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THE AFROETHNIC IMPULSE AND RENEWAL: AFRICAN AMERICAN TRANSCULTURATIONS IN AFRO-LATINO BILDUNG NARRATIVES, 1961 to 2013

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THE AFROETHNIC IMPULSE AND RENEWAL:
AFRICAN AMERICAN TRANSCULTURATIONS IN AFRO-LATINO BILDUNG
NARRATIVES, 1961 to 2013

A Dissertation Presented

by

TRENT MASIKI

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University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
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W. E. B. Du Bois Department of Afro-American Studies

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DEDICATION

To Naima and Samara

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ABSTRACT

THE AFROETHNIC IMPULSE AND RENEWAL: AFRICAN AMERICAN TRANSCULTURATIONS IN AFRO-LATINO BILDUNG NARRATIVES, 1961 to 2013

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Until now, there has been little sustained critical attention to the way African American literature, history, culture, and politics influence transculturation and ethnoracial identity formation in Afro-Latino bildung narratives. This dissertation addresses that oversight. *The Afroethnic Impulse and Renewal: African American Transculturations in Afro-Latino Bildung Narratives, 1961 to 2013*, examines a long, but often neglected, history of intercultural affinities and literary encounters between African Americans and Afro-Latinos from the twentieth to the twenty-first century.

In *The Afroethnic Impulse and Renewal*, I explore African American literary and cultural influences in the personal essays, memoirs, and autobiographically inspired fiction of Jesús Colón, Evelio Grillo, Piri Thomas, Carlos Moore, Veronica Chambers, Junot Díaz, and Raquel Cepeda. I pay particular attention to how African American

intertexts shape these writers' conceptions of Afro-Latino ethnic, racial, and national identity formation in the U.S. These writers, I argue, use African American narrative strategies and cultural tropes to assert and authenticate their identities as U.S. citizens and residents. Furthermore, I contend that these pan-African exchanges produce a pattern of acculturation that I call ethnoracial apprenticeship. The ethnoracial apprenticeship lens reveals certain Afro-Latino coming-of-age narratives to be unique, though not uniquely, African American texts. By studying these cases and moments of Afroethnic fusion, we can learn as much or more about the plasticity and diversity of "black identity" in the U.S. than we can by studying the African American experience alone. The African American intertexts in Afro-Latino *bildung* narratives require scholars to expand the canons of African American and Latino literature and redefine conventional notions of "black identity" in the Civil Rights, Black Arts, and post-Segregation eras.

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INTRODUCTION: AFRO-LATINO BILDUNG NARRATIVES AND THE AFRICAN AMERICAN LITERARY TRADITION¹

In a 2004 essay on Latino personal narratives, Silvio Torres-Saillant notes that “for the most part, autobiographical writing dominates Latino literature”; he goes on to call attention to “the bildungsroman component that so characteristically shows up in Latino autobiographies, which are predominantly coming-of-age stories” (“The Latino Autobiography” 65 and 71). Autobiographical coming-of-age stories and interethnic influences are two key features of contemporary U.S. Latino literature and culture, writes Ilan Stavans in *The Norton Anthology of Latino Literature* (1464). These two features are wedded in the work of the Dominican American writer Junot Díaz. Díaz is known for writing semi-autobiographical fiction and for including notable African American writers among his literary ancestors. His list of African American literary ancestors includes, among others, Alice Walker, Samuel R. Delany, Octavia Butler, and Toni Morrison. Díaz praises Butler and Morrison for the threat their novels pose to white hegemony: “Why these sisters struck me as the most dangerous of artists was because in the work of, say,

¹ In this study, I use the terms Latino and Afro-Latino to refer to U.S. immigrants and citizens who have ancestral roots and/or transnational ties to the Hispanosphere beyond the U.S. I am aware of the ongoing, U.S.-centric debates about typographic manipulations of masculinized collective nouns in Spanish. Because I am not Latino and because there is no consensus in the Hispanosphere on this issue, I choose to use the standard panethnic categories of Latino and Afro-Latino to describe the ethnic groups in this study. As a Ugandan-African American, I use the term African-American, rather than “black” or “Black” to refer to traditional U.S. Afro-descendants. The terms Afro-American and African American have been in circulation since at least the 1800s. The proponents of these terms prefer descriptors that link the ethnic group to a historical territory rather than to figurative language like “colored,” “of color,” “Negro,” or “black,” metaphors that perpetuate the imposed Eurocentric ideology and language of racial difference.

Morrison, or Octavia Butler, we are shown the awful radiant truth of how profoundly constituted we are of our oppressions. Or said differently: how indissolubly our identities are bound to the regimes that imprison us. These sisters not only describe the grim labyrinth of power that we are in as neocolonial subjects, but they also point out that we play both Theseus and the Minotaur in this nightmare drama. Most importantly these sisters offered strategies of hope, spinning the threads that will make escape from this labyrinth possible Heady stuff for a young writer. Theirs was the project I wanted to be part of. And they gave me the map that I, a poor Dominican immigrant boy of African descent from New Jersey, could follow" (Díaz with Moya).

African American writers and literary politics profoundly influenced Díaz, who says that his social and aesthetic politics were shaped by the ideological clashes that Ishmael Reed and Stanley Crouch had with Toni Morrison and Alice Walker in the 1980s (Díaz with Moya). The relationship between Junot Díaz and African American literary history and culture is representative of an understudied cultural encounter between African Americans and Afro-Latinos. Because they are often racialized as "black" in America, Afro-Latinos' pragmatic investment in African American history and culture is functionally, if not qualitatively, different from that of their mutually inspired indigenous and "white" Latino peers. For this reason, Afro-Latinos warrant special attention when conducting comparative analysis in African American and Latino studies.

This critical study explores the relationship between bildung narratives and contemporary Afroethnic identity formation in the U.S. To better understand this

relationship, I analyze and interpret African American narrative strategies and cultural tropes in post-1959 Afro-Latino bildung narratives and memoirs. Using critical concepts from African American and Latino Studies, this interdisciplinary analysis highlights a long, but often neglected, history of intercultural affinities, encounters, exchanges, and influences between African Americans and Afro-Latinos. Through close textual analysis and cultural poetics, I reveal and analyze the African American intertexts that inform and structure contemporary Afro-Latino bildung memoirs. My findings yield intertextual, intercultural, panethnic, and coalitional influences and exchanges between Afro-Latinos and African Americans from 1918 to 2013. A number of repeated thematic concerns link the texts that I examine. These repeated tropes include racial initiation, trauma, and passing; symbolic geography and migration; parent-child dysfunction, and links between academic, social, and sexual mobility. The bildung narratives and memoirs in this study include *A Puerto Rican in New York and Other Sketches* (1961) and *The Way it Was and Other Writings* (1993) by Jesús Colón; *Black Cuban, Black American: A Memoir* (2000) by Evelio Grillo; *Down These Mean Streets* (1967) by Piri Thomas; *Pichón: A Memoir: Race and Revolution in Castro's Cuba* (2008) by Carlos Moore; *Mama's Girl* by Veronica Chambers (1996); *Drown* (1996), *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007), and *This Is How You Lose Her* (2012) by Junot Díaz; and *Bird of Paradise: How I Became Latina* (2013) by Raquel Cepeda. Collectively, these autobiographical sketches, fictions, and memoirs focus on what it means to come-of-age socially, culturally, and politically as an Afro-Latino in the United States between the 1920s and the 1980s.

Contemporary Afro-Latino bildung memoirs evince major aspects of 20th century African American history and culture. These shared historical, social, and cultural experiences and intersections provide the rationale for examining the selected texts through the lens of African American studies. Jim Crow segregation; African American social justice campaigns, cultural movements, and Civil Rights victories; various twentieth-century waves of Caribbean and Latin American immigration; and African American artistic expression in literature, music, film, and television influence the thematic content of the sketches, fictions, and memoirs in this study. The African American literary conventions and cultural tropes in these narratives raise significant theoretical questions about genre boundaries, identity formation, literary influence, transculturation, panethnicity, interethnic coalition building, the philosophy of race, and the nature and scope of contemporary African American literature. In addition, a number of the works in this study combine the thematic concerns and narrative structures of the bildungsroman and the Afro-American slave escape narrative. The authors of these bildung sketches, fictions, and memoirs explore the traumas and triumphs of Latino racial socialization and identity formation under the U.S. ideology of hypodescent and its protocols of racial subordination. Furthermore, the Afro-Latino authors in my study use African American narrative strategies and cultural tropes to assert and to authenticate their identities as U.S. citizens and residents. These African American influences produce Afro-Latino patterns of acculturation and national identity formation that I call ethnoracial apprenticeships. These ethnoracial apprenticeships reveal some Afro-Latino coming-of-age narratives to be unique, though not uniquely, African

American texts. I use the term ethnoracial bildung narratives to collectively identify and define these unique sketches, fictions, and memoirs.

Afro-Latino bildung memoirs and narratives challenge commonplace notions about the putative boundaries between African American and Latino autobiography, literary history, and identity. By calling into question what it means to be African American in the U.S., Afro-Latino writers make the imagined borders between African American and Latino literature and culture porous. They do so by variously embracing, rejecting, and/or reconfiguring U.S. racial logic and practices. This study uncovers the ways in which contemporary Afro-Latino bildung narratives and memoirs simultaneously expand and consolidate the canons of both African American and Latino literature. This intercultural analysis yields productive knowledge about the transcultural nature of Latino identities and the political function of Latino interethnic solidarities with African Americans.

Using conceptual tools from African American studies, I reveal new insights about the cultural and political functions of ethnoracial motifs in post-1959 Afro-Latino bildung literature. These conceptual tools include Leon Litwack's notion of "racial initiation," Robert Stepto's concept of "symbolic geography," Drake and Cayton's five types of interracial passing, Michael A. Gomez's history of panethnic identity development, Tommie Shelby's theory of "pragmatic black nationalism," Christina M. Greer's theory on the socialization of "black ethnics," and Ira Berlin's construct and analysis of the "fourth Great Migration."

I take my definition of racial initiation from Leon F. Litwack's book *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow*. Racial initiation, as Litwack defines

it, is the initial encounter with "racial insult" (9). This first encounter "tended to hurt the most, as it often came with neither provocation nor explanation . . . The humiliation is what so many remembered" (9). The racial initiation of African American youth and adolescents is comparable to the socialization of the protagonist in the classical and modern bildungsroman:

Generations of black youths shared a common training and education based on their early experiences. The initial revelation of the meaning and force of race was at times shocking and traumatic, at other times too subtle to be fully grasped The suddenness of with which life came to be defined on the basis of perceived racial differences, and how little one could do in response, made an indelible impression on young blacks. (8)

The humiliation of racial initiation, writes Litwack, was pronounced: "The indignities visited on black youths were meant to impress on a new generation the solidity of racial lines and the unchallengeable authority and superiority of the dominant race" (10). The indignities of Jim Crow, often bred "rage" in African American adults, writes Litwack (11). One might also add righteous indignation to that account, the kind of righteous indignation that led to direct political action. That was especially true of the Emmett Till generation.

Robert B. Stepto's concept of symbolic geography is manifest in the immersion and ascent narratives that often occur in African American slave narratives and autobiographical writing. These narratives describe journeys of African American racial identity formation. The ascent narrative, as defined by

Step to, is a story about slave escape or African American migration out of the South to the North. Ascent narratives focus on heroic self-transformation through, among other things, the attainment of education, financial security, political empowerment, and increased social mobility (Step to 66-68 and 167-168). I suggest that *exodus narrative* is a more robust term than ascent narrative because it also accounts for those African American narratives that include emancipatory journeys west beyond Texas, south to Latin America, or east back to Africa. The immersion narrative is a "cultural immersion ritual" that involves travel to and prolonged residence in the Deep South by a subject who, typically, did not grow up there (66 and 167-168). The journey is, typically, voluntary. In the immersion narrative, the South is prefigured as the taproot of African American identity and cultural authenticity. The South becomes the place where the immersion hero acquires the "balms of group identity" that ameliorate the alienation produced by living outside of the ancestral homeland (Step to 167).

St. Claire Drake & Horace R. Cayton Jr. propose the theory of unintentional passing in their book *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City*. Drake and Cayton theorize that there are five "degrees of passing." "Unintentional passing" is the first of these degrees, and it occurs when a mixed race person is unaware that he/she is being perceived as "white" by the general public. The occurrence of unintentional passing terminates when the passer's "true" identity is revealed, making the situation socially awkward for all involved (160). In other words, unintentional passing is racialization, and it can be applied to Afro-Latinos who are perceived by the general public to be African American. The non-Latino

public often passes Afro-Latinos as African Americans until those Afro-Latinos reveal themselves to be otherwise.

The research of the historian Michael A. Gomez, the philosopher Tommie Shelby, the historian Ira Berlin, and the political scientist Christina M. Greer, coalesces around the notion that people of Afroethnic descent in the U.S. are structurally compelled to construct strategically contingent, panethnic “black” identities, solidarities, and institutions. Gomez chronicles the initial instances of this phenomenon in *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South* (1998). In his introduction, Gomez reminds us that Denmark Vesey’s 1822 rebellion contained a mix of free and enslaved African Americans as well as tribal divisions of Nigerian Igbos and Congolese-Angolans. The “collective identity” rhetoric Vesey used to foster and foment his rebellion, argues Gomez, “attempted to transcend ethnic and social differences in a quest for freedom” (3). Ironically, to achieve collective freedom Vesey had to convince native Africans and African Americans to contingently buy into the patently false but insidiously seductive European notion of race that was responsible for enslaving them in the first place. Vesey’s collective identity movement relied on what Shelby calls “common oppression theory.”

Shelby’s book *We Who Are Dark: The Philosophical Foundations of Black Solidarity* promotes the idea that Afroethnic peoples ought to build coalitions around shared experiences as racialized others, but not around self-constructed racialized identities. In his book, Shelby develops a theory of “pragmatic black nationalism.” Pragmatic black nationalism is a progressive African American

philosophy of political solidarity that is dedicated to achieving social justice for people who are racialized as “black” in America, no matter from where in the world they hail. “Pragmatic black nationalism,” writes Shelby, “openly rejects racial and ethnic ‘essences’ and has no need to deploy them, strategically or otherwise, in order to carry out its emancipatory aims. . . . Pragmatic black solidarity does not require those who are racialized as black to embrace blackness, of any ethnoracial genre, as a valued or necessary component of the ‘self’ at all” (59). Pragmatic black nationalism is “trans-institutional” by which Shelby means it is not racially separatist, though it acknowledges, he writes, that some ethnoracially specific institutions are temporarily useful and necessary to demonstrate self-reliance, promote “self-worth,” build trust and “consensus,” encourage “social responsibility,” develop leadership skills, and serve as havens when interracial cooperation and alliances falter or fail (137).

Ira Berlin’s *The Making of African America: The Four Great Migrations* (2010) and Christina M. Greer’s *Black Ethnics: Race, Immigration, and the Pursuit of the American Dream* (2013) remind us that Gomez’s theory of the transformation of African identities is still active today. Berlin and Greer chronicle and investigate the post-1965 explosion of Afroethnic immigrants from Africa, the Caribbean, and Latin America. Berlin calls this influx of Afroethnic immigrants the fourth Great Migration and he notes how it is transforming the cultural landscape of the U.S.:

While the diverse definitions of race and the vagaries of counting by national origin make it impossible to calculate the precise number of black arrivals, several million men and women of African descent

entered the United States in the last third of the twentieth century and the first years of the twenty-first. Although they were but a small part of the massive migration that followed the 1965 reform of immigration, the newcomers transformed black society. Whereas less than one black person in one hundred was foreign born prior to 1965, by 2000 the proportion was one in twenty. By the early twenty-first century, one-tenth of all black Americans were immigrants or the children of immigrants" (Chapter 5).

Like Berlin, Greer concerns herself with how Afroethnic immigrants challenge what it means to be African American in twenty-first century America:

Gone are the days of blacks as a monolithic group. Black groups in the United States have expanded well beyond the civil rights generation narrative, where everyone is a descendent of US slavery, the South, and the black Baptist tradition. This lack of a new definition of "black" has been perpetrated by scholars of race, urban politics, and public opinion. If we are to take a snapshot of the steadily increasing and diversifying black population, which has over 5 million foreign-born blacks from throughout the Caribbean and across the continent of Africa and encompass immigrant political refugee statuses, education visas, and economic pursuits, why not now? Given the interactions of the "new" blacks versus the "old" blacks, or, as some scholars have argued, the "good" blacks versus the "bad" blacks (Rogers 2006), one must ask what the future holds for these groups as they continue to

compete for resources, negotiate descriptive and substantive representation, and battle an increasingly solidified “modifier problem”—that is, being “black American” rather than just “American.” (4)

Contrary to popular belief, argues Greer, “black ethnic groups share a racial identity that extends across ethnicity, generation, and almost all other demographics” (5). In other words, these African immigrants adopt a panethnic, racialized identity that puts them in solidarity with African Americans and other Afroethnics, and they do so while simultaneously preserving the particular transnational ethnic identities with which they arrived. By examining the relationships between common racialization, common oppression, and panethnic identity formation, Greer believes that we can come to understand how integration, assimilation, and group expectations explain why “black ethnics subscribe to the promises of the polity at different levels” (5). By investigating how “black ethnics” are racially and politically socialized, Greer seeks to articulate the rationales that inform their policy stances, levels of political participation, and panethnic coalition-building tendencies in the quest for the American Dream of cultural, social, economic, legal, and political power.

The work of the above-mentioned scholars provides a framework for theorizing the Afro-Latino *bildung* memoir as both a ethnoracial apprenticeship narrative and a narrative of quotidian diplomacy. The ethnoracial apprenticeship concept describes how Afro-Latino subjects transculturally accept, reject, or modify their concepts of ethnicity in response to the pressures of hypodescent racial

socialization in the U.S. I define the ethnoracial apprenticeship memoir as a type of autobiographical bildungsroman in which the author's racial consciousness develops in his or her formative years by indelible events of racial initiation. For U.S. born Latinos, formative years, as I conceive it, refers to the period of biological adolescence. For Hispanic immigrants, formative years, as I apply it, refers to the period between their arrival in the U.S. and the completion of their acculturation.

Inspired by my post as a Fulbright Scholar in Panama, I use the term quotidian diplomacy to denote the interest and ability to fluidly move between and inhabit intercultural domains from the level of the neighborhood to the world stage. Quotidian diplomacy describes the cultural ambassador role of Afro-Latino writers who develop interethnic solidarities with non-Latino communities and causes as they narrate their journeys of Afroethnic self-discovery.² This diplomatic skill and cosmopolitan mindset proved crucial for those Afro-Latino writers who are, or were, political activists, community organizers, and progressive cultural workers. Quotidian diplomacy is conceptually akin to “cultural transnationalism” and “black globalization,” two concepts developed by Antonio D. Tillis in “Cultural Transnationality and Cosmopolitanism in the Journeys of Nancy Morejón.” For Tillis, black globalization represents the “[t]rans- and intercontinental shifting from localized spaces of ‘home,’ whether imagined or real, and mutable citizenship,” and cultural transnationalism posits “culture as a transmutable and transferable commodity in the global Black cultural economy” (51). Armed with a panoply of

² On the use of cultural and historical ambassadorship as a critical paradigm in the study of “the transnational Chicano/Latino imaginary,” see Heredia, Introduction 1-12.

interdisciplinary literary theories and cultural concepts, I interpret the meanings and analyze the functions of African American cultural tropes and narrative strategies in post-1959 Afro-Latino bildung memoirs, revealing how these texts help define a tandem cultural aesthetic and literary period in American arts and letters that I call the Afroethnic Impulse and Renewal.

The Afroethnic Renewal and Impulse: Definitions and Distinctions

What is and what is not African American literature? When is African American literature and when is it not? Who is and who is not African American? These are the questions that, at the margins of African American Studies, vex canon-forming theories, initiatives, and enterprises. Since its publication in 1997, the inclusion of immigrant and post-immigrant writers of African descent has been a staple feature of Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Valerie A. Smith's *Norton Anthology of African American Literature*.³ For example, the first edition of the anthology includes Arthur A. Schomburg, Marcus Garvey, Claude McKay, Eric Walrond, Paule Marshall, Audre Lorde, Michelle Cliff, and Jamaica Kincaid. Subsequent editions include René Maran, Nicolás Guillén, Edwidge Danticat, Carl Phillips, and Barack Obama. Besides Obama, whose father was Kenyan, each of these immigrant and post-immigrant writers has roots in the Afro-Caribbean Basin. Notably, two of these writers are Afro-Latino: Schomburg and Guillén. Andrews, Foster, and Harris

³ Post-immigrant is the term I use for immigrants who become naturalized citizens as well as for the U.S. born-children of an immigrant parent(s). I use post-immigrant in lieu of confusing constructions like first and second-generation immigrant.

provide a bit of Afroethnic diversity in the first edition of *The Oxford Companion to African American Literature* (1997). In addition to some of the immigrant and post-immigrant writers of African descent already named, the editors of *The Oxford Companion to African American Literature* include the writers Dingane Joe Goncalves, Ana Mazama (a.k.a. Marie-Josée Cérol), and Victor Cruz, and Piri Thomas in their anthology. These writers have roots in Cape Verde, Guadeloupe, and Puerto Rico, respectively. Cruz and Thomas, it is important to note, are neither immigrants nor post-immigrants, given that Puerto Ricans attained U.S. citizenship in 1917 and Puerto Rico became a U.S. commonwealth in 1952. Charles H. Rowell's 2013 *Norton Anthology of Contemporary African American Poetry* includes at least four immigrant/post-immigrant poets: Audre Lorde, Lorenzo Thomas, Alena Hairston, and John Murillo. Lorde's parents were from Barbados and Carriacou, Thomas was a Panamanian immigrant, Hairston's mother is Eritrean, and Murillo's mother is Mexican and his father African American. In addition to the ethnoracial categorization and inclusivity conundrum that vexes the editors of African American anthologies and reference books, there is also the problem of naming, defining, and temporally bracketing literary periods and movements. The *Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, *The Oxford Companion to African American Literature*, and the *Norton Anthology of Contemporary African American Poetry* adopt varied and varying periodization nomenclature for late twentieth century African American literature. For example, the section denoted as "The Contemporary Period" in Gates and Smith's anthology refers to African American literature

published after 1975, while Rowell refers to poetry written after 1969 as “The Third Wave, Post-1960s.”

