonzalez details how the pattern of Cuban immigration evolved from mostly white privileged Cubans, during the 60s and 70s, to the post Cuban revolution wave of immigrants who came in an assortment of racial identities, namely the black Cuban⁴⁰.

The Afro-Latino image in America has historically been a difficult one to define and categorize into a society with an alternatively dissimilar perspective on racial grouping from those in Latin America and the Caribbean. As noted by Latin-American literature professor, Dr. Antonio Olliz Boyd, “The image of an Afro Latino as an actual person, with genetic ties to Africa, remains an enigma whose existence is often difficult to fathom for the masses in the United States. This perception pertains to most North Americans, both black and white.”⁴¹ Boyd analyses the racial ambiguity regarding the cultural and political classification of Afro-Latinos. As Boyd mentions, the reality of Afro-Latinos is only explicable “Within the geographical purview of the political, social, and linguistic boundaries of the Latin American paradigm.”⁴²

³⁸ David Gutierrez, “Migration, emergent ethnicity, and the “third space”: The shifting Politics of Nationalism in Greater Mexico.” *The Journal of American History*; Vol. 86, No. 2 (1999): 481-490.

³⁹ Juan Gonzalez, *Harvest of Empire: A History of Latinos in America*. New York: Penguin Books (2000):109.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Antonio Olliz Boyd, *The Latin American Identity and the African Diaspora: Ethnogenesis in Context*. Amherst, NY: Cambria Press (2010): Introduction xxi.

⁴² Ibid.

However, within the ethno-racial boundaries set in North American social order, the Afro-Latino appears to experience a sense of marginalization, even from already marginalized societies in the U.S., as they represent a unique mixture of racial representations. Subsequently, black Latinos experience a distancing and lack of inclusion into the two cultural spaces that they phenotypically and/or linguistically fit into.

Aside from cultural assimilation, there are other significant socio-political needs for Afro-Latino immigrants to have a public sphere of representation. Through his research, Boyd theorizes that “both a society and its history”⁴³ heavily influence the epistemology that dictates the mores and behavior of the society and those who occupy it. Thus, the significance of racial assimilation for Latino immigrants in United States, where the classifications of “race and ethnicity have been co-defined to produce hierarchical strata that guide social behavior.”⁴⁴ Often, these markers negatively define the class structure and socio-positioning of the members of a society and the quality of life that accompanies it⁴⁵. Ultimately, the element of assimilation for Afro-Latino citizens and immigrants into the United States’ socio-political sphere appears to transcend well beyond mere cultural adaptation; it is, just as well, a space necessary for addressing the needs of these communities, which are dissimilar from the ones being addressed in already established cultural third spaces.

As described in a translated article about the challenges associated with racial classifications in the United States, Sociologist Alison C. Newby also documents the lack of a legitimate social space for Afro-Latino immigrants in many areas of the United States that have historically been accustomed to the migration of non-black Latinos. In the case of Afro-Cuban immigrants, they do not justifiably fit into any existing third space group of Latino citizens and/or immigrants. In

⁴³ Ibid, 43.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

this Spanish written article about the racial categories of Afro Cubans in the United States, the author details the challenges experienced by black Cuban immigrants, when their culturally defined self-description of personal identity does not correspond with the classifications of their perceived identity in the United States⁴⁶. Additionally, the article draws a comparison between their social positioning in southern and southwestern regions versus cities such as Miami and New York, where the image of an Afro-Latino is common and thus more easily accepted⁴⁷.

Interviews with Afro-Latino immigrants expose the challenges associated with assimilating into an existing social sphere, one in which the requisites for inclusion are pre-determined by the group's existing members; these existing spheres, such as non-black Latino communities, construct social guidelines that determine inclusion. As well, in many of these occasions, these constructed definitions of identity can limit the newcomer's liberty to define their own identity in their new environment⁴⁸. Many of these immigrants are finding that their interpretation of blackness is starkly different from the understanding of it in the United States⁴⁹. As well, they are finding that their Latino Identities are constantly in question by non-black Latinos who, although sharing linguistic familiarity with them, still regard black Latinos as ethnic outsiders due to their inescapable black appearance. Julio, one of the Cuban immigrants interviewed for the piece recalls his frustration with having to explain to Americans in the south and southwest (who are accustomed to non-black Latino immigrants) why he is a black man that speaks Spanish, which to them is an anomaly. To black Americans, Julio mentions, he is regarded and treated as a fellow black man until they realize that he speaks Spanish and immediately lose any further

