


12-2014

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Recommended Citation

Rodriguez, Yen, "The Triple Double: Racially Ambiguous Afro-Latino Identities in America" (2014). *Master of Arts in American Studies Capstones*. Paper 1.

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

**A Reflective Essay and Curriculum for First Year Learning Community
Presented to
The Academic Faculty**

By

Yen Rodriguez

**In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in American Studies**

Kennesaw State University

May of 2015

In the arena of competitive basketball, a triple double is achieved when a player scores double digit figures in three of the five scoring statistical categories. A player's ability to accomplish this feat is celebrated as a measure of excellent skill and versatility. Although revered, however, the ability to score a triple double is not a determining factor of overall success within the overall context of basketball. In a social setting, however, the capacity to effectively navigate through societies by use of versatility of multiple identities is paramount to successfully playing the game of life.

In his classic work, *The Souls of Black Folk*, W.E.B. Du Bois introduces the concept of "Double Consciousness" as the duality of identities that African Americans face in post-slavery western societies; instinctively having to exist and socially navigate through a world where the observer, or dominant groups, determine the conditions of those being observed. As an extension of this theory springs the idea of triple consciousness, producing that same reconciled dichotomy of individuality but also considering an additional perspective of ethnicity. Afro-Latinos in America serve as a practical example of operating through a tri-layered hybridity of identity by being an American, a Negro, and a Latino. This concept will be explored through a learning community considering the effects of ethno-racial hybridity for Afro-Latinos in America, progressing towards assimilation into a social order that, as Du Bois indicates, fails to harvest an authentic consciousness of self. Rather, three competing yet accommodating realizations of self or, as titled, attempting to score a triple double.

Part I: Pedagogy and Teaching Philosophy

So as I slightly veer from academic fashion, I suppose;
To a place where rhythmic poetry meets academic prose.
Because in all honesty, it's just the way I'm predisposed.
To fully comprehend and thus relay the messages exposed:
Analyzing theory, breathing pragmatism through her nose.
All the while, without intent of putting scholarship on hold.
Just a perfect combination of the study and the soul
Both evaluating culture, as societies unfold.

For the theories from elitists point of views are obsolete,
If the only people meant to comprehend them are elites.
And the social orders that they scrutinize can change a beat
When the traction of the rubber meets the certainty of street.
Then attempted applications of philosophies retreat
And what sounded great on paper spells personified defeat.
So to better understand the academically discrete,
Let's observe the Ivory Tower from an esoteric seat.

Community Learning

Through dialogue, the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher student with students-teachers. The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow.¹

Paulo Freire

My teaching philosophy is aligned with and draws inspiration from the value system of Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. By challenging the concept that knowledge is transferred linearly from teacher to student, community learning provides a platform for shared experiences to support any information being transmitted to any audience of learners. The experiential components associated with these shared experiences impact both the student and the instructor. At its core, community learning fosters an environment of reciprocal exchanges and critical dialogue, which adds a third dimension of perception to the content students receive.

¹ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 30th Anniversary Edition. Translated by Myra Bergman Ramos. New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc., 2005: 71.

In this way, students and teachers are engaged in a collective learning experience in which the actual process of learning creates additional perspectives that influence the way that both interpret, analyze, and apply the content. In contrast, the process of community learning fails if operating through the assumption that all of the content delivered is automatically received at a comprehensive level. Rather, the combination of diverse approaches and experiential learning enhances a student's ability to thoroughly process newly introduced information. Ultimately, the connections drawn between what is learned, how it is interpreted and how the learned skill is applied, contributes to a holistic paradigm of community learning.