The first line of the description of “The Contemporary Period” reads: “The fabled awakening in Harlem during the 1920s notwithstanding, one could argue that the true African American renaissance occurred during the last quarter of the twentieth century” (Gates and Smith 913). The definition identifies six trends that distinguish the period from previous ones. The first of these trends is “(1) the acknowledgement of the multiplicity of African American identities.” The definition goes on to refer to the period as a “literary and cultural renaissance” and stresses that the reflective practice of the period’s zeitgeist revealed that “African American communities differed according to geography and region, class, and *ethnicity* (Gates and Smith 914, emphasis mine). “Remapping the African American Literary Terrain,” a sub-section of the Introduction to “The Contemporary Period,” deals with the diversity of Afroethnicity. It notes that the transnational consciousness of the Contemporary era “reflected both the increasing influence of African and Afro-Caribbean writers on the development of African American literature and the fact that a number of black writers in the United States were themselves immigrants” (Gates and Smith 923). The sub-section notes the influences and contributions of Jamaica Kincaid, Edwidge Dandicat, Carl Phillips, Hilton Als, Michelle Cliff, and Patricia Powell, writers who, with the exception of Dandicat, have roots in the Anglophone Caribbean.⁴ The sub-section rightly acknowledges the literary

⁴ The section includes Als and Powell as examples, but the anthology does not include excerpts of their work.

influence of African immigrant writers in the U.S. By adding a few names for examples, the subsequent editions of the anthology can enhance this valued acknowledgement. One can also enhance the sub-section by identifying the small set of Afro-Latinos who have influenced the development of African American literature and culture in the post-war and late twentieth century. The description of “The Contemporary Period” accurately defines major aspects of its historical development and cultural temperament, but a competing and contested term for this moment in African American literature and culture is the so-called “post-soul” or “post-black” era.

Greg Tate’s 1986 article “The Cult-Nats meet Freaky Deke” and Trey Ellis’s 1989 essay, “The New Black Aesthetic,” spawned the discourse of the post-soul or post-black era, an era supposedly dominated by the individualist ethos and “cultural mulattos” of the New Black Aesthetic (NBA). The cadre of mostly heteronormative, middle-class, college-educated, non-conformist, African American cultural critics and theorists who derive and champion the post-black concept are primarily reacting to their perception of the Black Arts Movement of the 1960s and 1970s as categorically essentialist and dogmatic in its definition of “black identity.”⁵ Though invested in the nationalist idea and figurative nomenclature of “Blackness,” these critics and theorists view the New Black Aesthetic as more philosophically, politically, culturally, socioeconomically, sexually, ethnically, and aesthetically

⁵ See Tate; Ellis; George, *Buppies, B-Boys, Baps & Bohos* and *Post-Soul Nation*; Ashe, “These - Are - The ‘Breaks’: A Roundtable Discussion on Teaching the Post-Soul Aesthetic” and “Theorizing the Post-Soul Aesthetic: An Introduction”; Taylor; Dickerson; Womack; Touré; Royster; and Maus and Donahue.

diverse and inclusive than the Black Aesthetic. Although the New Black Aesthetic is reactionary vis-à-vis the Black Aesthetic and Black Power movements, its theorists do not necessarily want to dispose of the term “Black” as a signifier of ethno-national subjectivity for African Americans; they just want the kinship category to be more heterogeneous and expansive than it was from 1966 to the 1980s. Generally speaking, they want “black folks” to be more accepting of African American individualism in its myriad shades and temperaments. As a group, the post-soul theorists and the writers they study, are uncomfortable with unabashed, self-righteous expressions of anger at racial injustice. Generally speaking, a philosophy of optimism colors post-black/post-soul discourse and theory. In some cases, this confidence in the legal abolishment of segregation is uncritically alloyed with a call for African Americans to be more patriotically appreciative of their U.S. citizenship and more optimistic about their post-Segregation educational, social, and economic opportunities despite the reality of structural racism on macro and micro-social scales.⁶

A few scholars and critics in African American studies acknowledge the roles that African and Afro-Latino immigrants play in shaping our understanding of contemporary African American literature. For example, in her book *Post Black: How a New Generation is Redefining African American Identity*, Ytasha L. Womack devotes an entire chapter to the role that contemporary African immigrants play in transforming what it means to be African American in the U.S. In “Television Satire in the Black Americas: Transnational Border Crossings in *Chappelle’s Show* and *The*

⁶ See Dickerson and see also Womack.

Ity and Fancy Cat Show,” Sam Vásquez calls for expanding the canon of post-soul African American satire to include Afro-descendants from and in the Caribbean and Latin America (Vásquez). In her book *Sounding Like a No-No? Queer Sounds and Eccentric Acts in the Post-Soul Era*, Francesca T. Royster considers Junot Díaz’s *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Woa* to be a “post-soul” text (Introduction, Royster). Royster’s nod at Junot Díaz is important because it harkens back to Nelson George’s understudied pronouncement on Afro-Latino and African American relations in the “post-soul” era. In his 2005 interview with Ed Gordon on NPR, George said that in the next twenty-years it would be “crucial” for African Americans and Latinos to “build bonds” since so many “Hispanic immigrants are brown-skinned, in fact, are black” (George, “Nelson George: ‘Smart Black People’”)

To enhance our understanding of the diversity of contemporary African American literature and culture, we need to include the substantive impact of post-Civil Rights U.S. immigration policies on the development of contemporary “black identity” politics. The Afroethnic immigrant and post-immigrant writers who arrived in, or were born in the U.S., after 1965, require special attention because they remind of us of the particular geopolitical forces and historical processes that made their presence in America possible. In *The Making of African America: The Four Great Migrations*, Berlin recounts how the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 opened the doors of America to “several million” foreign-born people of African descent. These new Afroethnics and their U.S. born children have profoundly transformed what it has meant and what it means to be African American.

That the fourth Great Migration has transformed, and is transforming, American and African American culture is evidenced by the commercial success of performers like Rhianna, Nicki Minaj, Romeo Santos, and Prince Royce; by the Caribbeanization of pop music; and by the popularization of dancehall, reggaeton, and urban bachata. The immigrants, post-immigrants, and intranational migrants of the fourth Great Migration have also transformed twentieth century and contemporary African American literature. Many of the U.S. citizens and immigrants of the fourth Great Migration have roots in Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, Cuba, and Panama. I analyze, interpret, and evaluate how these Afro-Latinos use African American narrative strategies and cultural tropes to write themselves into American literary history. Jesús Colón, Evelio Grillo, Piri Thomas, Carlos Moore, Veronica Chambers, Junot Díaz, and Raquel Cepeda are among the class of writers who published their first books just before or in the wake of the fourth Great Migration. The literature of these Black Arts era and Contemporary Period Afroethnic writers is the literature of integration, the literature of Afrofusion. Imbued by reciprocal intercultural influences and exchanges with African Americans and other Afroethnics, these immigrant, post-immigrant, and citizen writers are emblematic of the Afroethnic Renewal.

The Afroethnic Renewal is a historical product, cultural period, and literary aesthetic. It is the consequence of a particular set of post-1940s socio-historical forces and federal policies. The Civil Rights victories that began with the 1946 Mendez v. Westminster school desegregation victory and that ended with the 1965 Voting Rights Act, significantly overlap with the decolonization of Africa and the

Caribbean and with political revolutions in the Hispanophone Caribbean and Latin America between the early 1950s and 1990s. American military interventions in Cuba, Hispanola, and Central and South America, from the 1960s to 1994, sparked waves of immigration to the U.S. Other international and intranational policies like the Bracero Initiative (1942-1964) and Operation Bootstrap (1947-1970s) contributed to the influx of migration from hemispheric Hispanophone countries and territories. Significantly, the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, the 1986 Immigration and Control Act, and the 1990 Diversity Immigrant Visa Program prompted waves of African, Afro-Caribbean, and Afro-Latino emigration. The unanticipated legacies of these largely post-war geopolitical forces include the proliferation of ethnic studies concentrations, programs, and departments in academia, and the publishing industry's enthusiasm for ethnic diversity and multiculturalism, a trend that started in the Black Arts era and proliferated in the 1990s. As a period, the Afroethnic Renewal spans from 1961 to the present, with significant Afroethnic immigration spikes and African American and Latino literary benchmarks in between.

Although the connotations and denotations of the term Afroethnic Renewal may be self-evident, it is important to explicitly articulate them. The Renewal refers to the influx of foreign-born people of African descent that entered the U.S. during the twentieth-century, but especially those that arrived as a consequence of the fourth Great Migration. Afroethnic, as I conceived the term in this study, refers to Afro-descendants when and wherever they are and have been in the world.

Although the term Afroethnic is pan-African, it acknowledges that people of African

descent, in addition to their common heritage and common oppression in the modern world, share diffuse and diverse social, cultural, and political histories and trajectories. In other words, the term Afroethnic recognizes the manifold subjectivities of Afro-descendants as well as the intrinsic deficits and benefits of panethnic categories and discourses.

I use the term Afroethnic Renewal, rather than Black Renewal, Africana Renewal, or Afro-Diasporic Renewal, for several reasons, the least of which are stylistic. I prefer the term Afroethnic rather than “black” or “Black” because it avoids the racialization of language and the reduction of peoples, histories, and cultures into de-territorialized abstractions. I also tend to avoid the use of the term African Diaspora as a category for the bulk of the Afro-descendant populations living in the Caribbean and Americas since the end of the transatlantic slave trade because diaspora subtly implies an expectation of return. Despite a long and continuing record of Back-to-Africa repatriation movements in the Caribbean and the Americas, many of these Western hemisphere peoples have no plans to “resettle” in Africa. Furthermore, the African Union foreclosed the possibility of a “right of return” for these populations when it conceived its four-point definition of the African Diaspora in 2005 (Adisa 4–5 and 10). Given these factors, it seems appropriate to develop an inclusive panethnic term like Afroethnics to categorize people of African descent living both in and outside of Africa in the contemporary moment.

Afroethnic immigrants and post-immigrants’ pragmatic and proactive engagement with African American history, literature, culture, and organizations

defines the Afroethnic Impulse. The Afroethnic Impulse is the historical affinity, curious attraction, and strategic spirit that compels Afroethnic communities, individuals, and their interracial allies to work and play in solidarity against the hegemonic structures of oppression arrayed against them, by play I mean the creation, preservation, and perpetuation of various forms of social, political, and expressive culture. The Afroethnic Impulse is multilingual, transnational, socially progressive, cosmopolitan, and politically pragmatic. It privileges history, inclusion, community, and interethnic and interracial sociopolitical collaboration. It produces conglomerations of social, cultural, political, economic, legal, and academic cohesion and coherence between individuals, organizations, and communities. It operates locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally, often resulting in panethnic or multiethnic configurations of national or meta-national identity. This conglomeration of values and relationships constitutes the pragmatic social justice and belletristic aesthetic that I call the Afroethnic Impulse, which I alternately refer to as Afrofusion. In addition to clarifying and expanding “The Contemporary Period” in African American literature, the Afroethnic Impulse and Renewal helps us better understand what it means and has meant to be Afro-Latino in the U.S.

Afro-Latino: Definitions and Applications

In her 1996 essay, “Afro-Hispanic American Literature,” Vera M. Kutzkinski writes that although “the specific parameters of Afro-Hispanic literature” have not been set, “the authenticating rhetoric adopted by Afro-Hispanist criticism largely reflects the legacy of the Black Power and Black Arts movements of the immediate

North American past, as well as the ideology of the Francophone Négritude groups” (166–67). Kutzinki’s essay places the “authenticating rhetoric” of Afrolatinidad in historical perspective and explicitly avoids the impulse “to establish a new literary canon,” yet, throughout the first decade of the twenty-first century, scholars in Latino Studies endeavored to isolate, define, and refine Afrolatinidad, as well as establish a canon of Afro-Latino American literature. For example, in his 2007 article “Afro-Latinidades: Bridging Black and Latina/o Studies,” Agustín Lao-Montes interprets Afrolatinidad through the concept of the African Diaspora. He defines the African Diaspora as condition of common global oppression, a process of cultural theory and expressive practice, and a coalitional, social justice project. He defines Afrolatinidad as “the histories, memories, social locations, expressive cultures, social movements, political organizations, and lived experiences of peoples of African descent in Latino/America. Afro-Latinidad is a category of difference, in contrast to identity discourses based on hegemonic notions of nationality and race in Latino/America” (125). Lao-Montes uses afrolatinidad to critique and redefine conventional and hegemonic discourses of “Africanity, Americanness, and Latinidad”; Lao-Montes’s concept of afrolatinidad challenges and expands standard applications and conceptions of national identity, geographic belonging, and ethnoraciality (126).

Although not specifically about afrolatinidad, Marta Caminero-Santangelo’s book *On Latinidad: U.S. Latino Literature and the Construction of Ethnicity* (2007) makes significant contributions to the understanding of the concept. In her Introduction, Caminero-Santangelo explores her reservations about the nature and efficacy of “Latino” panethnicity as a critical category. Caminero-Santangelo does

not use the term afrolatinidad in her discussion, but she specifically deals with how Africanity shapes notions of latinidad and what it means to be a Latino. After thoroughly charting the constructions and applications of Latino ethnicity in the scholarly literature, Caminero-Satangelo makes peace with the artificiality and imprecision of “Latino” as a panethnic identifier because it allows her to analyze and critique the linkages and ruptures between disparate communities of Americans of Latino descent as well as those linkages and ruptures between Latinos and African Americans (Introduction, *On Latinidad* 1–35). Caminero-Satangelo’s second chapter, “Puerto Rican Negro’: Defining Race in Piri Thomas’s *Down These Mean Streets*,” profoundly engages the rifts and bonds between latinidad and afrolatinidad.

Like Caminero-Satangelo, Juan Flores and Miriam Jiménez Román are equally concerned with the imprecision of panethnic categories and discourses. According to Flores and Jiménez Román, the twenty-first century popularization of the term Afro-Latino in the U.S. is a reaction to four phenomena: (1) the homogenizing function encoded in the panethnic term Latino, (2) the privileging of whiteness and Spanish fluency in the term Hispanic, and (3) the near exclusive use of the term “black” as a racial category for Afro-descendants of Anglophone slavery, and (4) the Eurocentric cultural hegemony that shapes popular consciousness in the Americas and the Caribbean (“Triple Consciousness?” 320). Silvio Torres-Saillant argues that popularization of the term Afro-Latino is also a reaction to the intellectually and morally suspect ways in which hybridization concepts like mestizaje can be used to reinforce the Eurocentric discourse of white supremacy (“Tribulations of Blackness”

1102–1105). Like Hispanic and Latino, there are competing definitions of who and what constitutes an Afro-Latino subject. Flores and Jiménez Román posit a transnational definition of the term Afro-Latino:

What does the term 'Afro-Latino' mean in the US context? First of all and most obviously, it refers to those Latinos of visible and/or self-proclaimed African descent Even while focusing on the specific US situation, however, the term 'Afro-Latino' also applies to a transnational discourse or identity field linking Black Latin Americans and Latinos across national and regional lines. (320)

They clarify this hemispheric definition in their 2010 anthology, *The Afro-Latin@ Reader*: "They are people of African descent in Mexico, Central and South America, and the Spanish-speaking Caribbean, and by extension those of African descent in the United States whose origins are in Latin America and the Caribbean" (2).

William Luis, in "Afro-Latino/a Literature and Identity," uses graduated categories of Afro-Latino identification. These categories include Afro-Hispanics, Afro-Hispanic immigrants, and Afro-Latinos. Afro-Hispanic, as Luis defines the term, refers to people of African descent who are native-born citizens of hispanophone countries in Latin America or the Caribbean (34). Luis applies the ethno-linguistic descriptor "Afro-Hispanic" to these individuals even when they migrate to and reside in the U.S. In contrast, he uses Afro-Latino to refer to the U.S. born offspring of Afro-Hispanic immigrants:

I refer to Afro-Latinos as people of Afro-Hispanic ancestry, whose parents were born and raised in a Spanish-speaking country of the

Americas and later migrated to the United States, where their progenies were born or reared and educated. Afro-Hispanics are tied more to their culture of origin and tend to write in Spanish; Afro-Latinos have been nurtured in US culture and express themselves through the language and culture of their adopted country, although some also write in Spanish and speak to issues pertinent to their parents' country of origin. And with the passage of time, as they immerse themselves in mainland politics and society, Afro-Hispanics can become Afro-Latinos. (34)

Although Luis' Afro-Latinos are raised and educated in the U.S., they may still have significant symbolic or real transnational relationships with the host countries of their initial immigrant progenitor(s), and Afro-Hispanic immigrants in the U.S., through willful acculturation, can transform themselves into Afro-Latinos. I prefer a model of *afrolatinidad* that is a bit more inclusive than the previous two, a model that also acknowledges those Afro-Latinos who have ancestral roots in countries outside of Spain, Latin America, and the Caribbean with hispanophone populations, countries like Equatorial Guinea, Angola, and Morocco and territories and regions like Western Sahara and Northern Africa. Thus, I use the term Afro-Latino to refer to U.S. citizens and immigrants of African descent who hail from or have transnational roots in any country in the Hispanosphere.⁷

⁷ The Hispanosphere refers to Spain and other Spanish-speaking countries in Africa, the Americas, Asia-Pacific, the Caribbean, and Europe. It may also include countries that have large hispanophone populations, but where Spanish is not the dominant or official language.

Afro-Latino bildung memoirs demand special attention from scholars in both African American and Latino Studies because these memoirs focus on the triumphs and tribulations of being racialized and socialized as "black" in the U.S. The distinctions between race, ethnicity, citizenship, and immigrant status are crucial when it comes to examining interethnic and transcultural influences in post-1959 Afro-Latino bildung memoirs. Exploring a wide range of Afro-Latino bildung narratives helps to more fully make the case for the Afroethnic Renewal and to better illuminate the manifold ways in which Afro-Latinos use African American narrative strategies and cultural tropes to write themselves into American literary and cultural history.

The Bildung Narrative: History, Theory, and Practice

In this fourth and final section of the Introduction, I contextualize the bildung narrative's generic conventions by reviewing its practice in eighteenth-century Europe and America, its origins in medieval German mysticism, and its relationships to parent/child strife, personal trauma, and the confessional mode.

In English, the German word *bildung* means *education* and the word *roman* means *novel*, as in a fictional, book-length narrative. A *bildungsroman* is a novel that narrates the cultural formation, psychological development, and bourgeois social integration of its protagonist from childhood to the point that he or she leaves home and attains independence. The bildungsroman's singular focus on the formative years of its protagonist's life explains its translation in English as a *novel of formation* or an *apprenticeship novel*. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's novel *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* (1796) supplies the basic, though often contested, stylistic

conventions and thematic concerns of the *bildungsroman* genre. The apprenticeship metaphor in Goethe's title is derived from the first of the three stages of professional development in the medieval European craft guilds: apprentice, journeyman, and master.⁸

The prospect of intellectual, social, and moral mastery is the key trope of bildung narratives, as seen in Patricia Alden's definition of the genre:

Central to the genre is the notion of individual selfhood achieved through growth and of social experience as an education which forms, and sometimes deforms, that self. The projected resolution of this process is some kind of adjustment to society. Wherever it appeared, the Bildungsroman was associated with bourgeois humanism, with faith in progress and with the value of the individual. (qtd in Kester 52)

Thomas L. Jeffers writes that the bildungsroman's "crucial theme is change: physical, psychological, and moral," and that the subjectivity of its protagonist is latent and becoming rather than manifest and perfected (2). The development of the bildung hero is twofold, argues Gunilla Theander Kester:

Bildung embodies a double process of inner developing and outer developing, what the Germans call Anbildung and Ausbildung. On the one hand, the word Bildung describes how the strengths and talents of the individual emerge, a development of the individual; on the

⁸ *Wilhelm Meister's Journeyman Years, or the Renunciants* (1821), the sequel to the *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, confirms Goethe's intentional use of the guild system as a literary trope.

other hand, Bildung also describes how the individual's society uses well the individual's manifest strengths and talents, a social 'enveloping' of the individual. (8)

The notion that social mobility and moral progress are inevitable for those in, and those who aspire to be in, the bourgeoisie typifies non-fiction bildung narratives like Ben Franklin's *Autobiography* (1791), a seminal and exemplary template for American autobiography and memoir. Franklinesque American autobiography and memoir promote "Exceptionalism, individualism, mobility, freedom, the American Dream, and transcendence"; and "self-industry, commitment, and reason" (Bolaki 21). The Germanic bildungsroman is associated with "positivism, white male superiority, and a sense of the self as a unified entity" and it "proposes the growth of a subject from one fixed state of mind to another: immaturity and maturity" (Kester 7-8).