⁴⁶ Alison C. Newby, "La problemática de las Categorías Raciales en Estados Unidos: El Caso de los AfroCubanos." *Migraciones Internacionales*. Vol. 4, Num. 3: (January-June 2008): 51.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 52

⁴⁸ Ibid, 57

⁴⁹ Ibid.

interest in forging a relationship with him. Mexicans, on the other hand, automatically believe him to be black and keep a considerable distance from until hearing him speak Spanish and realizing that he is indeed Hispanic. This realization of him being Latino, says Julio, actually scares Mexicans away from developing any sort of alliance with him. As well, whites inevitably label Julio an African American and treat him accordingly until (again) they hear him speak Spanish and become confused and even frustrated at the discovery that this black man who speaks Spanish is essentially not Mexican⁵⁰. Augustin, another interviewee, sums his frustration up by deducing that in this country, Hispanic really means Mexican or white Cuban, however, when expressing that he is actually from Cuba, people respond, with amazement, not aware that there were black people in Cuba⁵¹.

Another example of how the ambiguity of Afro-Latino classifications separate them from other black communities in the United States is found in their statistical exclusion from other non-Latino Afro-Caribbean immigrants. Although Afro-Latinos in the Caribbean share various phenotypical, ancestral, and cultural commonalities with other Caribbean nations, they are still classified dissimilarly from the rest of Caribbean immigrants. Aside from linguistic differences, much of the culture found among black people in the Caribbean and many areas of Central and South America are considerably similar. Under the scope of North American race classification structures, become categorically unlike. In a September 2008 article of the *Journal of Developmental Entrepreneurship*, Professor of International and Public Affairs, Tatiana Wah documents “The phenomenon of Afro-Caribbean immigrant enterprise viability” and its comparison to that of respective native-born African Americans. Interestingly, the data collected about the group of Afro-Caribbean immigrants excluded those that migrate from Spanish

⁵⁰ Ibid, 63.

⁵¹ Ibid, 66.

speaking Caribbean nations. Professor Wah describes her data collection by categorizing Afro-Caribbeans exclusively as “Non-Hispanic blacks from Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados, Haiti, Guyana, and the lesser Antilles including Grenada, St Lucia, Bahamas and Dominica.”⁵² Through statistics like these, the image of Afro-Latino immigrants in America are further complicated by the exclusion of Afro-Latinos as being statistically black and forced into being categorized as exclusively Latinos or Hispanics: a default category that presents issues within itself regarding the distribution of opportunities and resources allocated for Latino Americans.

Racial Self-Identification

Political Scientist Atiya Kai Stokes-Brown’s article centers on the racial classifications of Latin Americans within the categories afforded in the United States of America. The article speaks of the racial choices that Latin Americans are forced to choose from in assimilating into and navigating through American culture. In their native countries, Latin Americans are able to acknowledge various multi-racial and ethnic identities that operate within an accommodating society. In contrast, those varied racial and ethnic identities are funneled into an “either/or” racial binary system that does not particularly consider their differences regarding ethno-racial identification.

The primary focus of Stokes-Brown’s research is to highlight the factors that influence the manner in which the ethno-racial spectrum of Latinos are self-identified. The article also describes how Latino self-identification in America varies from that in their native country. However, as Atiya points out, in migrating to the United States, these Latinos are faced with

⁵² Tatiana Wah, “The Essential Structure of Afro-Caribbean Immigrant Enterprise Viability: Views From Local Economic Development Practitioners and Implications.” World Scientific Publishing Company. New York: Journal of Developmental Entrepreneurship. Vol. 13, No. 4. (September 2008): 463.

having to alter their racial identity to fit the existing range of racial classifications in order to socially navigate within their new culture.

As multi ethnic Latinos adapt to their new system of racial classifications, the research points out that second and third generation, U.S. born, Latinos are more likely to “reorder their racial identities”⁵³ to suit their environments and/or in pursuit of upward social mobility. According to her research, Latinos born in the United States are more largely influenced by American culture than their parents, and are usually inclined to have chosen a suitable racial identity parallel to their social contexts; an identity which, although still hybrid in nature, resembles less like that of their parents and grandparents. According to this research, “Approximately 40 percent of all Latinos are immigrants and upon arriving in the United States, Latinos are immersed in a culture where the dominant racial paradigm exists around black and white identity.”⁵⁴ Being that Latinos are forced into one of the given racial classifications in this country, research suggests that Latinos and other Caribbean immigrants identify with the intermediate racial systems they identified with back home. This is a highlighted element of the duality that these groups of immigrants are confronted with in having to identify with both of their assigned or chosen identities, and essentially navigating through their American societies by use of both.