That which had existed objectively but had not been perceived in its deeper implications (if indeed it was perceived at all) begins to “stand out,” assuming the character of a problem and therefore of challenge. Thus, men and women begin to single out elements from their “background awareness” and to reflect upon them. These elements are now objects of their consideration, and, as such, objects of their action and cognition.²

Paulo Freire

As a reciprocal benefit to the instructor, the shared experiences expose teachers to diversities of thought and processes of analysis. Furthermore, additional cultural exposure enhances levels of intercultural competency. The ability to operate within a wide spectrum of cultural spaces is paramount to effectively facilitate a diverse learning community. Increased exposure to a variety of cultures allows instructors to cultivate the necessary fluency to validate both the shared experiences and individual approaches of the students and then collectively integrate those perspectives when analyzing the content and effectiveness of the course. Just as students contribute their diversity of thought and experiences, so to do teachers. As their level of intercultural competence and comprehension increases the collective diversity of their experiences impacts and expands the structure of the learning going forward. Through the shared

² Ibid, 83.

experiences of students, instructors leave each class with a fresh set of skills gained through exposure and nurtured through immersion, necessary for a progression of diverse socio-cultural awareness. In a manner of linear posterity, students are teaching students through the exposure that an instructor receives from the repeated exchange of ideas, interpretations, and perspectives.

Increased cultural discovery, awareness, and sequential implementation shifts the narrative of pedagogy from merely teaching what is written to guiding students through a process of discovery. Connecting learning material to the students' lived reality aids in his ability to process the learning, regardless of content or discipline. That process of identifying and working through the connections between learning material and a variety of shared real life experiences are also strengthened through experiential learning opportunities. The pedagogy is reinforced through practice as its application authenticates the instruction. This cyclical progression is reinforced each moment that a student is confronted with life experiences that have been previously associated with learned content. Moving across disciplines, these real life connections compliment classroom learning as an experiential catalyst that draws a connection between learning, processing, and applying.

Seven Global Challenges: Tomorrow's World Today

According to the Center for Strategic and International Studies, there are seven major global challenges (formerly known as the seven revolutions) that consider how our expanding world and communities are, and will be, impacted by the dichotomous nature of growth and advancement versus safety and sustainability.

The CSIS researches these global patterns in search for plausible actions to address these challenges and their impact on both developed and developing nations, as well as contemporary

and future societies. These seven pressing issues are world population, available resources, technology, information and knowledge, world economy, security and conflict, and governance. The CSIS began this research in 1992 in effort to find strategies to address these international trends that have evolved into ever pressing global realities.

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”³ to enhance the awareness of intercultural perspectives and transition to the levels of intercultural adaptation and integration.

The intercultural component of this Learning Community will combine the global concepts of the KSU 1111 course with social awareness and identity theory. Through this lens, students will explore the social spaces of 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 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 Latinos approaching

³ Diana Deardorff. *The Sage Handbook of Intercultural Competence*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications Inc., 2009: 31.

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 just Latinos or 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.

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 international issues and the seven global challenges.

Starting points/Knowing your students

Students have varying levels of socio-cultural exposure and experiences; thus, uniformly facilitating content does nothing to enhance the learning experience nor does it impact each learner in the same way. As the point of entry is different for each student, instructors must first understand who they are edifying for the real process of edification to take place. One must first know how to add if he or she is ever to be taught how to multiply; therefore, it becomes essential for an instructor who is introducing multiplication to have an estimate of the students who understand the foundational concept of addition. While this concept is both logical and appropriate in a mathematical framework, these same ideas are paramount in the humanities and social sciences where cultural competence is a clear driver for student success. Focusing on each learner's unique set of needs allows the instructor to facilitate learning in a meaningful and impactful way.

Identifying the socio-political needs of students is a critical component for creating an effective learning environment; however, it is equally critical for creating an inclusive society through which cultural identities can be authentically experienced and expressed. For Afro-Latinos, there are other significant socio-political needs, apart from cultural assimilation, that highlight the necessity of representation in the public sphere. By applying these pedagogical concepts to the lived experiences of oppressed groups, the cyclical learning process transcends the classroom space. Through his research, Boyd theorizes that “both a society and its history” 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.” Often, these markers negatively define the class

structure and socio-positioning of the members within the society and the quality of life that accompanies it.⁴ Ultimately, the element of assimilation of 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.