The didactic, acculturative function of the bildungsroman is to groom a community of readers by helping them comprehend the practical benefits of the bildung hero's social and moral cultivation "in the context of vocation, courtship, and parent-child relations" (Jeffers 4). The bildungsroman is intrinsically conservative in that the typical resolution involves the protagonist's attainment of a job, a spouse, and domesticity. A bildungsroman's "primary function," writes Stella Bolaki, "is to make integration into the existing social order legitimate by channeling individual energy into socially useful purposes" (12). This makes the bildungsroman an optimal vehicle for promoting the interests of the nation state: private and public sector employment, workforce development, academic

achievement, traditional marriage, nuclear families, bourgeois morality, and community engagement. As it is classically practiced, the post-Goethe bildungsroman intrinsically reproduces and perpetuates these status quo objectives and values.

The secular moral philosophy in European and American bildungs implies a bijective relationship between aesthetic and moral refinement. To fully appreciate the import of the didactic function of bildung narratives and their use as social engineering tools, it is helpful to review the religious origins of the word *bildung* as a synonym for pious self-transformation. The word *bildung* took on its figurative meaning of moral development and social integration in medieval Germany under the influence of Christian mysticism, and in seventeenth and eighteenth century Germany under the influence of neoplatonic Pietism and classicism. Susan L. Cocalis traces this history in her essay “The Transformation of *Bildung* from an Image to an Ideal.” Cocalis argues that in medieval Germanic mysticism “the verb *bilden* originally signified God’s creation of human beings in His image (*Bild*), until Meister Eckhardt and later mystics appended Plotinus’ philosophy of emanation and reintegration to it” (400). In other words, the verb *bilden* refers to the act of forming and the process of formation. Eckhartian mystics were infatuated with Plotinus’ metaphor of the individual as a sculptor and the individual’s soul as a block of stone. They believed that individuals were responsible for sculpting their own souls into masterful works of art through reflective practice, and they called this process of introspective self-perfection “*bilden*” (Cocalis 400).

In the late 1600s, German Pietists “equated *bilden* with *lernen* [the verb for learn] and conceived of it [*bilden*] as both an aesthetic and organic process,” writes Cocalis (400). *Bilden* becomes linked to the noun *bildung* through the work of the German Pietists Johann Joachim Spalding and Friedrich Christoph Oetinger. When Spalding and Oetinger translated the Earl of Shaftesbury’s *Characteristiks of Men, Manners, Opinions, and Times* (1711) into German in the mid-1700s, they rendered Shaftesbury’s principle moral tenets “inward form,” “formation of genteel character,” and “good breeding” as “*innere Bildung*,” “*Bildung*,” and “*Selbstbildung*,” respectively (Cocalis 401). The medieval conception of *bildung* as a religious process of personal perfection becomes secularized after the translation of Shaftesbury’s *Characteristiks*. In Shaftesbury’s secular moral philosophy, individual perfection is not sufficient. The *bildung* hero, the “moral artist,” must contribute to the perfection of the “common good” by preserving “the civil liberties necessary for the cultivation of the moral arts” and cultivating “humanity through an aesthetic education” (Cocalis 401). The neoclassicist intellectuals Johann Joachim Winckelmann and Christoph Martin Wieland also played significant roles in secularizing the *bildung* concept among the German intelligentsia. “Both men,” writes Cocalis, “equated *Bildung* with the Greek ideal of *kalokagathia*, i.e., with being beautifully formed, well-educated, and morally good. But whereas Winckelmann conceived of *Bildung* as an ideal state of being, such as that immortalized in classical art, Wieland interpreted it as a formative process” (Cocalis 402). As Joseph R. Slaughter’s summation of Cocalis notes, *bildung* signifies “form and formation (both product and process)” (“Clef à roman”).

In German, the individualist hero of the bildungsroman is the *bildungsheld*. The bildungsheld's story "is situated in the context of the lives of parents, siblings, relatives, and wider community, the plot often leading to the formation of a family of his or her own" (Jeffers 2). Traditionally, the bildungsheld is male. "The classical Bildungsroman," writes Kester, "charts the rite of spring of a young man who journeys from immaturity and *naïveté* to maturity and *savoir-faire*" (51). In Anglophone, Euroethnic bildungsromans, the male bildungshelden are often plagued with a "crisis of paternity,"⁹ a father that is physically or emotionally absent. Jeffers perceives this pattern in *David Copperfield* (1849), *The History of Pendennis* (1848), *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* (1859), Roderick Hudson (1879), *The Princess Casamassima* (1886), *The Way of All Flesh* (1903), *The Longest Journey* (1907), *Sons and Lovers* (1913), *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), and *The Last Puritan: A Memoir in the Form of a Novel* (1935). The protagonists in these novels are each literally or figuratively fatherless:

They either don't have fathers alive to show them, with authority, the way to manhood, and in consequence they are driven now to depend on their mothers, a symbiosis finally less mutualistic than parasitic, and now reach out to older males who might stand in for the absent, or absently present, fathers. (Jeffers 188)

Jeffers sees the crisis of paternity as a moral "imbalance" of the modern age, but he fails to account for its presence in non-Euroethnic bildungs because of his decision

⁹ See Jeffers 2. Jeffers rewords "crisis of paternity" as an "imbalance, namely the modern age's problematic life-without-father" (7).

to focus on Euro-American texts and because of his perception of society's neglect of "youthful white males":

There are studies available on the Latino/Latina, the Asian American, the African American, the cross-culturally female, and the so forth Bildungsroman, and my own purposes have seemed ambitious enough without trying to compass those occasionally heuristic though often overspecialized and hyphenated subsets. And in any event, youthful white males have come to seem like the segment of our society that one needs to worry about, and precisely because they constitute a large segment that—often fatherless, guilt-heaped, and feeling undervalued—tests lower, goes to college less often, and gets into legal trouble more than white females do. (7)

The paternity crisis Jeffers frets over is equally characteristic of bildungsromans written by Western hemisphere, Afroethnic writers (i.e. Latinos, West Indians, and African Americans). For obvious reasons, the trope is particularly endemic in U.S. slave escape narratives, the founding genre of African American autobiographical writing. Greta LeSeur recognizes it in contemporary African American and Afro-Caribbean Anglophone bildungsromans: "Boys in the African American and West Indian novels, by contrast, are largely the concern of their mothers, since there is a pervasive and literal absence of fathers in their lives" (5).

In addition to their crisis of paternity, U.S. Afroethnic, Latina, and Asian female bildungsheld, suffer a crisis of maternity. Bolaki's study of the bildung narratives of Jamaica Kincaid, Sandra Cisneros, Maxine Hong Kingston, and Audre

Lorde focuses on female protagonists and their maternal relationships. Bolaki examines Jamaica Kincaid's *Lucy* and *At The Bottom of the River* and Audre Lorde's *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*, *The Cancer Journals*, and "A Burst of Light: Living with Cancer" as representative U.S. Afro-Caribbean texts. "The traditional female Bildungsroman," writes Bolaki, "represses *Bildung* or quest, ending in marriage or culminates in death when the female heroine distorts the acceptable social scripts" (23). However, the writers in Bolaki's study depart from these classic forms of closure. The mother-daughter "clashes" in the bildungs Bolaki examines dispense with "the American myth of self-creation" and "individualism and unbounded mobility" (23). U.S. ethnic bildungs, in general, argues Bolaki, highlight the lack of physical and social mobility. They "speak about domestic enclosure in houses and ghettos, one's responsibility towards their community, and the need for belonging" (25). In other words, they privilege the provincial rather than the cosmopolitan. Because of this cultural rootedness and proximity angst, the ethnic female bildungshelden in Bolaki's study, literally and figuratively, construct themselves "alongside their mothers . . . through either processes of mourning or translation" (24). The mother-daughter relationships in these narratives tackle "issues of Colonialism and sexuality, as in Kincaid's and Lorde's work in which the mothers are either Colonial agents or agents of 'passing'" (23). The fraught mother-child relationships in these narratives constitute a crisis of maternity.

The crisis of maternity is essentially a crisis of a toxic presence in the Afro-Latino bildung memoirs of my study. Both the female and male protagonists I examine suffer a crisis of maternity, a dysfunctional mother-child relationship. With

stunning regularity, the authors of these memoirs portray mothers as clownish, immature, ineffectual, aloof, neglectful, and/or abusive. In contrast, they portray surrogate mothers, when there are surrogate mothers, as mature, competent, wise, loving, and nurturing. These surrogates enact the discourse of marianismo, the set of Latino and Latin American values and customs that valorize, among other things, “nurturing maternity” and “maternal and familial duty and sacrifice” (Allatson 153–54). Two of the key conventions of bildung narratives—the confessional mode and the focus on the formative years—often compels the authors in my study to hold their parents up to public scrutiny like no other genre does.

Public scrutiny and incredulity are two of the occupational hazards of autobiographical writing declares Leigh Gilmore:

For the writers I study here, autobiography's project—to tell the story of one's life—appears to constrain self-representation through its almost legalistic definition of truth telling, its anxiety about invention, and its preference for the literal and verifiable, even in the presence of some ambiguity about those criteria Yet conventions about truth telling, salutary as they are, can be inimical to the ways in which some writers bring trauma stories into language When the contest is over who can tell the truth, the risk of being accused of lying (or malingering, or inflating, or whining) threatens the writer into continued silence These departures offer an opportunity to calibrate our attention to the range of demands made by autobiography and the silencing or shaming effects they impose. (3)

However, the threat of “unsympathetic scrutiny,” I argue, might not always be perceived as a threat by some writers (Gilmore 4). The opportunity to face public scrutiny might be a contributing factor in the autobiographical impulse that compels Afroethnic writers to meditate on the role of racial trauma in their lives. Subaltern writers employ *bildung* “to claim America for immigrants and ethnic groups, to expose the traumas of a Colonial education by decolonizing the self, or to illustrate the process of coming to voice for marginalized individuals and larger groups” (Bolaki 11). Narratives of “trauma, illness, and death,” and “marginality, enforced silence, and hampered movement,” argues Bolaki, productively expand the thematic boundaries of conventional *bildung* narratives (13). Jeffers might argue that Bolaki overlooks the presence of trauma in classical *bildung* narratives like *David Cooperfield*, as Cooperfield’s formative years were a “neglected-and-abused-child nightmare” (6).

Returning to the topic at hand, Kenneth Mostern discusses the importance of the intersection of racial trauma, African American autobiography, and identity politics. Mostern “accepts the category of the ‘memory of slavery’ conceived by Gilroy as a determinate trauma--a psychoanalytic category, here sociologized--as an explanation of the persistence of ‘blackness’ as a mechanism in US politics,” and he uses “the category of autobiography, which is not ‘personal experience,’ but rather an articulation based on the determinate memory and recall of experience via the lens of traumatically constrained ideology, to describe the continuing racialization of politics” (10). From its inception in the Colonial era as a response to white

supremacy, African American autobiography, Mostern reminds us, has always been more of a political process than an aesthetic object:

In particular, autobiography is that *process* which articulates the determined subject so as to actively produce a newly positive identity. To the extent that racial trauma is, precisely, what autobiography recalls, racial identity politics is determined and a variety of other politics may, as hooks knows, be repressed. (11)

African American autobiography is a political process and a political tool. Authors of African American bildung narratives craft a subjectivity that is “contingent, collective, and historical,” posits Kester, because they ideologically relate “to what is lost, the absent African home continent, and to what still seems unavailable to many African Americans, a home on the American continent” (Kester 16). “The classical European paradigm set by Goethe,” asserts Kester, “implies that chaos, anarchy, and rebellion spring from within the subject while a society, from without, implants order, rules, and stability. The general American literary tradition--of which the slave narrative is one outstanding example--reverses this distinction. Its main purpose is to uphold the innocence of the subject facing a cruel, unjust world” (47). I draw a similar distinction between Euro-American and Afro-Latino bildungs. The former views unassimilated people of African and/or Latino descent as a threat to the dominance and stability of American society, whereas the Afro-Latino bildung views American society as an institution that especially traumatizes individuals and communities of African heritage. Because of extant white privilege and structural racism, the social education and identity formation of Americans in general is

inherently a racial apprenticeship. Afroethnic Americans experience ethnoracial apprenticeship differently than Euroethnic Americans. Because of their unique cultural subjectivities and transnational histories, Afro-Latino immigrants and their descendants may experience and process anti-African racism differently than their African American counterparts, but they still recognize that it is a mutual problem that requires a collaborative solution and pan-African solidarity.

However, Afro-Latinos' transnational histories and heritages add another dimension of complexity to their bildung narratives, both fictional and nonfictional. According to Alejandro Latinez, "Latin American and Hispanic/Latino Bildungsroman paradoxically and creatively, reproduce a condition of permanent becoming, which define subjects' identity" (11). Latinez's study includes, among many others, analyses of *Bless me, Ultima* by Rudolfo Anaya, *The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros, and *When I was Puerto Rican* by Esmeralda Santiago. Latinez "focuses on the intersection of the ideological and narratological configuration of the Bildungsroman as a formative story and the social and economic development as a narrative of national formation" (2). The narrative of underdevelopment imposed on Latin American countries by the U.S., suggests Latinez, construes those countries as junior partners in the global community, junior partners who require the paternal guidance of the putatively more advanced nations of the world. The idea that Latin American and Hispanophone Caribbean countries are like undeveloped bildungsheld, contends Latinez, was initiated by President Truman's "1949 inaugural lecture and the 1951 classic United Nations document 'Measures for the Economic Development of Underdeveloped Countries'"

(3). In the eyes of the industrialized nations, the underdeveloped countries of Latin America and the Hispanophone Caribbean are at best immature and at worst infantilized. In his book *Cuba in the American Imagination: Metaphor and Imperial Ethos*, Louis A. Pérez Jr. demonstrates that the narrative of Latin American and Hispanophone Caribbean infantilization antedates the Truman administration, going at least as far back as the Spanish American War of 1898. Pérez Jr. examines depictions of Cuba as a child in U.S. political cartoons from the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century (95–174). Tracing the trope of Hispanic/Latino infantilization back to the Spanish American War provides more context and support for Latinez’s claim that the Hispanic/Latino *bildung* is a narrative of permanent becoming:

Development remains intriguing and puzzling for its permanent presence in Latin American and in the Hispanic/Latino literatures and cultures; it defines an essential characteristic of these works as narratives of *becoming*. In the stories, the condition of becoming does not allow a closure of the process of ‘*bild*,’ it seals the narratives with open endings. If the growth toward maturity implies a final stage of becoming a citizen of a modern nation, the permanence of uncertainties and anxieties about identity and national goals indicates that the Latin American and Hispanic/Latino narrative of formation challenges the outcome of the process. (82–83)

No matter how much moral, social, intellectual, or material progress the Hispanic/Latino *bildungsheld* makes, the dominant society in the U.S. never fully

embraces him or her. This social and cultural subordination of the Hispanic/Latino bildungsheld, concludes Latinez, intrinsically makes the U.S. Hispanic/Latino bildungsroman a narrative of arrested development.

Latinez's arrested development thesis is not so much inaccurate as it is incomplete. It is no surprise that reading Latino experiences and literature through the lens of the dominant culture tends to produce distortions, omissions, and suppressions that yield narratives of underdevelopment, incompleteness, incompatibility, disunion, alienation, and deracination. However, as I show it in this critical analysis, examining the impulse of African American literature, history, and culture in Afro-Latino bildung narratives reveals discourses of growth, wholeness, and solidarity, discourses that call for conceptualizing contemporary Afro-Latino and African American literature as two mutually reinforcing domains in the Afroethnic Renewal.

Chapter Overview

Having established a theory of the Afroethnic Impulse and Renewal in the previous sections of this Introduction, I now turn to an overview of my chapters. The first chapter, “The Afroethnic Impulse in Jesús Colón’s *A Puerto Rican in New York* and *The Way It Was*,” discusses Colón’s two intranational migrant memoirs: *A Puerto Rican in New York and Other Sketches* (1961) and *The Way it Was and Other Writings* (1993). Using seven representative essays from each collection, I chart the development of the Afroethnic Impulse in Colón’s ethnic nationalism and political radicalism, showing how Colón presages the pragmatic pan-African consciousness and the intercultural influences and exchanges of the intersecting Nuyorican and Black Arts/Black Power movements of the late 1960s and 1970s.

In the second chapter, “Ethnoracial Apprenticeship, Symbolic Geography, and the Popular Front in Evelio Grillo’s *Black Cuban, Black American: A Memoir*,” I examine the relationship between transethnic acculturation, pragmatic nationalism, and interracial Popular Front politics. *Black Cuban, Black American* deserves renewed and sustained attention as a bildung memoir because it is not only a narrative about Afroethnic transculturation, but it is also a story about political acculturation and maturity. Grillo’s memoir prompts significant questions about regional pride, social mobility, panethnic identity formation, cultural authentication, and the tension between first-person narratological consciousness and collective identity formation in transcultural Afro-Latino autobiographical narratives published in the post-Civil Rights era.

The third chapter, “John Oliver Killens, Indigeneity, and Racial Emasculation in Piri Thomas’ *Down These Mean Streets*,” pays special attention to Thomas’ literary apprenticeship under John Oliver Killens in the Harlem Writers Guild (HWG). The HWG had aesthetic roots in the Popular Front and its members played decisive roles in the development of the Black Arts Movement. The chapter goes on to examine the intersection of symbolic geography, pragmatic nationalism, the trope of the Native American noble savage, and “black cowardice” and infantilization jokes in the development of heteronormative masculinity and “black consciousness” in *Down These Mean Streets*.

In the fourth chapter, “From Bohemian Piolo to Black Left Jorocón: The Pan-African Conversion Narrative in Carlos Moore’s *Pinchón*,” I analyze the relationship between U.S. cultural imperialism, Cuban immigration, Afroethnic radicalism, and pragmatic pan-African acculturation. I focus on Carlos Moore’s life from his birth in Central Lugareño, Cuba in 1942 to his self-imposed exile from the country in 1963, at the age of twenty-one. I pay particularly close attention to the period between 1957 and 1961 because of its escape-and-return motif. During this period, Moore migrates from Cuba to New York to escape the conflict between the Batista regime and the revolutionary forces, and he returns to Cuba in the spring of 1961 to support Castro’s revolution. Using the lenses of symbolic geography and racial apprenticeship, I reveal myriad representations of ideologically radical mobility, maturation, and influence in Moore’s sojourn in black New York.

The fifth chapter, “The Pitfalls of Transcultural Ascension in Veronica Chambers’ *Mama’s Girl*,” considers Chamber’s psychological and ideological

development as an Afro-Latina writer of Central American and Hispanophone Caribbean ancestry. I separate my analysis of *Mama's Girl* into three parts. First, I examine the relationships between transculturation, cultural nationalism, racial apprenticeship, and the exodus narratives that literally and figuratively structure *Mama's Girl*. Second, I catalogue and compare the memoir's African American and Latino cultural tropes, developing conjectures about their relationships to the critical reception and commercial success of *Mama's Girl*. Third, I analyze and interpret representations of consumerism, educational excellence, and ascension, where images of ascension figuratively represent personal expertise, freedom, and upward socioeconomic mobility. This tripartite analysis reveals the links between social ascension, transethnic acculturation, mass culture, and the consumerism of Generation X.

The sixth chapter, "Fraternal Traumas, Silences, and Desires: *Fukú Americanus* in the Bildung Fiction of Junot Díaz, Piri Thomas, and John Oliver Killens," exposes a genealogy of trauma, transgressive desire, and fraternal silence in *Drown*, *This Is How You Lose Her*, *Down These Mean Streets*, and *Youngblood*. Using Junot Díaz's *fukú americanus* trope, contemporary theories about the gendered brain, and Piri Thomas as the literary ancestor that links Díaz to Killens, I examine how each text explores the relationships between sexual violation, homosocial camaraderie, and ethnic and gender identity formation. This chapter uncovers new insights about the African American literary ancestry of masculinity construction, camaraderie, and sexual trauma in the bildung trilogy of Junot Díaz,

expanding our understanding of the comingling of African American and Latino literature and culture in the Afroethnic Renewal.

In my seventh chapter, “Spectral Natives and ‘the ambiguous mix’: Tropical Mysticism, Five Percenter Theosophy, and Genetic Profiling in Raquel Cepeda’s *Bird Of Paradise: How I Became Latina*,” I return to my discussion of the bildungroman’s religious origins and its focus on self-perfection, as I outlined above. In this chapter, I consider how latinidad, mysticism, spirituality, Pan-Africanism, hip-hop, Five Percenter theosophy, and genetic profiling shape Cepeda’s recollection of her adolescent development. Inspired by Cepeda’s affinity for science, I use contemporary theories about attachment disorder to critique the mystical elements in her narrative. I also explore the relationship between Cepeda’s affinity for Five Percenter righteousness and her employment of self-tropicalization, masculine normativity, positivism, brand identity, and cross-promotional marketing. I demonstrate that Five Percenter theosophy primed Cepeda to develop an Afrofusionist philosophy of Santería, clairvoyant dreams, spectral natives, ancestor veneration, kismet, and gilgul neshamot as scientifically, if not psychologically, explainable phenomena.