As noted by Atiya, assimilation theory suggests that Latino immigrants, or descendants may ultimately “share a common American culture and achieve access to social, economic, and political institutions as they move away from the immigrant experience.”⁵⁵ She goes on to note that although many Latinos assimilate towards whiteness for various reasons, “some immigrants

⁵³ Atiya Kai Stokes-Brown, "America's Shifting Color Line? Reexamining Determinants of Latino Racial Self-Identification" *Social Science Quarterly* 93, no. 2: (2012): 311.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

of color”⁵⁶ may identify with African American communities or establish new social spaces that, amongst other things, serves to retain their native mores and value systems. Thus, as Stokes-Brown’s research suggests, Latino immigrants are able to use their hybrid duality to foil the racial classifications afforded in North American culture. Although current scholarship exists detailing the ways in which lighter Latinos assimilate towards whiteness, her research operates under the presumption that while many follow that trajectory, not all Latinos do. Interestingly, many Latinos assimilate towards blackness; not based exclusively on phenotypical or cultural similarities but, just as well from “everyday social interactions that include experiences of discrimination based on perceived group membership may encourage some.”⁵⁷

The article on “Latino Racial Choices” outlines the varied ideologies that lead Latino immigrants to choose their racial identities in an effort to assimilate to the United State’s model of racial categorization. Anthropologist Tanya Golash-Boza and American Economist William Darity Jr. emphasize on the inevitability of evolution regarding Latino racial identities in an American binary system. The authors argue that the assumptions of Latino classifications in America cannot be forecasted⁵⁸. Complimentary to their research, the authors analyze the expectations of the Census Project, which runs counter to the idea of an “assimilation canon,” which theorizes that identities are expected to evolve with time⁵⁹. This article also explores two central issues in analyzing the practicality of racial and ethnic identifiers: first, is the “volatility

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 312.

⁵⁸ Tanya Golash-Boza and William Darity Jr., “Latino Racial Choices: The Effects of Skin Colour and Discrimination of Latinos’ and Latinas’ Racial Self Identifications.” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 31 (2008): 900.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

of racial and ethnic self-identifiers at the individual level” and the rapidly evolving pattern of radicalized social structures in the US⁶⁰.

According to this article, the current sociological research that prioritizes the existing structure of the U.S. racial system as a major factor in determining patterns of Latino classification also recognizes the significance of self-identification of Latinos in America. The authors identify 3 possible paths of “segmented assimilation” in regards to how second and third generation Latino Americans self- identify racially. They argue that this assumes that Latinos who identify with non-whites are automatically categorized in opposition to whites, both racially and socially, also referred to as “downward assimilation.”⁶¹

Additionally, the research attempts to predict how Latino Americans will self-identify within the next 40 years and in succeeding generations. The authors use 3 possible hypotheses in order to test out their theory of future Latino racial assimilation in America. The first hypothesis involves “social whitening,” with Latinos from higher income and educational segments whom, as a possible direct relation to, are more apt to identifying themselves as being racially white⁶². The second is the “identification assimilation hypothesis,” which assumes that Latinos who are fully assimilated are also likely to racially categorize themselves as white⁶³. And third is their hypothesis based on “radicalized assimilation” that leads ambiguous Latinos to identify with either white or black depending on their degrees of skin tone and their personal experiences with race in America⁶⁴.

Blackness and Racial Identity in Latin America: A Cuban Perspective

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid, 905.

⁶² Ibid, 908.

⁶³ Ibid, 909.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 910.

Literary scholar, Henry Louis Gates' research on the hidden black cultures of Latin America serves as an example of societies where the racial strata, being starkly different from that found in the United States, strongly resembles the three tiered racial system that Eduardo Bonilla-Silva speaks about in his piece on "Tri-racial" racial categorizations. As a point of contrasts to the American racial binary system, chapter 6 of Gates' *Black in Latin America*, centers on the racial classifications and relations in Cuba.