Part 2: Afro-Latino Identities

Watch the climate escalate to these ambiguous degrees
Trying to figure out who I am and who they want me to be
And it doesn't really matter, as society perceives
Their reality as truth towards whatever it believes
And to their own interpretations of assumed identities
So they can't see the forest that they classified as trees
When a person's race is codified with one's ethnicities

Triple Consciousness

The oppressed suffer from the duality which has established itself in their innermost being. They discover that without freedom they cannot exist authentically. Yet, although they desire authentic existence, they fear it. They are at one and the same time themselves and the oppressor whose consciousness they have internalized.⁵

Paulo Freire

Professor of African Studies and Sociology, Petra Rivera analyses the hybridity by which Afro-Latinos navigate through American racial binaries. Through her review of Miriam Jiménez Román and Juan Flores' *The Afro Latin@ Reader*, she explores Afro Latino racial ambiguity from an ethno-racial perspective. As Rivera describes, the Flores and Jimenez' description of triple consciousness is directly aligned with W.E.B. Du Bois' theory of double consciousness,

⁴Antonio Olliz Boyd. *The Latin American Identity and the African Diaspora: Ethnogenesis in Context*. Amherst, NY: Cambria Press (2010): Introduction xxi.

⁴ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid, 43.

⁵ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*: 48.

adding a third identity into an already complex system of racial binaries. Triple consciousness considers the implications of being racially black, nationally American, and ethnically Latino⁶. By recognizing the flaws in the traditional view that positions blacks and Latinos as being mutually exclusive identities, the idea of triple consciousness describes the experience of Afro-Latinos attempting to integrate with social groups that do not validate the “intersections of blackness and Latinidad.”⁷

In observance of Du Bois’ theory, the editors are explicitly not attempting to undermine African American experiences in the United States, rather to draw comparisons with the epistemological struggles of Afro-Latinos in balancing their inherent identities versus the ones they choose to publicly identify with. Being that Latinos in America are traditionally veiled behind racial ambiguity (being either black or white but never both), Latino American identities obscure racial binaries in covering a wide spectrum of social classifiers. These classifiers extend beyond physical characteristics to include socio-economic factors, levels of education⁸. The fact that Latinos can appear to be either black or white disrupts the ability to generalize them based exclusively on racial differences and similarities.

Decisions, Decisions: Racial self-identification

La mestiza is a product of the new transfer of the cultural and spiritual values of one group to another. Being tricultural, monolingual, bilingual, or multilingual, speaking a patois, and in a state of perpetual transition, the mestiza faces the dilemma of the mixed breed: which collectively does the daughter of a dark skinned mother listen to.⁹

Gloria Anzaldua

Given the opportunity, racially ambiguous Latino Americans can align their identities in a

⁶ Rivera, Petra R. “Triple Consciousness.” *Transition* no. 105 (2011): 156. *JSTOR Arts & Sciences*. 158-159.

⁷ Ibid, 156.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Gloria Anzaldua. *Borderlands, La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, Third Edition. San Francisco, CA: Aunt Lou Books, 1987: 100.

manner that benefits their social position in their respective societies. As these identities continue to evolve and adapt to the classifications of a system of racial binaries, they become increasingly difficult to forecast or standardize. Tanya Golash-Boza and William Darity, Jr. challenge the notion that identities are expected to naturally evolve through time and space by highlighting the “volatility of racial and ethnic self-identifiers at the individual level.”¹⁰

Existing structures within binary racial systems factor heavily in determining patterns of Latino self-identification. Glash-Boza and Darity also identify three possible outcomes of “segmented assimilation” regarding how second and third generation Latino Americans self-identify racially. Through identifying with black Americans, Afro-Latinos assume an identity whose image automatically categorizes them with underrepresented groups in America or an example of “downward assimilation.”¹¹ As research proves, this social placement has the potential to steer self-classification in several directions. Racially ambiguous Latinos either gravitate towards the ability to assimilate into categorical whiteness in America or the struggle of the subjugated classes they find themselves in. Often times, these decisions are made for them depending on social, economic, linguistic factors, and even skin color gradation.