The Conclusion reviews the findings of my research and emphasizes the latitude and utility of the Afroethnic Renewal. Because the Afroethnic Renewal is not exclusive to transculturation between African Americans and Afro-Latinos, it functions as a robust general theory for reconceptualizing “black identity” and the contemporary transcultural aesthetic moment in African American literature and culture. The Afroethnic Renewal can apply to intercultural exchanges between

African Americans and U.S. Afroethnic writers who have national roots in Africa, the Middle East, Asia, Europe, Canada, Oceania, and/or the non-Hispanophone Caribbean. There is ample territory to cover in the Afroethnic Renewal and much of it remains underdeveloped and unexplored. Such analysis promises to reveal the deep impact of Afroethnic transculturation in what we might term the Literature of Integration.

CHAPTER 1

THE AFROETHNIC IMPULSE IN JESÚS COLÓN'S *A PUERTO RICAN IN NEW YORK* AND *THE WAY IT WAS*

Introduction

The post-war era of 1945 to 1961 was a culturally, socially, and politically transformative period for African American and Puerto Rican sociopolitical progress and literary production. Collectively, African Americans entered the American political and literary mainstream in exceptional ways during this period. For example, Ralph Bunche, who participated in the formation of the United Nations in 1945, won the 1950 Nobel Peace Prize for his role in the creation of the state of Israel, and Gwendolyn Brooks won a Pulitzer Prize for her 1949 bildung poetry collection *Annie Allen*. Bunche and Brooks were the first African Americans to win these notable prizes. Between 1950 and 1961, America witnessed significant Civil Rights violence and victories. *Brown v. Board of Education*, the murder of Emmet Till, the Montgomery Boycott, the federal establishment of the Civil Rights Commission, the Greensboro, NC sit-ins, and the CORE Freedom Riders movement are typical examples. Regarding African American literary production, 1950 to 1961 was also an exceptional period. Langston Hughes, Ralph Ellison, James Baldwin, Richard Wright, Alice Childress, Lorraine Hansberry, and LeRoi Jones each published major works. During this period, across the U.S., African American writers and African American institutions of various ideological persuasions

cultivated the cultural trends and political ideas that flowered into the Black Arts and Black Power movements of the 1960s and 1970s.¹⁰

Like their African American counterparts, Puerto Rican writers in the U.S. actively contributed to the development of American literature during the period between 1945 and 1961. Notable English language Puerto Rican writers of the Upheaval (1946-1979), the name Ilan Stavans assigns to Latino literature of the early Cold War era, include William Carlos Williams, Pedro Albizu Campos, Luis Muñoz Marín, Julia de Burgos, José Dávila Sempritt, Guillermo Cotto-Thorner, René Marqués, and José Luis González. Although Jesús Colón, an Afro-Puerto Rican author, published his only book length work during this period, Stavans includes him in the Acculturation (1899-1945), the literary period that includes Arthur A. Schomburg and Bernardo Vega, fellow Puerto Rican writers with whom Colón had close personal ties and working relationships.¹¹ Schomburg, Vega, and Colón “chronicled the pre-World War II migration experience through their respective working class and racial perspectives, stressing the continuum of cohesive, vital communities, civic and political leadership, and working class activism” (Acosta-Belén and Sánchez Korrol 14).

¹⁰ On the organizational and ideological genealogies between the literary politics and aesthetics of the Popular Front (Old Left) and the Black Arts Movement (New Left), see Smethurst, *The Black Arts Movement*.

¹¹ On Colón’s friendship and working relationship with Bernardo Vega at the newspaper *Gráfico*, during the 1920s and 1930s, see Acosta-Belén and Sánchez Korrol, “The World of Jesús Colón” 14 and 21. On the friendship between Colón and Schomburg, see Acosta-Belén and Sánchez Korrol, “The World of Jesús Colón” 25–26.

Published during the Civil Rights movement and the period of New Left ethno-nationalism that gave rise to the Black Arts and Black Power movements, Jesús Colón's intranational migrant memoir, *A Puerto Rican in New York and Other Sketches* (1961), contains significant African American cultural tropes and sociopolitical concerns. This is also true of his posthumous collection *The Way it Was and Other Writings* (1993). The Afroethnic Impulse in Colón's memoirs (i.e. the African American intercultural affinities, exchanges, and racial concerns and logics) is more than coincidental because Colón had at least passing knowledge of canonical writers in the African American literary tradition and he supported and organized with notable African American Civil Rights leaders in New York during the Upheaval.

In this chapter, I discuss Jesús Colón's biography, the scholarly reception of his two memoirs, and the historical and cultural contexts in which the personal essays in those memoirs were published. Using seven representative essays from each collection, I articulate and chart the development of the Afroethnic Impulse in Colón's ethnic nationalism and radicalism, showing how Colón presages the pragmatic pan-African consciousness and the intercultural influences and exchanges of the intersecting Nuyorican and Black Arts/Black Power movements of the late 1960s and 1970s.

Jesús Colón: Origins and Politics

On July 25, 1898, the Spanish colony of Puerto Rico became a U.S. territory. Puerto Rico was one of four island colonies that Spain ceded to the U.S. at the end of the Spanish-American War, the others included Cuba, Guam, and the Philippines. Nineteen years later, the Jones-Shafroth Act of 1917 granted Puerto Ricans U.S. citizenship; the island later became an official U.S. Commonwealth in July of 1952. In the wake of the Jones-Shafroth Act, Puerto Rican migration to the mainland increased dramatically. Jesús Colón, one of the premier writers of Puerto Rican Anglophone literature in the U.S., was part of that wave of migration (Flores, *A Puerto Rican in New York* ix). Edna Acosta-Belén and Virginia Sánchez Korrol describe Colón as “an individual of profound social consciousness and, foremost, a deep believer in communitarianism and in achieving social and political change through collective action His working class origins and involvement during his formative years in an intensively militant socialist labor movement in Puerto Rico combined with his own personal struggles as a destitute migrant in New York City to turn him into an irrepressible voice of the working class” (20). Colón’s posthumous books include *The Way It Was and Other Writings* (1993) and *Lo Que El Pueblo Me Dice: Crónicas De La Colonia Puertorriqueña En Nueva York* (2001).¹² Colón’s literary reputation, however, was built on the foundation of the only book length work Colón published during his lifetime--*A Puerto Rican in New York and Other Sketches* (1961),¹³ a collection of personal essays, anecdotal vignettes, didactic

¹² Subsequently referred to as *TWIW*, and *Crónicas*, respectively.

¹³ Subsequently referred to as *PRINY*.

cautionary tales, and philosophical reflections about the economic, social, political, legal, and racial discrimination Puerto Ricans and African Americans faced in New York from the 1920s to the 1950s. *PRINY* and *TWIIW* capture the collective identity of the Puerto Rican diaspora in the first-person experiences and reflections of its “articulate kinsman,” Jesús Colón.

Colón died in New York in 1974, but he was born on Jan. 20 in 1901 in Cayey, Puerto Rico to Paula López Cedeño and Mauricio Colón y Coto. His mother was a housewife and his father a baker (James 214). In the early twentieth century, the principle engine of Cayey’s economy was the cigar industry. Living in Cayey, Colón grew up in the unique cultural and political milieu of the *tabaqueros*, the artisanal cigar makers. The *tabaqueros* of Cayey “embraced revolutionary socialist and anarcho-syndicalist ideas” so much so that in 1915 their union, the *Federación Libre de Trabajadores*, founded the Puerto Rican Socialist Party, which fourteen-year-old Colón joined that same year (James 215; Acosta-Belén and Sánchez Korrol 15 and 22). Colón was an exceptional student. His peers elected him to be the editor of their school magazine, an honor that prefigured, if not predisposed, Colón’s adult career as a journalist in New York. As a teenager, Colón witnessed the massacre of striking *tabaqueros*; the traumatizing incident stayed with him his entire life. Not long after the massacre, Colón left Puerto Rico for Brooklyn, NY, interrupting the completion of his education at “the Central Grammar School in San Juan” (Acosta-Belén and Sánchez Korrol 19).

In 1918, Colón arrived in New York City as a stowaway on the *SS Carolina*. New York was a significant destination for Puerto Ricans because, in the decades

before World War I, it, like Tampa, was part of the North American cigar industry, an industry that relied heavily on the labor of artisanal Cuban and Puerto Rican cigar makers; in addition, 1918 was a significant year for Puerto Rican emigration because in the fall of that year a tsunami and earthquake devastated the northwestern coast of the island territory, causing many of its citizens to intranationally relocate in the U.S. (Delgado 70; National Weather Service). Colón settled in Brooklyn where there was a well-established Puerto Rican community in the 1920s and 1930s; by that time East Harlem (aka Spanish Harlem or El Barrio) had not yet become a significant Puerto Rican haven. However, within decades, East Harlem rose in prominence, if not notoriety, as the epitome of New York City's Puerto Rican neighborhoods. Unlike the working class Puerto Rican community in Brooklyn, the East Harlem community, was relatively more entrepreneurial and professional class, according to Winston James in his 1999 book *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia: Caribbean Radicalism in Early Twentieth-Century America* (224). Pragmatically speaking, the working-class community of Brooklyn was the ideal setting for a class-conscious radical like Colón, who eventually completed his high school education in June of 1922 by taking night classes at Brooklyn Boys High School. Completing a U.S. high school degree in an English language setting prepared Colón for his employment as a journalist and his work as a community organizer. Colón, writes Acosta-Belén and Sánchez Korrol, “often expressed both a moral and practical obligation to improve himself in the art and science of writing in the English language” (23). Colón's bilingual experience and credentials were invaluable to his activist success and literary legacy.

From the 1920s to 1971, Colón wrote for a number of Latino and radical magazines and dailies: *Justicia*, *Gráfico*, *Pueblos hispanos*, *Liberación*, *The Daily Worker*, *The Worker*, *The Daily World*, and *Mainstream* (Acosta-Belén and Sánchez Korrol 21). These magazines reflected his radical political affiliations and his allegiance to the Puerto Rican independence movement. After leaving the Socialist Party, Colón joined the Communist Party in 1933 and remained committed to it until his death in 1974. Colón, over his lifetime, founded and worked with several political organizations: Alianza Obrera Puertorriqueña, Ateneo Obrero Hispano, Sociedad Fraternal Cervantes, and the Liga Puertorriqueña e Hispana (James 217–218; Acosta-Belén and Sánchez Korrol 22).

Colón's migration to New York is coterminous with the African American Great Migration that began in the late Progressive Era. The Great Migration denotes the six decades of African American exodus out of the South into the North, Midwest, and West. This mass intranational migration took place between 1915 to the 1970s (Wilkinson part 1, chap. 2). Puerto Rican and African American migrants streamed into New York over the same period, often settling in some of the same neighborhoods. However, they migrated to New York for different sets of reasons, reasons that changed over time. For example, in the post-World War II era, Puerto Rican women migrated to New York "to work in the garment and other postwar industries" (Delgado 79). The impetus of the post-World War II Puerto Rican Great Migration was Operation Bootstrap, a federal campaign designed to modernize and industrialize Puerto Rico. Operation Bootstrap transformed Puerto Rico from an agrarian sugar-based economy into an urban manufacturing and tourist-based

economy. From 1947 to the mid-1970s, Operation Bootstrap dismantled the Puerto Rican sugar industry and replaced it with factories that produced consumer and industrial goods like clothing, shoes, electronics, pharmaceuticals, and petrochemicals (“Operation Bootstrap” and Sánchez Korrol). The promotion of mass emigration, seasonal migrant work, and female sterilization policies were built into Operation Bootstrap as “safety valves” to control unemployment and overpopulation, given that “[a] shift in the economic base from agriculture to manufacturing and tourism was expected to result in minimum incorporation of the island’s agrarian work force” (Sánchez Korrol). Many post-war era Puerto Rican migrants were jíbaros, people from rural municipalities and provinces. Provincial, impoverished, humble, quaint, and stoic are descriptors that define the stereotypical jíbaro (Allatson 133; Stanchich 180). Puerto Rican émigrés tended to settle in New York City where Puerto Rican communities existed since the end of the Spanish-American War. In the post-World War II era, Puerto Rican migrants established communities on Manhattan’s Lower East Side and in East Harlem (aka Spanish Harlem and El Barrio).

Cold War era Puerto Rican literature primarily reflects the “frustration and endurance” that characterizes the transition from rural Caribbean life to an urban Anglophone setting (Stavans and Acosta-Belén 583). A significant number of the Puerto Ricans who migrated to the U.S. due to Operation Bootstrap were Afro-Puerto Ricans; these Afro-Puerto Ricans were often the targets of U.S. ‘antiblack’ racism (Bost and Aparicio 36; Stavans and Acosta-Belén 363). Although *PRINY* details events that took place between the 1920s and the 1950s, it was still socially

relevant for Afro-Puerto Ricans when it was published in 1961 and popularized in the 1980s because it spoke to the racialization they faced and to the unique cultural affinities they fostered with African Americans and other U.S. Afroethnics. James, the scholar who writes about Colón as an Afroethnic radical, posits that Colón privileged class over race, and while it is true that Colón often did, it is also true that Colón's views about race and racism in the U.S. changed over time.

James demonstrates how Colón eschewed black nationalism and Pan-Africanism, ideological frameworks that were popular during the Harlem Renaissance, the period when Colón arrived and settled in Brooklyn. For example, writes James, Colón never mentions Marcus Garvey or UNIA in any of his writings. Unlike his close friend and Marcus Garvey advocate, Arthur A. Schomburg,¹⁴ Colón believed that racism was a by-product of a false class-consciousness and as such racism was a secondary ideological concern. James writes that “among black radicals from the Hispanic Caribbean there was relative indifference, if not aversion to black nationalism” (198). Although Colón was “exercised more by issues of class than of ethnicity and race,” his ideas about the primacy of race in the U.S. transformed over time (James 218). James speculates that the Civil Rights movement inspired Colón to be more forthcoming about the primacy of race in his columns. For example, James notes that between 1956 and 1959, Colón mentions Schomburg in his writing for the very first time, supports A. Phillip Randolph's Prayer Pilgrimage for Freedom, writes about school desegregation in Arkansas,

¹⁴ On the friendship between Colón and Schomburg, see Acosta-Belén and Sánchez Korrol, “The World of Jesús Colón” 25–26. On Schomburg's advocacy for Marcus Garvey's UNIA movement, see James 195–214.

witnesses increased African American leadership in the CPUSA, shares platforms with Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., and appears before the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC) for his involvement with the American Labor Party (ALP), the Communist Party USA (CPUSA), and the Puerto Rican independence movement (James 218–220; Acosta-Belén and Sánchez Korrol 22). Even the FBI, points out James, believed Colón was a member of the NAACP. And furthermore, in 1970, Colón updated *PRINY*, making nomenclature changes that were sympathetic to and in solidarity with the Afroethnic zeitgeist and the discourse the Black Arts and Black Power movements (James 218–220). As Maritza Stanchich notes, *PRINY* “contain[s] some hard-hitting and nuanced explorations of race” (172). Stanchich reveals that Colón was conversant with African American literary figures like Hughes, Wheatley, Dunbar, and Cullen. Colón used these writers as yardsticks to critique the “so-called Negro poetry” of Pales Matos, a fellow Puerto Rican who employed the racial harmonizing discourses of jibarismo and indignesimo to mask the Afroethnic component of the Puerto Rican cultural identity (Stanchich 180). Stanchich’s assessment of Colón’s explorations of Afroethnic identity and nationalism also holds true for essays in *TWIIW*, as I will demonstrate later in this chapter.

In his 2011 book *Triangulations: Narrative Strategies for Navigating Latino Identity*, David J. Vázquez reads the transformation of Colón’s racial consciousness through the lens of “insurgent nationalism.” Vázquez argues that “the age of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) constitutes part of the political logic of the cultural nationalist period” of the 1960s and 1970s and that Colón

“triangulate[s] concrete intellectual foundations of Latina/o insurgent nationalisms out of the historical shortcomings of older (although no less important) oppositional models” (“Zigzagging through History” 29). Colón, “a Popular Front activist,” was disillusioned by the ideological and operational failures of “the age of the CIO,” writes Vázquez. Those failures include the Left’s support for World War II, its lionization of presidents Lincoln and Frederick D. Roosevelt, and its acceptance of red-baiting, American exceptionalism, and the racist framing of the Zoot Suit Riots, Operation Bootstrap, and the Bracero Initiative (Vázquez, “Zigzagging through History” 30). Vázquez goes on to say:

The anticommunism of the Cold War that characterized the gains of the New Deal and the class struggles of the 1930s and the 1940s as un-American, the red baiting of Senator Joseph McCarthy, and the actions of the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC) (before which Colón appeared in 1959) are a few of the examples of events that led to disillusionment among Latina/os and other aggrieved groups. In response, figures like Galarza and Colón increasingly adopted race-based nationalist politics that called the burgeoning U.S. empire into question. (“Zigzagging through History” 31)

Following the scholars David Lloyd and Michael Denning, Vázquez argues that there is nothing inherently “regressive” about nationalism and that the Popular Front effectively employed a brand of nationalism called “ethnic Americanism” in their coalitional politics during the age of the CIO. Using this foundation, Vázquez

develops the concept of “insurgent nationalism’ to distinguish nationalisms practiced by Latina/os *against the state* as distinct from modes enacted in support of the state” (33–34 emphasis in the original). In short, Vázquez sees the cultural nationalisms of the 1960s, although more militant and separatist, as legacies of the inclusive nationalisms of the Popular Front, and furthermore he views Colón as both an icon of and bridge between those eras.

To make his case, Vázquez analyzes the Preface of *PRINY* and five representative sketches. The sketches include “Jose,” “Wanted—A Statue,” “The Library Looks at the Puerto Ricans,” “Kipling and I,” and “A Hero in the Junk Truck.” Vázquez argues that Colón uses the Preface to establish that his personal observations and experiences are representative, that is, typical of the collective Puerto Rican experience in New York. Colón is both “I” (the voice of himself) and “We” (the voice of his people). We see this fusion of the individual and the collective in the sketch “Jose.” “Jose” is the story of how record company executives financially exploited Colón’s “guitar-playing friend.” The executives secured one of Jose’s songs, credited themselves with the copyright, turned the song into a mass hit in the Latino and Latin American music world, received the royalties, and begrudgingly paid Jose a meager \$214 after he pursued legal action. Vázquez argues that Colón wants the reader to make the connection that both Jose and Colón are “representative of a class of intellectuals whose labor goes unrecognized in the racialized space of New York” (“Zigzagging through History” 54). Vázquez concludes that in “Jose,” Colón “matrixes the ‘I’ with projects of communal and national affirmation” to reveal how the continued production of expressive culture

in the face of exploitation and obscurity function as forms of agency and resistance that anticipate “the tactics of cultural nationalists groups like the Young Lords and the Puerto Rican Student Union (PRSU)” (“Zigzagging through History” 54). However, there are vital thematic details about the link between insurgent nationalism, working-class creative collaboration and expressive culture, the discourse of black/white mestizaje, and pan-African influence and exchange that Vázquez does not discuss. Given that “Jose” is the longest sketch in the book and that the Young Lords had a distinct Afroethnic consciousness, the absences call attention to themselves. As I demonstrate later in this chapter, Colón and Jose’s friendships with African Americans and Jose’s influence by African American and West Indian singers and music are non-trivial aspects of agency, resistance, and solidarity in the sketch “Jose.” “Wanted—A Statue,” contends Vázquez, stresses the importance of public monuments in constructing and consolidating an ethnic group’s political and cultural viability. Beyond simple representation and recognition, publically funded monuments of subaltern heroes perpetually challenge dominant narratives of local, regional, national, and transnational history. The sketch “The Library Looks at the Puerto Ricans” functions in a similar fashion.

Like the previous sketch, “The Library Looks at the Puerto Ricans” focuses on the contest for space, for inclusion. In this sketch Colón praises the New York Public Library for dedicating the month of February 1956 to Puerto Rican history and culture. However, he castigates the inclusion of some books and the omission of others. For example, Colón ends the sketch by berating the library for not mentioning Arturo Schomburg and the Schomburg Collection: “Though the

collection is dedicated to the Negro people and their history, there is a great amount of material on prominent Negro Puerto Ricans in its files” (Colón 140). In his analysis of the sketch, Vázquez focuses only on Colón’s insurgent invocation of Puerto Rico as a nation. Equally important is Colón’s insurgent emphasis on African Americans and Afro-Puerto Ricans being omitted from the library’s attempt at inclusivity.