According to this research, there are several primary reasons that perhaps define the nature of the existing racial culture in Cuba. According to his research, black Cubans were able to contribute in the fight for independence from Spain. Specifically, Cuban landowner, Carlos Manuel Cespedes, freed his slaves during the period of Cuba's Ten Year War and, with them, created an army to help win their independence from Spain⁶⁵. Although this was not the end of racial subjugation for blacks in Cuba, it presented an opportunity for an allegiance to the nation of Cuba, itself, autonomous from racial categorization, allowing blacks in Cuba to identify primarily as Cubans first and then as black people.

The historical timing of black participation in the military, as well as the ideological differences between the two wars in question, provides insight into the epistemology of both blacks and whites regarding the roles they occupied during the founding of their respective nations. Black slaves in America were, for the most part, forcibly absent in the initiative that served to liberate and define the nation they occupied. In contrast, the Cuban army was reported as having "black generals" from as early as 1870⁶⁶.

The preservation of African religion and culture throughout the Diaspora also resulted in black Cubans having a higher level of agency. As noted, the Santeria religion, a hybrid

⁶⁵ Henry Louis Gates Jr., *Black in Latin America*. New York: New York University Press (201): 182.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 182-183.

combination of West African Yoruba traditions and Spanish Catholicism, is one of the primary connections to African ancestral culture. This religious infusion is a primary catalyst for the organic African presence in daily Cuban life⁶⁷. During an interview with Cuban scholar, Torres Cuevas, Gates discovered that although post-revolutionary Cuba was “still in many ways a racist society,” the Cuban nation began embracing their mixed identities as a primary element of Cuban nationality, which coined “Cubanidad” or “the essence of being Cuban” by Cuban scholar, Fernando Ortiz⁶⁸. Cuevas describes the mixture of Cuban characteristics as responsible for the cultural infusion that makes up Cuban identities. When asked by Gates whether the black cultural origins would become diluted in this cultural mixture, Cuevas replied that one’s ancestral lineage (whether African or Spanish) was secondary to the existing Cuban identity⁶⁹. Dissimilar to the ‘one drop of black blood’ rule that automatically lumps mixed Americans into an exclusive racial category, the Cuban identity is a celebration of the nations’ mixture of races and ancestral cultures⁷⁰.

Another considerable element of the African influence in what is considered Cubanidad, or the Cuban spirit, is present in the emergence of Son music in the early 1900s. Son music is a form of music birthed in Cuba and containing components of both Spanish and African influences⁷¹. As noted, however, the soul and accompanying style of the musical genre derived from African roots. The strong presence of African ancestral influences made the musical form undeniably black music in the eyes of white Cubans. Celebrations and expressions of black culture were therefore discouraged and in many cases prohibited in public circles. However, was considered “jungle music,” eventually shifted towards the interior of Cuban societies and

⁶⁷ Ibid, 192-193.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 202-203.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 202.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid., 199.

reappeared as a culturally accepted element of Cuban identity; as noted by Gates, “suppressed African traditions found expression and evolved.”⁷² In his interview with members of the Septeto Tipico de Sones, Gates recalls them labeling the reception of the Son movement as being the pivotal moment when “the Cuban elite (and their government) stopped rejecting everything Afro-Cuban in favor of everything European”⁷³.

Hybridity and Racial Ambiguity

In a 2009 article in the *Journal of Latino-Latin American Studies*, Anthropology professor, Sarah England documented a series of interviews detailing the racial invisibility of Afro-Honduran immigrants in post-Katrina New Orleans. In part, Dr. England was attempting to investigate how these groups of Afro-Hondurans “fit into the larger pattern of Latino migration to New Orleans,” and “negotiate their place within the current black/Latino racial binary.”⁷⁴ She argues that although “the invisibility of the Latino population” is directly related to the group’s “socio-economical marginalization,” she also recognizes the advantages that invisibility offers as a means to navigate through social spheres that classifies blacks and Latinos “as mutually exclusive categories.”⁷⁵ Dr. England’s research suggests that from as early as the 1940s, New Orleans has received an increased population of Central American immigrants. She also notes that Hondurans, especially, have had a considerable presence in the city and that many of New Orleans’ post-Katrina Central American inhabitants “were actually victims, evacuees,

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid, 201.

⁷⁴ Sarah England, "Afro-Hondurans in the Chocolate City: Garifuna, Katrina, and the Advantages of Racial Invisibility in the Nuevo New Orleans." *Journal Of Latino-Latin American Studies*, Volume 3: no. 4 (2009): 31.