Equally influential, the presumptions drawn between race and social status in America present a challenge in attempting to predict how Latino Americans will self-identify within the next 40 years and in succeeding generations. The first hypothesis of segmented assimilation considers the idea of “social whitening,” where Latinos with non-racial factors such as higher income and education are more likely to identify themselves as being racially white.¹² The second is the “identification assimilation hypothesis,” which assumes that Latinos who are fully

¹⁰ Tanya Golash-Boza and William Darity Jr. *Latino Racial Choices: The Effects of Skin Colour and Discrimination of Latinos' and Latinas' Racial Self Identifications*, 2008: 900.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 905.

¹² *Ibid*, 908.

assimilated into what is considered to be white American culture are also likely to racially categorize themselves as white.¹³ The last theory is called “radicalized assimilation.” In view of this model, ambiguous Latinos will identify with either whites or blacks depending on their particular experiences with race in America.¹⁴ As example, Afro-Latinos being confronted with the same social opposition as blacks in America are naturally inclined to identify themselves as being black. More so than for the sake of skin color, the shared experiences of racial discrimination appears to have a greater influence in Afro-Latinos choosing to identify as such. Regardless of the identity being assumed, however, ambiguous Latinos run the risk of culturally overcompensating in their attempt to assimilate into their respective societies.

Social Overcompensation

Overcompensation can be defined as a pronounced determination to counterbalance and somewhat conceal one’s strongly defined, yet objectionable, physical characteristics or behavior by replacing them with opposing or dominant illustrations and usually to an unreasonable degree. This process involves becoming an engaged participant of the assimilated group and their defined social order. This is different from self-identification in that the chosen identity must be externally validated from members within the society. That these additional measures of confirmed acceptance exist are neither surprising nor rare, however, the extent to which they are upheld can be extreme. Exploring the factors that contribute to the extremity associated with assimilative overcompensation is paramount to understanding the challenges that Afro-Latinos face in having their personal identity authenticated. Latino identities are not monolithic and it is important to analyze the way that overcompensation both influences and informs the behaviors

¹³ Ibid, 909.

¹⁴ Ibid, 910.

of those individuals attempting to break into the realm of inclusivity. Overcompensating entails more than merely filling out an application or any basic display of commitment. In many cases, this level of overcompensating demands every fiber of personal commitment from the individual attempting to assimilate.

As an example, Afro-Latinos assimilating into North American social mores are also confronted with having to behave in a manner that is sometimes contrary to their traditional culture. Furthermore, the assimilator may feel compelled to engage in those activities at a higher level than members of the dominant class in order to demonstrate their commitment to their new their new environment. As well, the assimilator can inadvertently distinguish themselves from all groups outside of the dominant culture, including the groups that the assimilator already belongs to. This dilemma is as a seemingly indispensable requisite of cultural assimilation, involving an exchange of native cultures or values for new ones. Rarely, can an individual simultaneously uphold allegiance to both social perspectives, as they usually contradict each other: racially ambiguous Americans are often in positions where they must choose to love one identity and, at the very least, appear to despise the other.

Socially Constructed Identities: Cracker Day

But almost always, during the initial stage of the struggle, the oppressed, instead of striving for liberation, tend themselves to become oppressors, or “sub-oppressors.” The very structure of their thought has been conditioned by the contradictions of the concrete, existential situation by which they were shaped. Their ideal is to be men; but for them, to be men is to be oppressors. This is their model of humanity. This phenomenon derives from the fact that the oppressed, at a certain moment of their existential experience, adopt an attitude of “adhesion” to the oppressor.¹⁵

Paulo Freire

¹⁵ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 45.