In “Kipling and I,” Colón, says Vázquez, critiques the concept of the U.S. as a meritocracy by burning his copy of Kipling’s poem “If.” The poem had functioned as an inspirational talisman for Colón. However, after witnessing repeated and blatant racial discrimination in housing and employment against “Negroes and Puerto Ricans,” Colón disabuses himself of America’s national myth of itself as a colorblind meritocracy—he burns the poem in the fire to keep from freezing. In “A Hero in the Junk Truck” Colón and his wife rescue a portrait of Simón Bolívar, the 19th century liberator of Venezuela and advocate of Pan-Americanism, from being thrown into the garbage. Having no idea whom the elegant portrait represents, the crowd of Americans who watch them collect the portrait is completely befuddled. Colón and his wife explain the significance of Bolívar to the crowd, which, even after learning of his role in history, is still unmoved. This sketch, declares Vázquez, “underscores the cultural myopia of U.S. hegemony by making visible the historical and intellectual ignorance of North American readers,” and furthermore, it reminds us that “insurgent nationalists” require “new, confrontational strategies designed to effect substantive change” (Vázquez, “Zigzagging through History” 58).

Adalaine Holton explores the essays in *PRINY* to highlight “the role of Afro-Latina/os in twentieth-century black radicalism in the United States (5). In her 2013 essay “Little Things Are Big”: Race and the Politics of Print Community in the Writings of Jesús Colón,” Holton re-conceptualizes and expands the concept of “black” in black radicalism so that it is more inclusive of Afroethnic peoples from countries and territories, Anglophone and non-Anglophone, throughout the Caribbean and the Americas. Holton merges genre analysis, reading Colón’s essays as crónicas, with political analysis, reading his willingness to address race not as a complete disavowal of a Marxist class analysis, but as a pragmatic acknowledgement that class is racialized in the U.S. (Holton 7 and 14). Although I cover some of the same essays and reach similar conclusions as previous scholars, my analysis focuses on the specific African American cultural tropes and references in Colón’s collections. In addition, I read the collections as bildung memoirs rather than as collections of discrete essays and I use specific concepts and tropes from Latino and Puerto Rican Studies to illustrate how Colón adopts and critiques the Puerto Rican tri-racial identity construct by filtering it through his radical politics and emergent Afroethnic consciousness.

The Afroethnic Impulse in *A Puerto Rican in New York and Other Sketches*

James; Acosta-Belén and Sánchez Korrol; Stanchich; Vázquez; and Holton provide significant contributions to the literary and cultural analysis of the sketches in *PRINY* and *TWIW*. By using concepts from African American and Latino Studies, I reveal the unique bildung trajectory that illuminates the pan-African influences and

exchanges in Colón's essays. This contribution highlights the developmental aspects of the Afroethnic Impulse that animates Colón's black socialization and pragmatic panethnic nationalism. I provide a unique contribution to the field by exploring Colón's memoirs as bildung narratives and Colón as a bildungsheld. Strictly speaking, *PRINY* is not a bildungsroman because it is not fictional and it does not include the childhood and early adolescent years of the author's life. Neither is it a memoir, in the strict sense of the term. However, I argue that each of Colón's collections of essays functions like a bildung memoir because of its maturation and ethnoracial apprenticeship tropes and structures. Migration narratives, like archetypal African American slave escape narratives, can be productively read as bildung narratives because the protagonist of a migration narrative, regardless of his/her age, becomes a bildungsheld in the social milieu of the host region or country. Like the bildungsroman, Afro-Latino migration narratives depict a process of acculturation, a process of social formation and personal development. Afro-Latino bildung narratives tend to end in figurative naturalization if not literal naturalization. I include Colón's collections of autobiographical sketches in this study because they contain each of the features of an Afro-Latino ethnoracial apprenticeship memoir: migration and Afroethnic symbolic geography; racial initiation and awakening; black socialization; unintentional passing; and pragmatic black nationalism. *PRINY* contains an illuminating discourse about what it means to be Afro-Latino and African American in New York from the 1920s to the 1950s. To begin the analysis, I focus on the collection's intersection of migration, symbolic geography, and citizenship.

Colón's migration from Puerto Rico to New York mirrors Stepto's concept of the African American ascent narrative. Colón's migration is an emancipatory journey from one of the southernmost territories of the U.S. to one of its northernmost states. In the North, Colón acquires new linguistic, social, and cultural literacies that allow for upward social mobility. Juan Flores writes that while Puerto Rican migrants of Colón's time and place, especially Afro-Puerto Ricans, acknowledged the primacy of racism in the continental U.S., because of their Hispanic and geographical histories they tended to form social bonds "based on class and politics, not race" (Flores, *A Puerto Rican in New York, and Other Sketches* xii). Colón, contends Flores, "was an active and articulate member of the Communist Party through the Depression years, World War II, and McCarthyism, and remained so until the end of his life in 1974" (Flores, *A Puerto Rican in New York* xii). Colón's politics seemingly preclude him from privileging race over class; however, his sketches demonstrate that he has a sympathetic, if not pragmatic, understanding that class in the U.S. is racialized.

There are fifty-five sketches in *A Puerto Rican in New York and Other Sketches*; eleven of the sketches make direct references to "Negroes" and the treatment of Afro-Puerto Ricans as "Negroes."¹⁵ For example, there are panethnic references to friendships with African Americans and with other Afro-Caribbeans; references to discriminatory housing practices that target African Americans and Puerto Ricans; references to icons like Louis Armstrong, Marian Anderson, Arturo Schomburg, and Paul Robeson; references to being called a "nigger"; and references

¹⁵ See sketches 8, 10, 11, 13, 22, 25, 28-32, 37, and 41.

to African American universities (i.e. Howard University) and the experience of racial segregation in Washington, D.C. Below, I discuss seven of the eleven sketches, seven that are often overlooked and/or not fully theorized in respect to the concepts of the Afroethnic Impulse (i.e. racial initiation and apprenticeship; black socialization, solidarity, and nationalism; and pan-African cultural influence and exchange). I discuss the essays in the order in which they are sequenced in *PRINY* rather than in the order in which they were originally published.

"On the Docks It Was Cold" is the eighth story in *A Puerto Rican in New York and Other Sketches*.¹⁶ In the opening of the sketch, Colón describes a box of mementos in which he keeps "things that have made a mark or change" in his life (*A Puerto Rican in New York, and Other Sketches* 30). These transitional objects, as psychologists call them, include his red Socialist Party membership card, the first picture taken of his wife, and an employment badge from his time as a worker in the Lackawanna Railroad yards, respectively. Colón's nostalgia for this era of his life is coterminous with an affectionate memory of an Afro-Panamanian mentor, Mr. Clark. The relationship between Mr. Clark and Colón is one of master and apprentice; and it constitutes the emotional and political core of the sketch. Mr. Clark was the "big tall Negro foreman" who had originally hired Colón to work "the Hamburg American Line docks in Hoboken" (Colón, *A Puerto Rican in New York, and Other Sketches* 30). Colón stresses how Mr. Clark, a Jamaican Panamanian, fluently spoke Spanish, French, and English and knew "how to load a ship better than anybody else" (*A Puerto Rican in New York, and Other Sketches* 31). Mr. Clark and Colón are the

¹⁶ Published in *The Daily Worker* 2-15-57 and in *PRINY*.

central characters of this sketch, which belies notions of intrinsic interethnic conflict among Afroethnics in general and national rivalries among Afro-Latinos in particular. The practical engagement with Mr. Clark illustrates Greer's notion of black socialization and constitutes a weak form of Shelby's pragmatic black nationalism. Equally important, Colón's portrait of Mr. Clark debunks the myth of Afroethnic immigrant shiftlessness and intellectual inferiority, and in this sense Colón's memoir is unapologetically politicized. As Mostern notes, "*nearly all African American political leaders . . . have chosen to write personal stories as a means of theorizing their political positions*" (12). This is no less true of Afro-Latino memoirists. "On the Docks It Was Cold" self-consciously stresses panethnic solidarities and Afroethnic socialization between two distinct and disparate Afro-Latino groups, and it positions Colón as a bildungsheld in a narrative of U.S. racial identity formation, acculturation, and citizenship.

"Hiawatha Into Spanish," the thirteenth sketch in Colón's collection, exemplifies Litwack's concept of racial initiation as well as a unique twist on Drake and Cayton's theory of unintentional passing.¹⁷ "Hiawatha Into Spanish" describes how Colón inadvertently circumvents racist employment practices when he is hired to translate silent movies for a film agency in Times Square. Initially, Colón secures freelance work with the company through the mail. Impressed with his work, the company invites him to come into the offices to be interviewed for a salaried position. When he arrives the employer says, "That was to be your desk and typewriter. But I thought you were white" (Colón, *A Puerto Rican in New York, and*

¹⁷ Published in *The Daily Worker* 11-13-56 and in *PRINY*.

Other Sketches 51). Naïvely, when he setup the interview, it never occurred to Colón that race was a factor in his prospective employment as a full-time translator. He concludes the sketch saying, "Then and there that day in the early twenties, I added one more episode to the maturing serial of my life" (*A Puerto Rican in New York, and Other Sketches* 51). This racial initiation is one of many in the chronicle of Colón's ethnoracial apprenticeship in the U.S. What is significant is Colón's awareness of the bildung ethos of his racial awakening, an awareness that is signified by the repeated use of versions of the words maturity and mature in his race-themed sketches.

In the previous section of this chapter, I previewed my analysis of "Jose," the twenty-fifth sketch in *PRINY*. Here, I go into more depth, providing specific details and evidence for my claim that "Jose" embodies the Afroethnic Impulse in Colón's political, social, and cultural consciousness. A class-based analysis of "Jose" rightly focuses on the theme of capitalist exploitation, but it does so at the expense of the equally meaningful themes of pan-African harmony, collaboration, and intercultural mixing, influence, and exchange. In this sketch, Colón portrays the story of his friend Jose,¹⁸ a self-taught guitar player who is a genius at playing a single song in various styles (i.e. waltz, tango, fox trot, march, rumba, and funeral march), and who, in addition, can play various genres of Latin Caribbean and Latin American music: Puerto Rican guaracha and plena; Cuban bolero and rumba; Argentinian tango, and Mexican "bambas, huapangos, corridos, and rancheras" (*A Puerto Rican in New York,*

¹⁸ Colón opens that sketch by saying that Jose is not the real name of his friend. The rationale for this concealment is revealed at the end of the sketch. Jose hopes to pursue continued litigation against the unnamed record company and executives who exploited him.

and Other Sketches 89). However, the trope of intercultural mixing, influence, and exchange is not limited to the literal production of music. Colón uses the U.S. binary discourse of black/white miscegenation to figuratively articulate the unique sonic quality of Jose’s singing voice, which he describes as “a cross between Louis Armstrong’s and Martha Raye’s—that has a human quality, a warmth to it like—like Louis Armstrong and Martha Raye” (*A Puerto Rican in New York, and Other Sketches* 89).

Louis D. Armstrong was an African American native of New Orleans, Louisiana, whose international career as a jazz singer, trumpeter, and minor screen idol, began in the 1920s and lasted until his death in 1971. Blessed with a big grin, Armstrong’s childhood nicknames were Dippermouth and Gatemouth; he earned the nickname Satchmo when he was an adult (Collier 28). Starting as early as the mid-1940s, during the be-bop craze, many young African Americans considered Louis Armstrong to be an Uncle Tom. The charge stemmed from his obsequious grinning; minstrel antics; dated, Southern, and predominantly apolitical song repertoire; and the fact that he once said he eschewed politics and just played music (Collier 29–30; Margolick). Famous African American jazz performers who leveled the Uncle Tom charge against Louis include Charles Mingus, Miles Davis, and Billie Holiday (Bergreen). Gov. Orval Faubus’s refusal to let the Little Rock Nine desegregate the Little Rock Central High School in 1957, enraged Armstrong. Armstrong, who worked for the State Department as a cultural diplomat doing international “Jazz Ambassador” tours, publicized his outrage, earning the admiration of those who had once called him an Uncle Tom (“Louis Armstrong, Barring

Soviet Tour, Denounces Eisenhower and Gov. Faubus”; Margolick; U.S. Dept. of State). Like Armstrong, Martha Raye, a Euroethnic radio, theater, nightclub, television and film star, was blessed with a wide grin. Her nickname, “The Big Mouth,” was understated. Known for her slapstick antics, Raye was an accomplished singer, dancer, actor, and comedian, whose parents had been vaudeville performers. Her career in show business spanned from 1919 to 1984. Similar to Armstrong, Raye patriotically served her country. Starting in World War II, Raye entertained American troops in three successive wars. In 1993, Raye received a Presidential Medal of Honor from Bill Clinton (Jackson, Markoe, and Markoe; “Martha Raye”).

Colón seems to be having some fun at Jose’s expense by characterizing his voice as a cross being Armstrong and Raye’s. For example, Colón admirably, or at least neutrally, describes Jose as being able to dance and play several instruments, but when it comes to his friend’s voice, Colón says Jose is only able “to sing in a sort of way” (*A Puerto Rican in New York, and Other Sketches* 89). Jokes aside, presumably, the most effective way for Colón to interpret Jose’s humanity--the humanity of Puerto Rican artistic excellence-- is to trope it through the discourse of Afro and Euro-American miscegenation in order to make it culturally intelligible to a mainstream radical and progressive audience. Using Armstrong and Raye as the vehicle for the tenor of his metaphor, Colón situates the Puerto Rican voice and body as neither black nor white but both. This plays into the intellectually and morally suspect racial harmonizing rhetoric that reactionaries use to simultaneously consolidate Puerto Rican nationalism and suppress charges of anti-Afro-Puerto

Rican racism on and off the island. Colón explores the historicity and social efficacy of the former and denounces the latter in sketches that appear in his second collections of essays, *TWIV*. Although Jose might not have the best voice, his talents as a musician and dancer provide him with seasonal migrant work in putatively Cuban conjuntos at summer resorts on the East Coast and in Puerto Rico.

In addition to Jose's musical acumen and virtuosity, the trope of intercultural mixing, influence, and exchange informs Jose and Colón's social lives. Colón devotes a significant amount of the sketch, nearly forty-percent, to their relationship with their unnamed New London, CT friend, "[a]n American Negro, a lover of Latin American music and Puerto Rican food. Every year on his birthday, our friend in New London used to invite thirty to forty Puerto Ricans from New York to his home" (*A Puerto Rican in New York, and Other Sketches* 90). When their friend visited New York, he made the rounds to all of the homes of his Puerto Rican friends. During one of the Negro friend's birthday parties, Colón learns that a Cuban conjunto is playing in a local, posh Connecticut hotel. Colón suspects that Jose might be one of the band members. He calls, his hunch is correct, and he arranges for the band members to come over to the Negro friend's house after their gig is over so they can "relax with *real* people, have *real* food, play and dance a bit" (*A Puerto Rican in New York, and Other Sketches* 91).

Colón continues the trope of Afroethnic mixing, influence, and exchange by describing his musical sessions and collaborations with Jose. One of their pastimes is listening to Jose play, from memory, the songs and "musical phrases" he heard "West Indian Negro" migrant workers sang on the sugar cane plantations when he

was a child in Puerto Rico (Colón, *A Puerto Rican in New York, and Other Sketches* 92). Their other pastime is co-creating songs. When they are together, Jose plays music and Colón writes the lyrics for the music on the spot. At other times, Colón mails Jose lyrics to use for a song, and in two or three months, Jose surprises Colón with a plena or merengue that uses the lyrics Colón sent through the mail. They would sign their names to the sheet music and lyrics and agree that they should send the growing compilation of songs to Washington to be copyrighted, ostensibly Washington, D.C. However, they never do. They stash them in a suitcase that sets under Jose's bed.

On one fateful occasion, Jose, whom Colón describes as "naive," composes his own lyrics, sets them to music, and gives them to a fellow musician friend, a friend whose race, gender, and ethnicity are never revealed. In all likelihood, the fellow musician friend was a fellow Latino, given that the music he/she stole was written in Spanish and composed as one of the aforementioned Puerto Rican musical genres. Jose does all of this without first seeking Colón's counsel. One day, Jose hears his song playing in a local record store as he walks by. When Jose asks about the song, the clerk says, "That is the hit of the hour—everybody is buying it" (Colón, *A Puerto Rican in New York, and Other Sketches* 93). The song is a massive dance hit in the Hispanophone Caribbean and Latin America. Only after Jose hears his song being played in the record store does he inform Colón about his solo project. Because Jose failed to fully comprehend the human capacity for deception and the importance of intellectual property rights in a capitalist economy, he did not copyright his work and consequently he earned no repeating royalties from the song

his musician friend stole from him. Unlike Jose, Colón maintains copyright over his literary intellectual production. Whether he and Jose subsequently secured copyrights for their musical collaborations is unclear.

Racialized capitalist exploitation, Vázquez argues, and endurance in the face of that exploitation is the point of the sketch “Jose.” Colón wants the reader to make the connection that both Jose and Colón are “representative of a class of intellectuals whose labor goes unrecognized in the racialized space of New York” (Vázquez, “Zigzagging through History” 54). Presumably, Vázquez means unrecognized by a mainstream audience, given that Colón has a long, if not lucrative, career of writing for Latino, radical, and progressive newspapers and magazines. Vázquez concludes that “Jose” reveals how the continued production of expressive culture in the face of exploitation and obscurity functions as a form of resistive agency. However, it is equally important to mention that Colón co-creates songs with Jose, that the false friend is probably Latino, and that the thematic core of the sketch is quantitatively and qualitatively structured by intercultural Afroethnic influences and exchanges between Puerto Ricans, “Negros,” and “West Indian Negros.” Colón and Jose’s friendships with African Americans, musical collaboration, and professional negligence cannot be neglected or discounted. Neither can Jose’s influence by West Indian Negro songs nor his deception by the Latino false friend. These are non-trivial aspects of agency, resistance, solidarity, and self-defeat which the concept of insurgent nationalism does not address. Reading “Jose” through the lens of the Afroethnic Impulse helps us better understand, articulate, and profit from those unspoken dialectical tensions and lessons.

As an Afro-Latino, Colón's engagement with the U.S. construction of "black identity" is complex. It is most apparent in sketches twenty-eight to thirty-two, which include insights on Puerto Rican immigrant racial identity formation, racial segregation, panethnic and transcultural alliances with African Americans, and his own ethnoracial subjectivity. For example, in "Carmencita," sketch twenty-eight, Colón's piously Catholic mother-in-law, Carmencita, migrates from Puerto Rico to live in his household in the 1930s.¹⁹ When she arrives, Carmencita is an anti-intellectual ingénue, but by 1941, when Hitler invades the Soviet Union, she has become a pious Communist sympathizer. Part of Carmencita's education includes her racial initiation. When Carmencita first arrives to New York, Colón uses a visit to the Prometheus statue in front of Radio City Café as a lesson about racial segregation and protocol. "If a couple of Negroes dared to sit at one of those tables, they would not be served," Colón tells Carmencita (*A Puerto Rican in New York, and Other Sketches* 104). Confounded, Carmencita asks why and Colón remarks, "Because Negroes are looked upon as inferior in this country and are not given the same rights as the whites. And that goes for us Puerto Ricans, too" (*A Puerto Rican in New York, and Other Sketches* 104). The scene simultaneously equates and draws distinctions between the racial subjectivities of Negroes and Puerto Ricans. In essence, Colón helps Carmencita realize that they, at that very moment, are the hypothetical Negroes who dare not sit at Radio City Cafe for lunch. It is a racial initiation, a necessary part of Carmencita's ethnoracial apprenticeship and acculturation as a citizen on the U.S. mainland. Even though the scene makes much

¹⁹ Published in *PRINY* in 1961.

ado about race, as a whole, the sketch suggests that class trumps race. Ultimately, Carmencita learns that “there was something greater than nationality and so-called ‘race’—and that is the conscious feeling and understanding of belonging to a class that unites us regardless of color and nationality, without belittling the contributions and positive qualities of our particular nationality” (Colón, *A Puerto Rican in New York, and Other Sketches* 105).

Home, displacement, transcultural hospitality, and Afroethnic solidarity are central themes in sketch twenty-nine, “The Lady Who Lived Near the Statue of a Man on a Horse.”²⁰ The story opens on “a cold January night in 1924,” when on his way home from working the 6:00 p.m. to 2:30 a.m. shift at the Brooklyn post office, Colón encounters an elderly, *dark brown* Puerto Rican woman with gray hair (*A Puerto Rican in New York, and Other Sketches* 111, emphasis mine). The woman was lost; she had spent the entire day trying to find her way back to her residence. She lived with an African American family that had taken her in when she had randomly shown up on their doorstep, lost and homeless, some weeks or months before Colón discovered her lost in the snow. Originally, the woman lived in the “palatial” home of a white couple whom she worked for as a domestic (Colón, *A Puerto Rican in New York, and Other Sketches* 112). She had met the couple back on the island and agreed to migrate to New York to work for them.

After being exploited by the white couple for a month, the woman left their home, took a couple of trolleys, and wandered the streets of Brooklyn. When she knocked on a random door in Crown Heights for help, she encountered the African

²⁰ Published in *The Daily Worker* 12-4-1956.

American family that took her in. To earn a living, the woman continued working as a domestic. The African American family served as her chaperon, escorting her to and picking her up from her new sites of employment. On the day that Colón finds her, the woman had gotten lost because she had chosen to try to make it home on her own instead of waiting for one of her African American benefactors to pick her up. All the woman knows is that the family lives close to a statue of a man on a horse. There are several such statues in New York. The woman lives with Colón and his wife for a few weeks until they can find her residence.