⁶ Ibid.

and returnees, not new arrivals.”⁷⁶ Many of these immigrants came from the Afro-Latino Garifuna community in their native Honduras and appear to be physically no different from African Americans except that they speak Spanish and in some cases, the Garifuna language itself. Dr. England attributes the context of New Orleans’ black and white racial binaries as prime contributors to the Garifuna immigrants’ invisibility prior to Katrina. She noted that Hispanics in New Orleans have historically been classified as an “other” or “a third identity, not an easy fit,” within the established socio-racial structure⁷⁷. The image of an Afro-Latino further complicates this notion of a third space establishment for all Latinos when, indeed, a sizeable group of those same Latinos are also black⁷⁸. She also notes that the social invisibility stemming from the racial ambiguity of Afro-Latino immigrants does, in many ways, allow them to circumvent the existing friction between the marginalized communities of African Americans and non-black Latino immigrants.

On the other hand, during times of crisis or natural disasters (such as Katrina, for example), the same invisibility that proves helpful on certain occasions can also prevent the “needs of distinct populations from being met by the state and relief workers.”⁷⁹ Dr. England explains the polarity of societal effects on Afro-Latino immigrants by arguing “that though the invisibility of the Afro-Central American population in New Orleans is certainly symptomatic of their socio-economic marginalization, in a way it also served them as a buffer from some racialized tensions revealed by Katrina and its aftermath.”⁸⁰ In a series of interviews of immigrants who arrived to the U.S. in the 50s and 60s, Hondurans stated that the city of New Orleans did not know how to classify them racially. Consequently, Afro-Latino Hondurans were still subject to racial tension

⁷⁶ Ibid, 32.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

from whites. One Garifuna immigrant stated that, “In those days it was clear to them, that regardless of language and national origin they were seen as black in the Jim Crow South.”⁸¹

Given the existing tension in New Orleans between African Americans and Latinos, the image of the Afro-Latino challenges the construction by being forced to consider another dimension to the existing binary between what is supposed to be two “mutually exclusive” identities.⁸² Interestingly, England notes that most of the Garifunas she interviewed reported to live primarily in African American neighborhoods as opposed to non-black Honduran neighborhoods, yet their attitudes and assimilation towards African-Americans is no different than other Latinos. Some Garifunas even claim to receive better treatment from police officers once they realize that the black person they just stopped is actually Latino. This is an example of how the invisibility of the Afro-Latino proves beneficial: by living separate from other non-black Latinos, Garifunas are able to avoid the specific discrimination and tension directed towards traditional Latino communities. All the while, Afro-Latinos in New Orleans benefit from the milder subjugation of a Latino in a predominantly African American community. However, although these groups of Afro-Latinos reside in black communities, they do not share any desire to assimilate or integrate with their African American neighbors and regard them in the same manner as their, tension-driven, Latino counterparts. These examples appear to be a direct effect of the socially constructed nature within Afro-Latino invisibility. Subsequently, this defies any reasonable necessity to fully integrate into either of their two identities or communities; as well, indirectly facilitating the separation of black Latinos from both black Americans and non-black Latinos⁸³.

In conclusion, through this exploration of film, music, art, and popular culture, this Learning

⁸¹ Ibid, 34.

⁸² Ibid, 45.

⁸³ Ibid.

Community will use an interdisciplinary approach to explore Afro-Cuban Identities in America and how they relate to the seven global challenges. By participating in cultural projects, critical thinking activities, and experiential learning opportunities, students will engage in racial, ethnic, gender, political, economic, and religious discourse. Students will also challenge preconceived ideologies about race and ethnicity by critically examining evidence surrounding Afro-Latino groups and racial ambiguity in America. Also, through connections between global and domestic issues, students will initiate a comprehensive exploration of intercultural competence and the skills necessary for success in a global society. As mentioned, the combined courses will use a Multilevel Process Change Model of Intercultural Competence to enhance awareness of intercultural perspectives and facilitate transition towards levels of intercultural adaptation and integration⁸⁴. The courses are designed to communicate with each other by generating critical discourse connecting the idea of culture and identity with the international trends associated with the seven global challenges. By enhancing their level of cross cultural competency, students will be able to draw connections between ethno-cultural perspectives and how they relate to global issues.

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⁸⁴ Diana Deardorff, *The Sage Handbook of Intercultural Competence*: 31.

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