The challenges associated with racial ambiguity and Latino-Americans are the socially constructed barriers of exclusion between disenfranchised groups, or the narrow benchmarks of inclusion defined by the dominant group. One of the unintended consequences for underrepresented groups transcending beyond their reality of marginalization is the creation or reinforcement of another subjugated class. As mentioned by Paulo Freire, “during the initial stage of their struggle the oppressed find in the oppressor their model of “manhood.”¹⁶ This idea highlights the challenge for Latino assimilation into spaces already occupied by an underrepresented group. In many like circumstances, individuals from incoming minority groups are indeed able to find solidarity with the previously existing marginalized society. However, there is just as much a possibility that they can become a new target for ostracism and oppression. Members of oppressed societies adopt the model of their oppressors and in turn subjugate the newer, less represented, groups.

An example of this systemic behavior is displayed through an inner city middle school ritual in South Florida called “cracker day.” According to its constructed meaning, a cracker is a pejoratively associate slang word for white people in America, especially rural or southern whites. James Buckingham documented the early use of the word in his 1842 book, *The Slave States of America* where he referred to the towns-people from Macon Georgia as “crackers, from the frequency with which they crack their large whips, as if they derived a peculiar pleasure from the sound.”¹⁷ During the 1990s, cracker day was a local tradition practiced by teenage African American boys, who would go throughout the school hunting down and physically attacking every white student in sight. These rituals, if you will, were usually held on the last days of a

¹⁶ Ibid, 46.

¹⁷ James S. Buckingham. *The Slave States of America*. Fisher, Son, & Co., 1842: 210.

semester or, depending on how deeply into the inner city the school was located, they took place monthly and even weekly.

Enigmatically, the schools throughout inner city Miami accustomed to this practice did not have many students who met the ancestral, cultural, or physical classifiers required to be considered a “cracker.” In an effort to legitimize their own sense of societal supremacy, black inner city youth had to change the target of their racial subjugation and redefine the characteristics of crackers in inner city Miami. These socially constructed crackers, consisted of lighter skinned Latinos or recent immigrants, regardless of their physical characteristics. Racially ambiguous and unable to be truly classified within the binary system of the United States, Latinos could potentially land on either side of this dilemma. Many Afro-Latinos were forced to prove their blackness through methods of routine overcompensation that, ironically had very little to do with any true assimilation to blackness in America. My personal experience as a fair skinned biracial Latino forced me to rely on several outlying factors to ensure that I would not be viewed as white in this context. Firstly, I occupied black inner city culture geographically and due to proximity, culturally. Additionally, the darker skin complexion and physical characteristics of my immediate family members contributed greatly towards the community accepting me as a black man, albeit Latino. However, this sort of assimilative acceptance was not necessarily transferable. Whenever outside of the familiar neighborhoods that legitimized my blackness, I was culturally forced to prove myself all over again in order to gain acceptance into an unfamiliar social space of black Americans. In purview of W.E.B. Du Bois’ theory of double consciousness or the duality of identities, Afro-Latinos in this context had to remain cautiously mindful of which identity to represent, and when. Du Bois contextualized how the “second

sighted” Negro was forced to navigate “in a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world.”¹⁸

Nevertheless, even in a setting such as inner city Miami, racial ambiguity is common and as a result, multiple levels of segregation and exclusion are present while those navigating this ambiguity seek inclusion wherever they can. In this and similar spheres, each society’s respective minority groups must still be keenly aware of one’s own duality of identities that are either self-suppressed or heralded, depending on the circumstance and what side of the fence one find himself on.

Throughout this research, another set of personal anecdotes about Miami’s cracker day surfaced in blogs and in a series of articles titled “An Intimate Perspective on the Struggle for Education” which records the challenges for education in the greater Miami area. Coincidentally, the third entry came from a student who attended the same middle school as I did and detailed his struggles to assimilate to his, then, new environment. One of those struggles, as the former student recalls it, included having to live through cracker day. For the sake of anonymity, we will refer to this particular student as Juan Doe and the school he attended as Neighborhood Middle School. In his testimony, Juan describes the encounters he experienced as a Latino with cracker day.