Every Sunday, Colón and the old woman search neighborhoods that contain statues of men on horses. Eventually, they come across of statue of the Union Army war hero Ulysses S. Grant, “at Bedford Avenue near Bergen St.” in Crown Heights, Brooklyn (Colón, *A Puerto Rican in New York, and Other Sketches* 114). The African American couple is relieved to learn that no harm has come to the old woman, whom they have not seen in weeks. In the end, all parties agree that it is better for the old woman to continue living with Colón and his wife because they speak Spanish. The story contrasts the exploitative white couple with the charitable and compassionate African American couple. The sketch praises the virtues of Afroethnic solidarity. Recall that the story is set in the early 1920s, the decade of the New Negro Renaissance and the first wave of the Great Migration. One can reasonably imagine that the African American couple that takes the old woman in are a couple of some means, given that they had the space to accommodate her and the spare time to take her to and from employment sites. Perhaps they are accustomed to helping African American migrants and view the old, “dark brown”

Puerto Rican woman as part of their panethnic kith and kin. Ultimately, the story emphasizes that African Americans and “dark brown” Puerto Rican migrants face a common oppression that can serve as the basis for mutual aid and solidarity. If the helpless, old Puerto Rican woman is a touchstone for the efficacy of Afroethnic solidarity in this sketch, then the helpless, young white woman is a touchstone for the potential for interracial compassion and trust in the subsequent sketch, “Little Things Are Big.”

Colón politically fuses Afro-Puerto Rican and African American subjectivities in sketch number thirty-one, “Little Things Are Big.”²¹ “Little Things Are Big” highlights how white supremacy breeds suspicion and diminishes the capacity for mutual compassion and decency between Afroethnics and Euroethnics in the U.S. The sketch is compelling because it describes how Colón’s sense of decency is at war with his sense of self-preservation. The story takes place on the Atlantic Avenue subway station “some time after midnight on the eve of last Memorial Day”; the only other person on the platform with him is “a nice looking white lady in her early twenties” who has “a baby on her right arm, a valise in her left hand and two children, a boy and a girl about three and five years old, trailing after her” (Colón, *A Puerto Rican in New York, and Other Sketches* 115). Colón wants to ask the lady if she needs help getting down the stairs, but he is too afraid of a potential reprisal: “But how could I, a Negro and a Puerto Rican approach this white lady who very likely might have preconceived prejudices against Negroes and everybody with

²¹ Published in *The Daily Worker* in 6-27-56 and in *Mainstream* between the 7th and 19th of Feb. 1957.

foreign accents, in a deserted subway station very late at night" (*A Puerto Rican in New York, and Other Sketches* 116). After considering several possible outcomes, from the insalubrious to the ominous, Colón suppresses his instinct for "courtesy" and pretends not to recognize the woman or her plight: "Like a rude animal walking on two legs, I just moved on half running by the long subway platform leaving the children and the valise and her with the baby on her arm" (*A Puerto Rican in New York, and Other Sketches* 116). The sketch ends with Colón characterizing his choice as a moral failure, a victory for white supremacy's naturalization of racial chauvinism.

From the standpoint of Afroethnic transcultural solidarity, Colón's description of himself as a "Negro and a Puerto Rican" is intriguing because it acknowledges his triple consciousness as a U.S. citizen of African, Hispanophone, and Caribbean descent (*A Puerto Rican in New York, and Other Sketches* 116). However, on the very same page, Colón subsequently reaffirms that African Americans and Puerto Ricans are culturally distinct: "So many slanders are written every day in the daily press against Negroes and Puerto Ricans" (*A Puerto Rican in New York, and Other Sketches* 116). This acknowledges a shared social problem and simultaneously maintains that African Americans and Puerto Ricans are not one, undifferentiated mass of Afroethnics whose sensitivities, historical experiences, and social needs are the same.

"The Mother, the Young Daughter, Myself and All of Us," sketch number thirty-one, underscores the racial tensions that integration often masked in the

North.²² The sketch is among the briefest in the collection, yet it masterfully articulates how polite silence is one of the enabling features that perpetuate the discourse of white supremacy. The story opens with Colón having coffee in an eatery in which there were only two empty seats, one to the right of him and another three seats to his left. A woman and her nine-year old daughter, both presumably Euroethnic, walk into the establishment. The woman directs the child to sit to the right of Colon. The child refuses:

“I won’t sit beside no nigger,” said the child.

And the mother, myself, and all of us never said a word. (Colón, *A Puerto Rican in New York, and Other Sketches* 118)

These are the last two lines of the story. Notably, the sketch is the only one in which the word “nigger” seems to appear in the entire collection. The combination of the sketch’s intense brevity, subject matter, timing, autobiographical point of view, and lyrical sense of closure magnify its intellectual and emotional impact. The story signifies on the notion that silence is consent. The absence of a parental or communal reprimand implicates everyone in the eatery, including Colón, in the sustainability of white supremacy. This sketch, if not about unintentional racial passing, is certainly about racial etiquette and protocol. Presumably, Colón maintains his silence because the prospect of an African American man reprimanding a white female and her child is laden with explosive, if not deadly, potential. The conclusion illustrates Colón’s maturation in relation to his

²² Published in *Mainstream* between the 7th and the 19th of February 1957 and in *PRINY*.

ethnoracial apprenticeship in the U.S. He is neither shocked nor outraged by the girl's derision and defamation. By this point in the memoir, he is thoroughly initiated and racially savvy. However, what is significantly different about this sketch and the preceding one is its lack of didactic editorial intrusion. Although the last line of the story suggests regret and a sense of moral failure on the part of everyone involved, the ending of the story is, nonetheless, ambiguous. It is unclear if the reader, when faced with a similar predicament, is to radically break or pragmatically maintain the traumatic silence.

I conclude my analysis of *A Puerto Rican in New York and Other Sketches* by exploring an immersion narrative. In sketch thirty-two, "Greetings from Washington," Colón describes how his white friends, John and Mary, a couple, are oblivious to the irony of them sending him a post card praising Washington, D.C. as the "City of democracy, equality, and freedom!" (*A Puerto Rican in New York, and Other Sketches* 119). Their insensitivity and myopia cause Colón to reflect on his experience of D.C. when he visited the city on a business trip. Colón's journey south from integrated New York to segregated D.C. is similar to what Stepto calls an immersion narrative, but only to the extent that Colón moves from a space of integrated public accommodations to a space of segregated public accommodations. Because Colón's Afroethnic roots are not in the Deep South, the trip offers him no compensating "balms of group identity" rooted in the specific rituals, customs, and cultural discourses of African Americans from the South (Stepto 167). Although Colón's Caribbean origins seem to disqualify his trip as an immersion narrative, his panethnic solidarity with African Americans qualifies him as an "articulate kinsman"

from the North, which is the role the immersion hero typically assumes (Stepito 167).

As the articulate kinsman, Colón describes numerous instances of racial segregation in D.C., highlighting the hypocrisy at the core of the nation's capital. For example, Colón recalls how a proprietor, in an attempt to humiliate and intimidate, smashed a drinking glass immediately after an African American man finished using it (*A Puerto Rican in New York, and Other Sketches* 119). Colón also sheds light on the social networks Afroethnics needed to travel safely in the South. Prior to going to D.C., a friend provided Colón with a letter of introduction to a "Negro family" so that he would have a place to sleep in the city's segregated capital. Colón describes how difficult it was to find restaurants that served Afroethnics and how "No colored allowed" signs were fixtures in the city's hotels. He reports that "the Negroes and those appearing to be Negroes were sent to dormitories in Howard University or in the neighborhood of that famous Negro institution" (*A Puerto Rican in New York, and Other Sketches* 123). Again, Colón clearly draws an ethnic line between Afro-Puerto Ricans and African Americans, acknowledging the significance of the distinctiveness of the two groups' cultural and historical experiences. The phrase "appearing to be Negroes" does two things: (1) it suggests that the category Negroes is exclusive to Anglophone Afroethnics with roots in the U.S. and (2) it illustrates the absurdity of ethnoracial classification by evoking Drake and Cayton's concept of unintentional passing (i.e. how some Afro-Latinos are somatically indistinguishable from African Americans).

The Afroethnic Impulse in *The Way It Was and Other Writings*

In this next section, I bring attention the essays collected in *TWIW* (1993). The inclusion and sequencing of the essays in this posthumous collection reflect the editorial insights and judgments of Edna Acosta-Belén and Virginia Sánchez Korrol. The editors explain their decisions in the Introduction and they divide the collection into two parts: (1) *The Way It Was* and (2) *Other Writings*. As in the previous section, I primarily explore the essays in the order that they are sequenced in the book, rather than in the order that they were originally published as newspaper articles or in the historical order of the lived experiences they illuminate.

“A Bright Child Asks a Question” is the fifth sketch in *TWIW*.²³ Ostensibly, the anecdote is set in the 1950s, during Civil Rights movement, given that the “progressive” Puerto Rican mother of the precocious child was teaching her daughter “We Shall Overcome,”²⁴ one of the “songs heard among the Afro-Americans during those days”(Colón, *The Way It Was, and Other Writings* 46). Composed of five short paragraphs, the anecdote takes up only one page in *TWIW*. The topic of the essay is the foundational tripartite ethnoracial identity of *the* archetypal Puerto Rican. The first two paragraphs recount Columbus’ discovery of Puerto Rico in 1493, the arrival of the first black slaves in 1510, the myth of Indian extinction, and the miscegenation of the actors in this racial triad. Colón writes:

²³ It seems to be an undated and previously unpublished essay.

²⁴ African-Americans used “We Shall Overcome” in protests as early as 1945, see (Library of Congress). Colón did not start writing in Anglophone magazines until 1955. Mostly likely Conlon refers to the use of the song in the 1950s or 1960s.

The Indians in Puerto Rico almost disappeared by the middle of the next century. The remaining Indians, the blacks and whites who came in great numbers have been mixing and marrying each other in Puerto Rico for over four hundred years.

Although there undoubtedly remain some pure white and pure black families and some Indian-type persons. (*The Way It Was, and Other Writings* 46).

As a consequence of this historical process, the majority of Puerto Ricans, implies Colón, are so thoroughly mixed that they constitute a new and distinct race. For Caribeños, the most prized element of the tripartite racial construct is the Indian admixture. Colón did not originate the tripartite notion of Caribeño ethnoracial identity formation.²⁵ That took place much earlier. According to Garbriel Haslip-Viera, the Puerto Rican, Cuban, and Dominican independence movements exploited Caribeño indigeneity as a nation-building strategy in the 1840s in order to ethnically distinguish themselves from Spanish colonial masters, creole loyalists, and Haitians (“The Taíno Identity Movement Among Caribbean Latinas/Os in the United States” 418). L. Antonio Curet concurs with Haslip-Viera, but adds that after Puerto Rico officially became a U.S. Commonwealth in 1952, its government sought “to develop a

²⁵ Caribeños is a collective term that is sometimes used to refer to people born in the countries of the Hispanophone Caribbean Basin, most notably Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, and Cubans. The discourse of a new race being fashioned out of the contact between Europeans, Africans, and Indians in the Americas developed at least as early as the late nineteenth century. British philosopher Herbert Spencer explores the idea of a distinctly American race in 1882 and Charles W. Chesnutt does so in 1900, see McWilliams 43–56. José Vasconcelos explores it in his 1925 essay “From the Cosmic Race,” see (Stavans and Acosta-Belén A83–A98).

new Puerto Rican identity” and the Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña (ICP) used the nineteenth-century tripartite model to do it. The ICP logo/seal graphically illustrates the foundational grand narrative of the racially tripartite Puerto Rican. In the center of the logo, are three men. From left to right, the men consist of (1) an Indigenous islander dressed in a loin cloth standing in front of corn and tobacco plants and holding crops, (2) a Spanish colonizer, fully-dressed, holding a copy of large book with an Agnus Dei at his feet, and (3) an African descendant dressed in only in pants, holding a drum and machete in his left hand and standing in front of sugar cane with an African mask on the ground between him and the Spaniard.²⁶ As scholars like Haslip-Viera and Curet, note the tripartite racially model may accurately capture the distant past, but it fails to account for the present. Latin American, Hispanic Caribbean, U.S., European, Middle-Eastern, and Asian immigrants subsequently, if not initially, contributed to the cultural, ethnic, and genetic construction of the modern archetypal Puerto Rican.

The conclusion of “A Bright Child Asks a Question” pits the Puerto Rican racial triad (i.e. Indian, European, and African) against the U.S. racial dyad (i.e. African and European) in order to expose the evil of “white” social, political, legal, economic, and cultural hegemony and racial logic:

When the mother came to the words ‘black and white together,’ the little Puerto Rican girl asked, “Mother, what am I, black or white?” (Colón, *The Way It Was, and Other Writings* 46)

²⁶ See the following web site: www.icp.gobierno.pr/

The child's question speaks to the complex and precarious ways in which some "racially ambiguous" Latinos frustrate U.S. racial categorization and are frustrated by it. Their putative racial ambiguity is contextual, a result of living in the U.S. under its hypo-descent, binary racial logic, a logic that also racializes language. To understand the logic and absurdity of the hypo-descent racial dyad, imagine race as a spectrum of color composed of thirty-two different bands of pigment ranging, in diminishing order of obscurity, from the darkest hue at the beginning of the spectrum to imperceptibly black at the very end. In this scheme, one is socially black even if one falls within the final band, the 32nd, the band that is the least obscure, that is indistinguishably white. The remaining thirty-one bands reveal the diversity and inclusivity of hegemonic black identity as well as the absurdity of applying binary rhetoric to a thirty-two-division scheme.²⁷ The concept of race, of course, includes other somatic factors beyond color, but this pigment metaphor, though overly reductive, illustrates how confounding and hegemonic racial categorization can be. Latino frustration with the U.S. hypo-descent racial dyad is at the core of each of the texts discussed in my subsequent chapters and it helps us better understand how and why some Latinos variously accept, reject, and modify the Afroethnic Impulses and fusions in their bildung narratives.

Two years after the 1955 murder of Emmett Till and the Montgomery Bus Boycott, Colón published "Pilgrimage of Prayer," "Phrase Heard on a Bus," and

²⁷ The number thirty-two in the pigment metaphor refers to an old Louisiana law that defined persons with 1/32 African ancestry as being "black," see Omi and Winant 53.

“Little Rock,” the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth sketches in *TWIW*.²⁸

“Pilgrimage of Prayer” is a prime example of pragmatic interethnic nationalism. The essay is an ad, instructional manual, and exhortation. It informs readers about A. Phillip Randolph’s Prayer Pilgrimage for Freedom, a mass rally on the Lincoln Memorial whose intent was to compel “the federal government to fulfill the three-year-old Brown v. Board of Education decision” (The Martin Luther King Jr. Research and Education Institute). Martin Luther King Jr. delivered his “Give Us the Ballot” speech at this rally. Although he frames the rally as a Negro and white affair, Colón stress the pragmatic urgency of Latino coalitional participation:²⁹

We urge all Spaniards, all Puerto Ricans and all other Spanish-speaking people who can, to join the pilgrimage to Washington, Friday, May 17. By being there you will be helping yourself and your own people. For the achievement of first class citizenship, civil rights and equality of opportunity for the Negro people will mean the achievement of all these rights for all of us. (Colón, *The Way It Was, and Other Writings* 75)

Colón tropes the anticipatory tri-racial unity as the coming together of “Negro, white and brown,” anticipating the Chicano brown identity movement of the 1960s, the browning of America discourse of the 1980s, and the resurgence of brown as a

²⁸ Published in *The Daily Worker* on 5-14-57, 7-2-57, and 10-8-57, respectively.

²⁹ For a latter instance of Colón’s faith in coalitional Afroethnic politics see his article “Negro, Puerto Rican Rally Builds Unity,” published in the *The Worker* on 2-16-64.

ethnoracial category in contemporary Latino Studies.³⁰ The second essay, “Phrase Heard on a Bus” is divided into two parts. The first part contrasts Colón’s experience on a Fifth Ave. bus around 1918 with his experience on a Fifth Ave. bus in 1957. The shared theme is class discrimination. Known for its high-end shops and stores, Fifth Ave. functions in the essay as a symbol of privilege and wealth. In the first part of the anecdote, Colón recounts one of his first mainland racial initiations. Having recently arrived in New York from Puerto Rico, Colón had not yet learned or internalized the hypo-descent binary racial protocol of the U.S. He only “vaguely suspected that . . . my color had something to do with the strange conduct on the Fifth Ave. bus conductor” (Colón, *The Way It Was, and Other Writings* 77–78). Colón enters the double decker bus, goes to the upper-level, and sits in the front seat. The conductor collects Colón’s fare and subjects him to a “long” disapproving gaze: “After getting my nickel and examining me from head to foot, he solemnly informed me that ‘my place’ was down below, that I was not supposed to sit in the upper sight-seeing seats” (Colón, *The Way It Was, and Other Writings* 77). Colón refuses to move and ostensibly finishes the bus ride without incident. Colón is outraged that these “little,” quotidian outrages are still being “‘pulled’ today against Negroes and Puerto Ricans” (Colón, *The Way It Was, and Other Writings* 77).

The first half of the essay articulates how class is racialized by showing how the African American and Latino desire for dignity and upward mobility are routinely, publically, and structurally resisted or denied. It also invites readers to

³⁰ For other applications of brown as a critical social category in Central American Studies, see Milian. For its application in Caribbean Studies, see Mordecai.

read Colón's naïve and impromptu act of resistance through the heroic lens of Rosa Park's premeditated resistance. Colón concludes the first half by saying that he has been prejudiced against Fifth Ave. buses ever since his initial humiliation, his initiation into U.S. black subjectivity. In the second part of the sketch, Colón finds himself again on a Fifth Ave. bus. He overhears a rich woman pray for rain so that she will not have to attend a charity function for "the needy and disabled of society" (Colón, *The Way It Was, and Other Writings* 78). Colón is outraged by her callousness and class privilege. He concludes that even after the inevitable socialist revolution in America that it will take years for "we the people" to develop a social consciousness that is free of the "low morals of capitalism" (Colón, *The Way It Was, and Other Writings* 79). Although the first half of the essay might be taken as self-congratulatory and self-aggrandizing and the second half as overly optimistic and panderous, the sketch confirms that though the trauma of racial initiation can be enduring, it can also be edifying if it leads to a commitment to social change.

1957 was a significant year for Civil Rights challenges and victories. On September 3, 1957, Orval M. Faubus, the governor of Arkansas, in blatant defiance of the 1954 Supreme Court school desegregation ruling, employed his National Guard to prevent nine African American students from entering Central High School in Little Rock. On September 9, 1957 President Eisenhower signed the Civil Rights Act of 1957. The 1957 Civil Rights Act established the Civil Rights Commission, provided an additional Asst. Attorney General, buttressed existing civil rights statutes, provided means for further securing and protecting the right to vote, and

provided jury trials for contempt of court and amended federal jury qualifications.³¹ Undaunted, Faubus continued to bar the students from entering Central High. They were finally allowed to attend the high school on September 20th, after President Eisenhower federalized the Arkansas National Guard.

For Colón, the Little Rock Crisis was a sad reminder of the loss of respect slavery earned and segregation continued to earn the U.S. on the global stage. Nearly one month after President Eisenhower signed the 1957 Civil Rights Act, Colón published “Little Rock” (*The Way It Was, and Other Writings* 80–82). In “Little Rock,” Colón contextualizes and critiques “the weak Civil Rights Bill” by comparing it to the “small concessions” that African Americans have been granted since “Booker T. Washington’s time,” contemporary examples being “the position won by a Dr. Bunche or by a couple of Negro cadets graduating from West Point” (*The Way It Was, and Other Writings* 81) Because “the question of FULL equality to the negro [sic] people has not changed,” cautions Colón, “concessions and reforms” should not satisfy “We progressives of all races” (*The Way It Was, and Other Writings* 80–81). Furthermore, progressives who believe that they have “liberated” themselves from racial bias, including those progressives who are “Negro, white, Indians, Chinese, Puerto Ricans or whatever,” must be ever vigilant, examining daily the quality of their interracial relations. In addition, he warns that it is the height of folly for progressives to believe that they can advance their cause by demeaning the opposition: “It cannot be done by just thinking that you can exorcise chauvinism from people by ridiculing, insulting, howling and calling them ignorant. By this

³¹ For an online digital copy of the act, see Eisenhower Presidential Library.

method of insult and innuendo all that we can achieve is to alienate those who are just getting rid of the capitalist poison" (*The Way It Was, and Other Writings* 81). Derision is antithetical to moral suasion. Donating money to progressive causes and passing resolutions that stand against racism are necessary, but they are not, at the organizational level, sufficient, argues Colón. "We OURSELVES ought to do something individually and collectively," he contends (*The Way It Was, and Other Writings* 82). The solution—have progressive white workers lead anti-racist petition drives and send the petitions to the president of the U.S. Colón ends the essay with a rhetorical question that suggests that the impact would be revolutionary. In "Little Rock," we experience the exuberant conviction of Colón's didacticism even if it is attenuated by the weakness of his faith in discursive moral suasion as a singularly infallible tactic.