And then there was cracker day. [Juan] was often a target of the latter. *It was basically whoever was light skinned, and in my case, I would be considered a cracker*, he says. Cracker day started early in the morning on the day before classes ended for the school year. The kids who arrived early to school, as [Juan] did, would hang out in the PE field until class began, he explains. On that specific day, someone would come up to you, pick on you, something stupid like, *Hey, you stepped on my shoe. Get down and clean it*, he says. *If you didn’t get down and do it, you’d get jumped right there. That happened to me a few times.* [Juan] can laugh about cracker day now, but back then, it was scary.¹⁹

¹⁸ W. E. B. Du Bois [In David W. Blight and Robert Gooding-Williams, eds.] *The Souls of Black Folk*. Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2005: 7.

¹⁹ Miller, Jimmy. “Faces of Miami-Dade County Public High Schools: An Intimate Perspective on the Struggle for Education (A Series) Article III: Beats the Odds”

The racial demographics of Neighborhood middle school further underlined the absurdity of the cracker day ritual. According to demographic statistics from 2011, Neighborhood middle school had an approximate average of 58.17% black students, 40.63% Hispanic students, 2% Asian students, and only 0.09% white students.²⁰ Also, the 80.3% of students that receive free lunch subsidies serve as a clear indicator of exactly how sub-standard the socio-economic conditions of Neighborhood's student population was and is. The most relevant number in that set of statistics is that only 0.09% of the student body have the racial and cultural American ancestry that would deem them a cracker by aforementioned criteria. These statistics highlight the concepts that Paulo Freire seeks to define in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Despite the almost non-existence of white students at Neighborhood Middle School, many of the students shared more commonalities than differences; yet, the dominant black American youth still internalized the characteristics of their own oppressors by subjugating lighter skinned Latinos who became the primary, and often only group of students targeted on cracker day.

Another descriptive account of the conditions and details surrounding the culture of cracker day in Miami was evident through the catalyst of excelled magnet programs in inner city schools. Recorded in an online forum about cracker day in South Florida schools, bloggers commented with a variety of responses, ranging from familiarity to a morbid disbelief of the reality of cracker days in inner city schools. One specific blogger commented about his experiences with attending an academic magnet program in an inner city school outside of his home district:

A brief description of the Magnet Program: Find a destitute neighborhood filled with underperforming youths. Identify a school at the end of its rope. One with kids who have lost purpose, direction and hope. One with peeling paint, no air conditioning, and outdated

²⁰ Movoto School Rank for Allapattah Middle School

vandalized textbooks that are at least a decade old. Spend millions on this school. Upgrade the school with a new building. Fill the new building with the most advanced computers available, air-conditioned classrooms, new everything, and imported best-performing teachers from throughout the county. Meanwhile, leave the existing structure, classrooms, teachers, amenities, and supplies intact in their abysmal state. The old students will continue to use them and suffer. Now, bus in middle-class children from a relatively affluent neighborhood. Make sure the middle-class kids attend the shiny new complex, built just for them. Then have them eat lunch with the other kids. Finally, force the students to enter a ‘spill out’ area after eating. This spill-out area is a fenced in zone that can-not be escaped. It is attended by security guards who make sure no one leaves until the bell rings for the next class. They will not intervene in any altercation. Try to imagine a better environment for a youth to vent their rage at the injustice of their circumstances. Try hard. If you think of anything, please contact the Miami Dade school board. They need your input.²¹

Along with providing the outlying socio-economic reasons that fuel this behavior, it also represents the demographic of students that were the primary subjects of this racial bounty hunt. As noted, however, many of these students were white Latinos or lighter skinned Latinos. The subsequent element of this particular example is the overcompensation that the subjugated groups must partake in order to be fully accepted or, better yet, excluded from the oppressive culture attached to whom this society has categorized as crackers.

My last example came from a personal experience that didn’t involve middle school aged students at all, rather, the methods that adults also take to overcompensate for access into elite or established classes. In this example, the epistemology that drives overcompensating disposition is channeled through an entirely dissimilar vehicle as the victims of cracker day. For a few years, I worked as a program director for an inner city afterschool initiative. During my tenure at that position, I was in direct frequent contact with one of the schools administrators, Mr. Louis Smith, who worked extensively with me to help foster a safe haven for these inner city kids who truly had no-where to go from the time school ended to the time their parents arrived home from work, usually well into the evening. Mr. Smith played a significantly active role with me in

²¹ “What Are Magnet Schools?” Cracker Day: A Story of Racial Profiling Posted.

effort to carry out this mission for disadvantaged youth. Mr. Smith would even participate as a chaperone on most, if not all, of our planned fieldtrips. On one particular outing, Mr. Smith decided to bring his mother along. Initially, I didn't have the opportunity to formally introduce myself to her before getting on the bus. So as soon as we arrived at our intended location, I ran to the first opportunity to meet and converse with Mr. Smith's mother. Mr. Smith was a typical white man with aging blonde hair and green eyes. Naturally, his mother shared the same physical features, with the most striking resemblance to her son. As I approached Mrs. Smith, I introduced myself by telling her what an absolute pleasure it was to finally meet her and that her son's continued contributions and support for these children was exceptional. Before I could finish my introduction, she stopped me by saying, "*Ay mi hijito, hazme un favor- yo no hablo Ingles, si es posible que me puedas comunicar en Español,*" which translated in English means, "Oh dear, I don't speak English, is there any way that you can speak to me in Spanish?" As my mouth dropped and I stood there in utter astonishment, I couldn't help but to inquire as to where she was from; to which she replied in Spanish, "I'm from Cuba, the same place Luisito is from. *Luisito!* I replied (adding the suffix 'ito' to any name is a common term of endearment in Latin American culture). *But what about the last name Smith? Where'd that come from?* I asked. "*Ay, por favor*" (oh please) she replied in Spanish, Smith is what he changed his name to when we came to America- his birth name is Vazquez, Luisito Vazquez. Although this was an isolated case, many Cuban Americans who, by sheer appearance, can pass for white, often times go to the overcompensating length of altering their names in order to veil any trace of Latin identity. Though I, at that time, had known Mr. Smith for about two years, and although he was well aware that I myself was Cuban, he never spoke to me in Spanish or even acknowledged that he knew how to. This is by no means a judgment but an observance and epistemological

consideration of the essence of cultural assimilation for survival (which in Mr. Smith's case was an assumed white identity) and the extreme lengths taken to prove it.

Not Black Enough

CNN Anchor, Soledad O'Brien and Professor Yaba Blas published a documentary about the experiences of bi-racial or ambiguously black teenagers, titled "Black in America." Throughout the documentary, professor Blas explores the concept of "colorism" or the belief that lighter skin has higher social value, resulting in lighter skinned black people having more favorable life experiences. This idea, however, was tested throughout the varied testimonies from biracial teenagers and their experiences of being accepted as being neither white nor black by the societies they inhabit.²²

The featured testimonials ranged from teenagers that were either biracial, international, or societally assigned an image different from the one they identify with. As mentioned throughout, individuals self-identify based on a variety of influences ranging from cultural, social, generational, rebellious, or even preferential. And as reflected through the documentary, not all of the racially ambiguous participants identified with the same particular race. Considering Glash-Boza and Darity's perspective on the patterns of Latino self-identification, nor were their chosen identities fueled by the same fire. In one example, there were two sisters who shared a black mother and a white father. Both sisters grew up exclusively with their father, had the exact same upbringing, lived in the same house, and attended the same schools. The sisters, however, both self-identified with different races. While one sister self-identified as being white and subsequently carried what her society perceived as a white image, the other sister identified as black and positioned herself in a black social sphere. Further complicating the notion that these

²² Soledad O'Brien and Yaba Blas. "Who is Black in America?" CNN: 2013.

patterns are predictable, the sisters support the significance of the intrinsic motivators that contribute to identifying with a particular race or group of people. Although given the exact same external conditions, social context, and cultural accessibility, both decisions were influenced by elements not directly related to their environment.