"The Negro in Puerto Rican History,"³² "The Negro in Puerto Rico Today,"³³ "Arturo Schomburg and Negro History"³⁴ are the twenty-second, twenty-third, and twenty-fifth essays in *TWIW*. The first two were published in 1960 and the latter in 1962. Colón opens the first essay saying that he is responding to frequent demands by readers to discuss the "Negro in Puerto Rico," and he uses the occasion of Negro History Week as his pretext for satisfying their demand (*The Way It Was, and Other Writings* 90–92). Besides the introduction, the essay contains three sub-sections: "Puerto Rico," "Abolitionists," and "Branding." In the introduction, Colón discusses

³² Published on 2-7-1960 in *The Worker*.

³³ Published on 3-13-1960 in *The Worker*.

³⁴ Published on 2-11-1962 in *The Worker*.

the early modern period, detailing how the Portuguese started the African slave trade in Europe and how cities like Lisbon and Seville became populated with “Negro judges and other municipal personnel” and professors like Juan Latino of the University of Granada. In the section titled, “Puerto Rico,” Colón describes how the Spaniards brought these European Negroes to Puerto Rico as “domestic and house servants” (*The Way It Was, and Other Writings* 90). Colón also challenges the myth of Indian extinction in this section by claiming that some of the indigenous Puerto Ricans survived the Spanish conquest by hiding in the mountains and fleeing to other Caribbean islands. Indian extermination and flight motivated the priest Bartolomé de las Casas to request African slaves to replace the indigenous slaves, says Colón. These Africans participated in Indian rebellions and helped them flee their Spanish oppressors, claims Colón. The sub-section “Abolitionists” names several white Puerto Rican abolitionists, some of whom purchased the freedom of slaves and others who freed their slaves. The third sub-section is ostensibly about the brutality of branding, known as “El Carimbo,” but the majority of the sub-section describes how the economic decline of the hacienda system, anti-slavery sentiment, and slave rebellions combined to bring slavery to an end in Puerto Rico on March 22, 1873.

The follow up sketch is “The Negro in Puerto Rico Today” (*The Way It Was, and Other Writings* 93–95). Colón opens this essay saying that the discussion of race in contemporary Puerto Rico is a “delicate” subject because “[t]he fact that we in Puerto Rico have been ‘miscegenating’ for the last four hundred years and more has created a series of illusions, if not downright hypocritical attitudes, that have been

passed down as truth for many years” (*The Way It Was, and Other Writings* 94). The discourse of the tripartite Puerto Rican, that is the discourse of colorblind nationalism, allows hegemonic actors and the socially and historically naïve to claim that there is no racism in Puerto Rico, argues Colón. This illusion, points out Colón, works in tandem with the imported practice of “suave” and “subtle” U.S. structural racism, a covert style of racism that brands “aspiring” young Negroes with “El Carimbo,” not on their bodies, but in their “souls,” “characters,” and “personalities” (*The Way It Was, and Other Writings* 94). Colón concludes the essay by castigating the Puerto Rican Legislature for holding Bill 348 in committee for two years and by deriding Luis Muñoz Marín, the U.S. backed governor, for sending the bill back in committee after it came out. Bill 348 deals with housing discrimination and reads, in part, “it shall be illegal to deny the selling or leasing of any dwelling because of race, creed, color, or political belief” (Colón, *The Way It Was, and Other Writings* 94). Using the image of slave branding, of “El Carimbo,” Colón illuminates the continuity between the past and the present, and ominously reveals the adaptive plasticity of race and racism for both his contemporary audience and posterity.

The penultimate essay in *TWIW* is “Arturo Schomburg and Negro History” (*The Way It Was, and Other Writings* 98–99). This is another one of Colón’s occasional essays. It is written for Negro History Week 1962. Ideally, “Arturo Schomburg and Negro History” should be read in conjunction with “The Library Looks at the Puerto Ricans,” the thirty-seventh sketch in *PRINY*, a sketch that also praises Schomburg. Taken together the two essays exemplify a tradition of Latino hagiography. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Colón personally knew and

worked with Schomburg. This essay reveals details about that relationship and promotes the emulation of Schomburg's life as well the patronage of the Schomburg Collection. The essay retells the origin story of Schomburg's bibliophilia. After a teacher in Puerto Rico tells young Schomburg, "The Negro has no history," little Arturo dedicates his life to recovering everything he can about the history, culture, and contributions of Afroethnic peoples. Colón praises Schomburg for the many Latino organizations to which he belonged and with which he worked. Colón concludes the essay by quoting J.A. Rogers' assessment of the financial and cultural value of the Schomburg Collection and encourages readers to use the occasion of Negro History Week to visit it. By quoting Rogers, an African American journalist and self-trained historian of the African diaspora, Colón brings Afro-Latinos and African Americans into a panethnic contact zone and simultaneously reveals how the challenges and victories of the Civil Rights era permitted Colón to more freely express a pan-African consciousness and cultural nationalism in radical, class-conscious magazines like *The Worker*.

Although "Angels in My Hometown Church" is the ninth essay in *TWIIW*, I deal with it here for chronological and thematic reasons. Like many of the essays in Colón's memoirs, "Angels in My Hometown Church" uses comparison and contrast between the past and the present as its organizing principle. The essay deals with a traumatizing childhood racial initiation. As a boy in Cayey, Colón's best friend was a boy named Pedro: "Pedrito, my childhood friend, was chubby and white. He looked like one of the angels painted around the Virgin Mary" (*The Way It Was, and Other Writings* 53). Colón refers to pictures of the angels surrounding the portrait of the

Virgin Mary in the church in Cayey. Painted by Don Ramón Frade, the cherubs in Colón's hometown church were unique because they were "white, brown, and black" angels, representing, perhaps, a version of Puerto Rico's tripartite foundational racial narrative. The brown angel could represent Indigenous Puerto Ricans as well as archetypal miscegenated Puerto Ricans. Colón and angelic Pedro routinely played together on the vacant land, which was both in front of the church and near Pedro's parents' mansion. Pedro's mother would routinely disrupt the boys' play, calling Pedro home and shouting, "You should not have a friend of that color!" (Colón, *The Way It Was, and Other Writings* 53). In Pedro's absence, Colón would retreat to the interior of the church, look at the angels surrounding the Virgin Mary, and console himself with Frade's conception of multiracial harmony in heaven.

When Colón and his wife visit Cayey in August of 1965, nostalgia "queerly" overtakes the atheist. He feels compelled to visit his old church. Inside he finds that the brown and black angels surrounding the Virgin have been covered over with cement. He also finds "a well-dressed white lady with a fine silken shawl, piously kneeling in front of a Christ figure" (*The Way It Was, and Other Writings* 54). After she rises from prayer, Colón inquires about the missing angels. She tells him an unconvincing story about structural damage being the reason why the black and brown angels were covered over, but eventually she reveals that their erasure is best because Puerto Rico has become an American tourist destination and "Don Ramon Frade, the pride, not only of our hometown but of Puerto Rico, had very queer ideas" (*The Way It Was, and Other Writings* 54). Incensed, sixty-four year old Colón rushes out of the church only to be assaulted by "a voice ricocheting from the

church's thick wall that through time and space refused to die" (*The Way It Was, and Other Writings* 54). It is the voice of Pedro's mother, reminding her cherubic little son that he "shouldn't be playing in front of the church with . . . that boy!!!!!" (Colón, *The Way It Was, and Other Writings* 54). The conclusion is one of Colón's more pessimistic endings. It contains and offers no resolutions, and in doing so it suggests the commonplace notion that the past is ever-present, that there may be no permanent recovery from the trauma of racial initiation, only management in the form of belletristic resistance.

Conclusion

The bildung trajectories in *PRINY* and *TWIIW* reveal the complex, strategic, and fruitful ways in which Afro-Latinos built personal and political solidarities with each other and African Americans from the late Progressive through the Civil Rights movement. They chart the development of Jesús Colón's Marxist-mediated pan-African consciousness, demonstrating how the Afroethnic Impulse has contributed to the development of Latino literature. Colón engaged with the tropes of racial initiation, symbolic geography, panethnic social networks, binary racial schemes, unintentional passing, and pragmatic black nationalism in ways that were consonant with his Communist ideological commitments, his migrant origins from Puerto Rico, and his residence in the urban North. These tropes are far more reflective of the classic African American bildung narrative when viewed through the lens of one of Colón's Southern contemporaries--Evelio Grillo, author of *Black Cuban, Black American: A Memoir* (2000).

CHAPTER 2

ETHNORACIAL APPRENTICESHIP, SYMBOLIC GEOGRAPHY, AND THE POPULAR FRONT IN EVELIO GRILLO'S *BLACK CUBAN, BLACK AMERICAN: A MEMOIR*

“Through my music teaching and my not absolutely irregular attendance at church I became acquainted with the best class of colored people in Jacksonville. This was really my entrance into the race. It was my initiation into what I have termed the freemasonry of the race.”

--James Weldon Johnson, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*, 1912

Introduction

The phases of maturation in the bildungsroman and Freemasonry are both patterned after the three promotional stages of medieval European labor guilds: apprentice, journeyman, and master mason. For example, the three degrees of Freemasonry are Entered Apprentice, Fellowcraft, and Master Mason. Like the developmental stages in the bildungsroman, Freemasonry is based on a system of progressive moral revelation and intellectual and civic refinement. By invoking the rhetoric of Freemasonry, James Weldon Johnson explicitly frames *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* as a bildung narrative and his narrator as an Entered Apprentice in the discourse of African American identity and culture. Johnson's Freemasonry metaphor highlights the crucial roles that the African American bourgeois and church-going classes play in developing what Robert B. Stepto calls “the articulate kinsman,” the individual who has the talent and temperament to pursue social justice for the African American community through discursive and direct action (167). The articulate kinsman is the community's representative in the political arena, the kingdom of culture, and the marketplace of

ideas. More importantly, the concept of the articulate kinsman is linked to Stepto's concept of symbolic geography.

Stepto's concept of symbolic geography is manifest in the immersion and ascent narratives that often occur in African American slave narratives and autobiographical writing. These narratives describe journeys of African American racial identity formation. The ascent narrative, as defined by Stepto, is a story about slave escape or African American migration out of the South to the North. Ascent narratives focus on heroic self-transformation through, among other things, the attainment of education, financial security, political empowerment, and increased social mobility (Stepto 66-68 and 167-168). The immersion narrative is a "cultural immersion ritual" that involves travel to and prolonged residence in the Deep South by a subject who, typically, did not grow up there (66 and 167-168). Usually, this journey is voluntary. In the immersion narrative, the South is prefigured as the taproot of African American identity and cultural authenticity. The South becomes the place where the immersion hero acquires the "balms of group identity" that ameliorate the alienation produced by living outside of the ancestral homeland (Stepto 167).

In this chapter, I examine the relationship between symbolic geography, transethnic acculturation, pragmatic nationalism, and Popular Front interracial politics in Evelio Grillo's *Black Cuban, Black American: A Memoir*.³⁵ *BCBA* deserves renewed and sustained critical attention as a bildung memoir because it is not only

³⁵ Arte Público Press published Grillo's memoir in 2000 as part of its Hispanic Civil Rights series. I subsequently refer to Grillo's memoir as *BCBA* from this point on.

a narrative about Afroethnic transculturation, but it is also a story about political acculturation and activist maturation and refinement. Grillo's memoir prompts significant questions about regional pride, transnationalism, social mobility, panethnic identity formation, cultural authentication, and the tension between afrolatinidad and "black identity" formation in Afro-Latino bildung narratives published in the post-Civil Rights era. Although Grillo earns degrees from elite African American schools and colleges, plays significant leadership roles in African American political and civic organizations, influences African American electoral politics in California, and advocates for the underserved in the Carter administration, he has yet to receive in-depth critical attention from scholars in African American Studies. This study fills that gap. This essay seeks to raise the profile and expand the intercultural discussion of Evelio Grillo's literary and political interventions in both African American and Latino Studies.

Like his fellow Floridian James Weldon Johnson, Evelio Grillo was an articulate kinsman par excellence. Grillo was a community organizer and Democratic political operative of Afro-Cuban descent who played a significant role in African American political history at the local, state, and federal levels of government in the post-World War II era. Grillo devoted his entire adult life to shaping African American electoral politics and effecting social change for America's poor and underserved. His political activism and organizing, relative to African Americans, included work in the Southern Negro Youth Congress (SNYC) in New Orleans, the East Bay Democratic Club (EBDC) in Oakland, CA, and the U. S. Department of Health Education and Welfare (HEW) in Washington D.C. Grillo devoted an inordinate

amount of his time and energy to African American institutions and causes because during his formative years in Tampa, FL he was culturally and ideologically elevated in the “freemasonry of the race.”

In his memoir *BCBA*, Grillo portrays the story of his acculturation as an adept in African American history and culture. He earns his three degrees in the “freemasonry of the race” by going on literal and cultural journeys that require him to navigate the symbolic geography of African American identity politics in Jim Crow America. In the memoir’s Introduction, Kenya Dworkin y Mendez uses the journey motif to define Grillo’s process of becoming African Americanized, his ethnogenesis:

Black Cuban, Black American is the story of one Afro-Cuban's adventures in identity reconstruction. It is Evelio Grillo's intimate account of his costly but effective triumph over racial and ethnic ambiguity and disempowerment--a journey from Afro-Cubanness to African-Americanness. This is a journey many have made, but few, if any, have heretofore written about. (viii)

In *Forging Diaspora: Afro-Cubans and African Americans in a World of Empire and Jim Crow*, the historian Frank A. Guridy adds nuance to Dworkin y Mendez’s interpretation of Grillo’s ethnogenesis: “While Evelio Grillo’s story seems to easily lend itself to an assimilationist narrative, the experiences he and his family had actually highlight the process of transculturation, the making of a proto-Afro-Latino culture and identification” (184–85). In *Unbecoming Blackness: The Diaspora Cultures of Afro-Cuban America*, the historian Antonio López notes that the experience of Afro-Cubans being racialized as African Americans highlights the complex relationship between transculturation, pragmatic nationalism, and passing:

His [Grillo's] engagement with "African Americanization"— in fact, his "passing" as African American— structures *Black Cuban, Black American*, which includes accounts of the many African American mentors and institutions responsible for Grillo's upward mobility. Yet, even as he engaged in African Americanization practices, Grillo was conscious of the difference his afrolatinidad made. In a 2007 conversation that I had the pleasure of sharing with him in Oakland, Grillo remarked to me, apropos of his book title, "It pleases me that I have to write the word black twice," a self-reflective comment, as I understand it, channeling a special insight: that the multiple "blacks" of the title, neither interchangeable nor unrelated, hint at the social collaboration between Afro-Latinas/os and African Americans characterizing Grillo's life, a collaboration that finds expression in the artistic pleasure Grillo admits taking in the seemingly repetitive— but, in fact, different—act of writing the word(s) "twice." (215)

López's interpretation reveals the double consciousness that results from Afro-Latinos being at the intersection of two panethnic groups: Latinos and Afroethnics. Like Guridy, López is one of very few scholars in Latino Studies who explore Grillo's memoir. However, none of these authors has written a comprehensive transcultural account of Grillo's "intervention in the literary history of the [Cuban-American] diaspora" (López 1). Guridy devotes two pages to the subject of Evelio Grillo's unique role in African American history and culture. López doubles Guridy's coverage, devoting the four-page conclusion of *Unbecoming*

Blackness, "Write the Word *Black* Twice," to the transcultural ethos and to the unique publication history and marketing of Grillo's memoir.

Claudia Milian, in her book *Latinizing America: Black-Brown Passages and the Coloring of Latino/a Studies*, writes about Grillo's Southernness and the tensions between his "memorialization of U.S. African Americanness" and the "Hispanic Americanization" of his memoir by his publisher, Arte Público Press. Milian notes that the opening chapters of *Black Cuban, Black American*, the chapters that have the most Latino cultural references, do not "lead one to believe that Grillo annulled his Cubaness and that he was wholly and incontestably assimilated into U.S. African Americanness. What comes out of Grillo's Cuban, black, and American triangulation is a Latined décalage that operates in all of these ethnoracial liaisons His passing from Afro-Cubaness to U.S. African Americanness is not a closure. It is an open-ended temporality Grillo's narrative reformulates his Hispanization and gives prominence to a black Latined Americanness Grillo's southern Latinities show that his altering black Cubaness, and/or black Americanness, clings to each Cuban or U.S. African American Latinity that pauses through the comma evoked in his title" (47).

Janelle Chevon Coleman devotes the third chapter of her dissertation to a comparative analysis of liminal space and the "appropriation of blackness" in *BCBA* and *Down These Mean Streets* by Piri Thomas (133).³⁶ The current literature on

³⁶ Reading *BCBA* as an assimilation narrative rather than as an acculturation narrative, Coleman addresses the basic features of Grillo's ethnoracial liminality. However, the chapter tends to equate blackness with being exclusively African American, does not account for Grillo's explicit references to social justice work and

BCBA misses an opportunity to contextualize Grillo's intervention in African American literary, intellectual, and political history.

Is there a relationship between Afro-Latino bildung narratives and the symbolic geography of the African American autobiographical tradition? Does there exist a relationship between racial initiation, personal memory, authenticity, the unreliable narrator, and the formal structure and thematic concerns of transcultural Afro-Latino bildung narratives? Does the künstlerroman narrative in *BCBA* exhibit a significant relationship between racial segregation, military service, and Popular Front politics? Are ethnogenesis and passing linked to the tropes of the good mother, bad mother, and missing father in *BCBA*? Is there a relationship between industrial change, economic decline, and ethnoracial identity formation? What is the nature of the relationship between education, social mobility, and transcultural ethnoracial identity formation? These are some of the questions that drive my analysis of *BCBA*. The intercultural fusion of *BCBA* makes it a unique but not uniquely African American text. *BCBA* chronicles Grillo's apprenticeship in and mastery of the Freemasonry of African American literature, history, culture, and politics. In essence, *BCBA* is the portrait of an activist as a young man.

* * *

Evelio Grillo died on December 28, 2008 in Oakland, California, where he spent the majority of his adult life and professional career. However, Grillo was not an Oakland native. He was born on June 4, 1919 in Tampa, FL, one year before

advocates, refers to Grillo and Thomas as if they were transnational immigrants rather than U.S. born citizens, and sometimes confuses Grillo with his son Judge Evelio M. Grillo.

white rioters massacred African Americans in Ocoee, FL and four years before they did the same in Rosewood, FL (Greenbaum 224). Grillo was the youngest of five children. The eldest child was his brother Henry who was nine years older than Grillo. The three other siblings, "Raul, Anival, and Sylvia followed, in approximately eighteen-month intervals" (Grillo 22). Both of Grillo's parents were of Cuban descent and worked in the cigar factories of Ybor City, a district of Tampa. Grillo's mother's family migrated to Florida in 1894 (Grillo 10), four years before Cuba gained its independence from Spain in 1898. To put Grillo's mother's immigration in historical context, it is necessary to recall Cuba's Ten Years War. According to the historian Nancy Raquel Mirabal, Cuba's "Ten Year's War (1868-1878) prompted cigar manufactures in Cuba to relocate to the United States providing employment for Cuban exiles and migrants" (152). Cuba did not abolish slavery until 1886, so in theory, the U.S. then would have been a destination where enslaved Afro-Cubans could have pursued their freedom as people of color. Grillo's mother may have been as Americanized as Grillo, given that her formative years were spent in the U.S. For example, Grillo tells us that his mother attended elementary school in Jacksonville, FL, which means that she was either born in the U.S. or came to America as a very young child.

Grillo spent his formative years learning about the heroes, history, foodways, and calling signs and hailing signals of African American culture in Ybor City. As an adolescent, he attended Paul Laurence Dunbar High, a prestigious black college-preparatory school in Washington, D.C. During his years at Dunbar, Grillo became a protégé of Howard and Sue Thurman. Howard Thurman was a famous African

American religious and civil rights leader and the Dean of Chapel at Howard University. Henry, Grillo's brother, was already connected to Sue Thurman (as well as Mary McLeod Bethune) before Grillo came to D.C. Grillo writes that Sue Thurman introduced Henry to her and her husband's elite social circle. When Grillo arrived in D.C. he was also initiated into the Thurman's social circle: "It was an important moment in my social and psychological development as a black American. I became part of not merely a black American home, but a black upper-class family, one at the very center of black American intellectual life and very prominent in larger American religious circles" (Grillo 73).

Howard Thurman was responsible for Grillo being accepted into Xavier University, a historically African American college in New Orleans, LA. Grillo's immersion into African American society and culture during his primary and secondary school years, and his subsequent racial solidarity with African American soldiers in the U.S. Army during World War II, are just a few of the elements that make the story of his life a politically significant transcultural memoir. The political significance of *BCBA* lies in its potential to strengthen old and build new transcultural alliances between Afro-Americans and Afro-Latinos in the United States and the Spanish-speaking Caribbean. The literary and cultural significance of the memoir exists in the complex ways it uses culturally specific tropes and narrative strategies to construct and authenticate Grillo's identity as an African American.