The film also featured another teenager who was of North African descent and who self-identifies as being black. The teenage girl was of fair skin and had long wavy hair but, although being African, found difficulty in having her blackness validated in African American societies. During a December 2012 panel discussion about being black in America, Yaba spoke about the struggles of a biracial person's perceived expectation to claim an identity, which is then rejected by the same group that demands the claim. Blas describes this dichotomy as "racial schizophrenia," when people of mixed races are expected to publicly claim an allegiance to blackness but are never legitimately validated as such. The duality through which biracial Americans navigate these scenarios works to devalue their chosen identity, casting them into a realm of unauthenticity. This racial dilemma prohibits biracial identities from ever truly evolving.

In a 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 States.²³ Additionally, they draw 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 easily

²³ Newby, Alison C. "La problemática de las Categorías Raciales en Estados Unidos: El Caso de los Afrocubanos". *Migraciones Internacionales*. VOL. 4, Num. 3. January-June, 2008. New Mexico State University. Julie A. Dowling. University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Page 51.

accepted.²⁴ Interviews with Afro-Latino immigrants expose the realities of assimilating to an existing social sphere, where the group's membership pre-determines the requisites for inclusion to that specific social space; ultimately, they have the power to define the guidelines for the identities worthy of inclusion and their respective positioning. 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 environment.²⁵ Many of these immigrants are finding that their interpretation of blackness is starkly different from the understanding of it in the United States.²⁶ 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 a familiarly non-black appearance of 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 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 they hear him speak Spanish and realize that he is Latino. This realization of him being Latino, says Julio, actually scares Mexicans away from developing any sort of alliance with him. And white people 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 Mexican.²⁷ Augustin, another interviewee, sums

²⁴ Ibid, 52.

²⁵ Ibid, 57.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid, 63.

his frustration up by deducing that in this country, Hispanic really means Mexican or white Cuban but when I [being black] say that I am from Cuba, people respond, with amazement, not aware that there were black people in Cuba.²⁸

The central problem is this: How can the oppressed, as divided, unauthentic beings, participate in developing the pedagogy of their liberation? Only as they discover themselves to be "hosts" of the oppressor can they contribute to the midwifery of their liberating pedagogy. As long as they live in the duality in which to be is to be like, and to be like is to be like the oppressor, this contribution is impossible. The pedagogy of the oppressed is an instrument for their critical discovery that both they and their oppressors are manifestations of dehumanization.²⁹

Paulo Freire

As suggested through this research, there does not appear to be an authentic social space for Afro Latinos in either predominantly non-black Latino or African American spheres. The socio-political and cultural spaces that are currently available are limited in the opportunities for inclusion that they provide to Afro-Latinos. These limitations, inherent to any binary system of classification, prevent Afro-Latinos from wholly assimilating into the two existing social spaces without either abandoning or compromising the multiplicity and hybridity that characterizes their identities. There are several areas in the United States that have a history of black Latino migration, which allows for the recognition and adequate representation of Afro Latinos and their cultural and societal concerns. However, the better part of our country remains in the same confused state about the phenomenon of black Hispanics, perhaps, due primarily to the inability to properly categorize them according to the seemingly canonical template of racial classifications for minorities in the United States. Far from having an acceptably defined third space in these underexposed areas, the image of the black Latino has yet to achieve a level of validation for their racial and ethnic hybridity.

²⁸ Ibid, 66.

²⁹ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*: 48.

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