Grillo divides the eighteen chapters of *BCBA* into three parts: *Part One: Ybor City*, *Part Two: Going Up North*, and *Part Three: At War*. These three sections cover

the first twenty-six years of Grillo's life. The sections chronicle his formative years, his high school and college days, and his tribulations as a young black soldier in the segregated U.S. Army, during World War II. The three parts of the memoir are analogous to the three degrees of freemasonry: Entered Apprentice, Fellowcraft, and Master Mason. These three sections depict the construction of Grillo's racial consciousness and ethnic solidarity with African Americans. The authenticating tropes in Grillo's act of *passing* into African Americanness include references to friendships, mentorships, animosities, and romantic couplings with African Americans. There are also glowing references to African American universities, foodways, spirituals, and sermons (Grillo 12, 42, 43, and 45). More significantly, there are explicit references to African American revolutionaries, abolitionists, singers, writers, and public intellectuals (Grillo 17). Grillo even goes so far as to devote an entire page to the lyrics of the "Negro national anthem," James Weldon Johnson's "Lift Every Voice and Sing" (Grillo 45-46).

Grillo frames the three parts of *BCBA* with an Acknowledgments section and an Epilogue. My analysis of *BCBA* begins with the Acknowledgements section, in which Grillo explains why he dedicates the book to his mother, Amparo Valdés Grillo, and to his sister, Sylvia Grillo Griñán. The Acknowledgements section is patently confessional and psychoanalytical, setting the stage for the interpersonal dynamics and historical forces that influence Grillo to become a master mason in the craft of African American identity and politics.

Entered Apprentice in the South: The Formative Years of Evelio Grillo's African American Acculturation

Like two other Afro-Latino memoir writers in this study, Grillo has a particularly fraught relationship with his mother, a relationship that significantly contributes to his affinity for African American history and culture. Grillo first articulates the emotional division between himself and his mother in the Acknowledgments. In the Acknowledgements, Grillo contrasts his uplifting African American mentors with his emotionally unavailable mother and violent older sister. These contrasting sets of interpersonal relationships shed light on the forces that motivate Grillo's complex ethnoracial identity formation. Grillo opens the Acknowledgements with a philosophical statement about the primacy of nature over nurture. He grants nature the upper hand in shaping our lives, but the transformative and redemptive power of nurture is what fascinates him. He goes on to expound on the ways that nurture, via the apprentice/mentor relationship, shapes identities and fosters interpersonal skills that the social order prizes.

Although he dedicates his memoir to his mother and sister, the first people Grillo praises in his Acknowledgements are his "prime nurturers," the African Americans and Euro-Americans who mentored or taught him in his formative years: Nicholas Hezekiah Martin, Dr. Howard Thurman, Sue Bailey Thurman, Sis. Mary Felicity, Sis. Mary Elise, Dr. Kate Elliot Turner Studt, and Albina Blanchett. He credits these mentors with being, respectively, (1) "role model's epitome," (2) his "father," (3) "mind-opening," (4) "utterly dedicated" to "the education of black children," (5) "love incarnate and developer of my soul," (6) the architect of his

professionalism, and (7) the woman “in whose lap [he] learned to read” (xv). With the exception of the two nuns and Dr. Studt, all of Grillo’s mentors seem to be African American.

After praising his prime nurturers, Grillo focuses on his mother, Amparo Valdes Grillo, and older sister, Sylvia Grillo Grinan. Grillo simultaneously praises his mother and sister for the quantity of their nurturing but pillories them for its quality. For example, he gives them credit for the “days and hours dedicated to [his] care and development,” for “the primary day-by-day responsibilities for [his] physical care” (xv and xvi). However, he diminishes that praise by saying that in that respect they were “like all mothers” (xv). In other words, at the very minimum, they provided basic needs like food, shelter, physical supervision, and moral instruction. Even when Grillo tries to exceptionalize the praise for his mother, he either diminishes the “unparalleled” credit he gives her by calling her “chief among the villagers who reared me” or he exaggerates it by calling her “lighter of my paths through life’s labyrinths” (xv and xvi). These compliments are interspersed with less flattering acknowledgements. For example, Grillo “feared” and “resented” his mother; “sought in vain for her approbation” by trying to be a “good boy;” found that “she was usually too tired, and too beset, to baby” him; generally believed that she “had little capacity for hugging and cuddling”; and felt that the care his mother and sister provided was tainted by “screaming fights” (xv-xvi). He goes on in this vein throughout the memoir.

Absent in Grillo’s tapestry of backhanded praise is the fact that Amparo was a thirty-six-year-old widow with five young children between the ages of one and

nine. Grillo sums up his relationship with his mother and sister best when he says, “However difficult they were to love, they mothered me” (xv). The quality of the relationship between Grillo and his mother prompts a keen realization about the impact it had on his romantic relationships (xv). Grillo’s evaluation of that impact is decidedly psychoanalytical in that he confesses to becoming aware of the “pervasiveness” and “endurance of her influence” on his attempts to “develop loving, intimate relationships with women” (xvi). Although he acknowledges the influence, he does not articulate if it was for the better or for the worse. However, the most significant aspect of the Acknowledgments is that it previews the scene of Grillo’s physical and psychological emancipation from his mother. Grillo describes the “major confrontation” the two of them had when he was fifteen. At that age, Grillo decides to move to that “clearly fabulous land called Up North to ‘get an education’” (xv). He had not been doing well in school in Tampa and he did not see any opportunities for himself if he remained in Florida. His mother did not want him to leave, but he insisted. To her credit, Grillo’s mother subsidized his trip by pawning her wedding ring. Confronting his mother and convincing her to support his trip gave Grillo a sense of “power [he] had never known before” (xv). When Grillo cut his maternal ties and pursued his fortune up North in Washington, D.C., he embraced, and was embraced by, a new mother—the bourgeois African American intellectual class with its Progressive and Popular Front leanings.

The first seven chapters of *BCBA* reveal significant aspects about what Grillo calls his progressive “acculturation” as an African American (56, 57, and 65). The fact that he uses and repeats the word “acculturation” rather than “assimilation” is

an ideological/political act. Unlike Dwokin y Mendez, Grillo never uses the word “assimilation,” or any version of it, in his memoir to describe his ethnogenesis as an African American. I argue that he avoids using the term assimilation because it does not accurately capture his complex and conglomerated identity. Assimilation connotes a sense of erasure and replacement, whereas acculturation implies incorporation of a secondary identity without the attenuation of the primary one. Assimilation implies loss and gain, whereas acculturation implies only gain, as in the sense that one accrues new experiences, insights, and ways of being.

* * *

BCBA opens in 1922 when Grillo is three years old. The first chapter is titled “*Father*,” but neither Grillo’s father nor his mother is the first person he mentions in the chapter. The first person that Grillo mentions in *BCBA* is his African American caretaker, Mrs. Byna. Although Grillo only mentions her briefly in the first paragraph of the first chapter, it turns out that Mrs. Byna is a crucial component of his acculturation process. Mrs. Byna lived behind the Grillos, across an alley. We learn more about Mrs. Byna in the fourth chapter, in which Grillo describes her as “a stout woman of about sixty” who was kind and loving (19). Although this is a factual description of Mrs. Byna, it intertextually taps into the trope of the good mother and the mythology of benevolent motherhood. In Mrs. Byna’s house, Grillo felt “safe and secure” because Mrs. Byna gave him warm hugs and soft looks, never struck him, and taught him how to read. Mrs. Byna was completely unlike his mother, who lacked “tenderness” and “couldn’t express herself physically” (19). After Grillo became school age, Mrs. Byna moved deeper into the African American part of the

neighborhood, Grillo visited her almost every day. She, Grillo says, helped him develop “a strong identity with black Americans . . . and a sense of being loved by adults” (20).

The first chapter is dedicated to the few hazy memories Grillo has of his father, Antonio, of whom he had “only the vaguest impressions” (3). Grillo remembers his father’s presence and the routine of waiting for him to arrive home from work, but he does not remember his specific image. However, Grillo does claim to recall, with specificity, the smell of *biftec a la palomilla* that suffused the house as his parents argued over whether Grillo should accompany his father on a trip to Cuba. Grillo presents his recollection of the argument in direct quotes. Using direct quotations asserts a sense of certitude that strains credulity, given the fact that Grillo was three years old at the time of the row between his mother and father. The trip to Cuba was for medical treatment. Grillo’s father had tuberculosis and he, presumably, thought he would be better served by going home. Antonio made it to Cuba, but he did not make it back to Florida. He died in his homeland. Grillo remembers his father coughing up blood in a porcelain basin, the grotesquely dripping refrigerated coffin that held his corpse at the wake, and the horse and buggy funeral cortege. After his father died, Grillo’s mother, Amparo, never spoke of Antonio again. Grillo imagines that it was out of anger because his father drank “quite heavily,” gambled, and was a “womanizer” (4). The emotionally absent mother and physically absent father in the Acknowledgements and the first chapter set the stage for Grillo’s piteous quest for surrogate parents and personal identity from among models within the African American bourgeois intellectual class.

The next six chapters intersperse ethnographic digressions with autobiographical anecdotes. For example, in the second chapter Grillo provides details about Ybor City's significance in the cigar manufacturing industry, its racially and ethnically segregated neighborhoods, and some of the culturally particular recreational practices of the Cuban immigrants, like *bolita* (a lottery game) and séances. From 1880 to 1930, writes Grillo, Tampa was known as the "Cigar-Making Capital of the World." Ybor City was the section in Tampa where much of the cigar industry was concentrated. Cubans, Italians, Spaniards, African Americans, and "a not very visible number of white Americans of European extraction" populated Ybor City, which was named after Vicente Martinez Ybor, one of Tampa's first cigar factory owners (6). Grillo's parents worked in a cigar factory. His father, Antonio, was a finisher and his mother, Amparo, was a bonchera (i.e. a buncher).

Grillo describes how moving to the U.S. forced Cuban immigrants to adopt Jim Crow racial logic and U.S. ways of being black. He contrasts the U.S. to Cuba, where there was no legalized racial segregation. Afroethnics in Cuba had unrestricted access to government and commercial accommodations, and they worked as administrators in institutions like schools, hospitals, and the military, claims Grillo; however, in Cuba, "separation by economic class made for *de facto* segregation by race" (7). Affluent Afro-Cubans, asserts Grillo, socialized among the affluent, who were predominantly Euroethnic. "Es Negro, pero es Negro blanco" (He is a black man, but he is a white black man) was an expression I heard often," writes Grillo (7). This Cuban expression of African inferiority recalls a similar expression from the Dominican Republic--"blancos de la tierra." The rise of

“deracialized social consciousness” in the Dominican Republic, says Torres-Saillant, started in the 1600s with the collapse of the sugar-based plantation economy. In the early 1800s, bourgeois Afroethnics in the Dominican Republic called themselves “blancos de la tierra,” a term that conflates biological whiteness with socioeconomic affluence:

Blacks and mulattos who had reached the same level of their former master either negatively or positively, that is, through their own social ascent or the white colonists’ descent, were, indeed, the equivalent of former *blancos*. They lacked a material frame of reference wherein to construct a concept of identity based on racial self-differentiation, that is, on affirmation of their blackness. (“Tribulations of Blackness” 1095–1096)

The idea that affluence whitens is not unique to the Hispanic Caribbean. The concept is also common in the U.S. cultural imaginary. For example, the Jim Dandy/“uppity nigger” trope is a manifestation of its presence in the nineteenth century, and the situation comedy *Blackish* is a twenty-first century expression of the concept. However, Euroethnic privilege and supremacy mediate the social and political agency that affluence grants Afroethnics in the U.S.

Jim Crow customs and laws physically segregated black Cubans from white Cubans in the U.S. They forced Afro-Cubans to live in the African American section of Ybor City, while white Cubans had a wider range of options of where to take up residence. The only places where Afro-Cubans and white Cubans came together was

at work, funerals, séances, grocery cooperatives, pre-pay health clinics, and perhaps labor union meetings. They did not visit each others' homes nor did they attend the same churches, claims Grillo. Grillo summarizes the communal trauma of Jim Crow racialization in a poignant line: "I don't remember playing with a single white Cuban child" (9). Jim Crow drove a racial wedge between Cuban nationals in the U.S.

Grillo describes the section of Ybor City in which he grew up as "a ghetto within a ghetto" where "black Cubans and black Americans live together" (10). The Afro-Cubans were the larger of these two groups in this section. "A common racial identity as blacks," writes Grillo, "did not bridge the gulf that existed between the two groups" (11). Language, literacy rates, religion, interracial coupling practices, foodways, Catholic schooling, and mutual suspicion separated the two groups. Because first generation Afro-Cubans had "limited contact" with African Americans, they ascribed "the violence that occurred within the lowest economic class to the entire black community," passing on their fears and suspicions of African Americans to their children (14). However, the relationships that "bonded young black Cubans to black Americans" were the relationships they developed in school, in intercultural courtships and marriages, and in recreational social spaces (15).

The segregated neighborhoods and school system of Tampa served as the training grounds on which Grillo's apprenticeship in African American culture took place: "The American pattern of rigid segregation of blacks and whites asserted itself in the schools with unrestrained, brutal vigor . . . School resolved all of my confusion about my color, my Spanish tongue, and my culture. I was a black boy. *That's* what was important!" (Grillo 39). Grillo attended St. Peter Claver's, a

segregated Catholic school named after a Jesuit priest who dedicated his life to the abolition of slavery in fifteenth century Colombia. At St. Peter Claver's, "the mean and combative" African American children teased the Afro-Cubans, calling them "tally wops," a derogatory term for Italian immigrants (39). However, tensions were not always rife. Grillo, in particular, bonded with African American children over food. He found their exotic American lunches physically and culturally satiating:

The black American children had all kinds of interesting delicacies such as meat loaf, liverwurst, chicken, cornbread, a stick of celery, a small apple and, perhaps, a cookie or two. Occasionally, I would manage, with great satisfaction, to swap half of my bologna sandwich for half of a liverwurst sandwich. I could not imagine where my schoolmate's family could procure a delicacy so very special! (42)

Mason, an African American friend, introduced Grillo to sour pickles. Grillo describes the pickles as marvelous and the surreptitious experience of buying them at the corner store adventurous because he did it without his mother's permission (42).

Coincidentally, another component of African American culture that young Grillo finds exotically seductive is the Protestant sermon. Grillo's initiation into this aspect of Protestant African American church life occurs when, as a twelve-year-old, he attends the funeral of Mrs. Bina's nephew, a veteran who died from complications related to poison gas exposure during World War I.³⁷ The minister's sermon focuses on the political origins of the war. Grillo characterizes the African

³⁷ Here I assume that Mrs. Bina is the same person as Mrs. Byna.

American minister as articulate, educated, eloquent, and passionate. He describes the minister's sermon as transfixing, transporting, and rapturous, unlike the "bland homilies" at St. Peters (45). What most fascinates Grillo about the sermon is that it is more than an impersonal, abstract moral lesson. It explicitly articulates geopolitical history as a force that directly shapes and takes the lives of people in his own community and extended family. It also foreshadows how those same political and historical forces will come to exploit him as a soldier in World War II. This is one of the moments, I argue, that inspires Grillo to become an "articulate kinsman" for people of African descent in the U.S.

Grillo's primary school education did not emphasize the relevance of history to its students' lives as Afroethnics. The teachers at St. Peters either omitted African American history and culture or taught it in a perfunctory fashion. They covered a short list of topics and did so in a cursory way. For instance, the school honored the significance of the Emancipation Proclamation, celebrated President Lincoln's birthday, used textbooks that portrayed slaves as infantilized people needing the care and guidance of their white masters, and paid homage to Crispus Attucks and Booker T. Washington (41 & 44). The instructors at St. Peters were not socially or pedagogically equipped to help their students develop an effective sense of Afroethnic pride, agency, and resistance:

Despite their unreserved commitment to an excellent education for black children, despite the close and affectionate bonds they formed with us, there was one thing they could not teach us: the black culture. They could not help us understand our past as children of slaves, to

handle the rage we harbored in the face of the inequities, the humiliations we faced on a daily basis in a totally segregated society.

They could not help us to *feel* black. (44)

Overall, Grillo describes the St. Peter's experience as positive because Afro-Cuban and African American children organically developed a sense of common experience, history, and purpose as Afroethnics in Jim Crow America.

After Grillo entered Booker T. Washington High School in the ninth grade, his competency in African American history and culture increased. Attending public schools together dissolved the cultural barriers between Afro-Cubans and African Americans, Grillo writes:

Social class, different languages, and different cultures divided the two communities. Black Cubans still built dependent relationships with black Americans, especially our black American teachers, with whom we formed deep, affectionate bonds. . . .

My heart and mind belonged to Nat Turner, Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, Paul Laurence Dunbar, John Brown, Paul Roberson, Langston Hughes, W. E. B Dubois, Allison Davis, Alain Locke, and the two brothers, James Weldon and James Rosamond Johnson, who wrote the song very dear to my heart, "Lift Every Voice and Sing. (16-17)

Teachers like Mr. Harris, Mr. Stewart, Mrs. White, and Miss Anderson, encouraged the students at Booker T. Washington High "to resist the evils of a segregated society" (45). In summation, the difference between the racecraft at St. Peter's and

Booker T. Washington was like day and night when it came to the discourse of resistance.

Schoolyard relationships with African Americans translated into neighborhood relationships and courtships. For example, at Booker T. Washington High School, Grillo had a romantic relationship with Pauline, an African American girl (13). “Verdell, the unrequited love of [Grillo’s] childhood” was bi-ethnic; her mother was African American and her father Afro-Cuban:

Though Verdell lived in the Cuban ghetto, she had none of her activities in it. Assuming her mother’s identity, she attended a Protestant church and had her social life within the black American ghetto. She was comfortable and very popular as a black American beauty, the rage among black American boys older than I was. (16)

Afro-Cuban youth also comingled in spaces outside of school. For instance, African American organizations rented and held dances at La Union Marti-Maceo, the Afro-Cuban community center. Afro-Cubans and African Americans watched films together at the “colored” movie theater, which also served as a stage for live performances like the Cab Calloway band. Gasparilla Day and the South Florida Fair were also mutual occasions for comingling. The fair held segregated children’s days. “[S]ome very light mulatto” Cuban children, like Grillo’s cousins, passed as white and went on the day reserved for white patrons, however; unambiguous Afro-Cuban and African American children mutually attended on “Colored Children’s Day” (15-16).

After completing primary and secondary school, Afro-Cubans and African Americans continued to congregate in segregated colleges and universities, like Florida A & M University in Tallahassee and Bethune-Cookman College in Daytona Beach. For a year or two, Grillo's brother Henry attended Bethune-Cookman, where he became a protégé of the African American activist Mary McLeod Bethune and met Mrs. Sue Thurman, wife of the Rev. Howard Thurman, the famous African American religious and civil rights leader who was Dean of Chapel at Howard University (24 & 73). Ultimately, Henry followed Bethune to Washington D.C., where he lived in an African American neighborhood near Howard University, an historically African American college. Henry worked "as a bookbinder in the schools, a government-subsidized position"; he eventually secured a job as a clerk in the federal government for \$1,080 a year (59 & 64). Grillo boasts that he and his four siblings all attended college and that three earned professional degrees beyond college (24). College-educated Afro-Cubans "achieved nearly full integration, socially, into black American life" (12). Grillo recalls how he and his family admired their neighbor Mirta, an Afro-Cuban college graduate who taught in the public schools and exclusively socialized among middle-class African Americans. The sheer existence of Mirta, says Grillo, taught the Afro-Cuban community "that the future of black Cuban youth lay in integration with black Americans (40).

"Those [Afro-Cubans] who did not attend college," writes Grillo, "went to live circumscribed lives in the Latin ghettos of New York City" (12). The historian Susan D. Greenbaum writes that during the Great Depression, mechanization and the defeat of the union collapsed the cigar industry in Tampa: "Workforce reduction was

even greater than the drop in production, because machines could make twice as many cigars per worker” (231). “Between 1930 and 1940, claims Greenbaum, “35 percent of the Cuban-born population of Tampa departed. Black Cubans confronted the bleakest opportunities, and they left in the largest numbers. More than half (51 percent) of Tampa’s Afro-Cubans emigrated during the 1930s” (232). They migrated to New York because since the nineteenth century it “had been headquarters for the Cuban exile leadership and was a familiar destination of itinerant cigarmakers” (Greenbaum 233). Mirabal writes that the Tampa exodus to New York also corresponded with a similar exodus from Cuba: “During the early 1930s a smaller number of Afro-Cubans left Cuba in protest of the repressive policies of President Gerardo Machado (1925-1933). The majority of these settled in New York, where they became involved in political and cultural clubs and labor unions” (153).

The few remaining Afro-Cubans in 1930s Tampa grew closer to African Americans socially, professionally, and intimately. They took up positions in the African American professional, political, and entrepreneurial class. Recall Grillo’s neighbor, Mirta. “Our choices,” admits Grillo, “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 Integration presented us with simple options: join the black American society, with its rich roots deep in this country, or have no American roots at all” (12). Although it had its challenges, integration into the African American community was not a particularly hard feat. Grillo says African

Americans accepted Afro-Cubans as “part of the black community, for that was the way we were perceived by the larger American society” (15).

In Masonic terms, Grillo’s formative years in Ybor City were his years as an Entered Apprentice in African American history and culture. Speaking of those years, Grillo says, “My acculturation by the black American community of Tampa had taken” (Grillo 66). His Fellowcraft, or Journeyman, years begin when he leaves Ybor City and joins his brother Henry in Washington, D.C. This journey constitutes the memoir’s ascent narrative. Grillo describes it in *Chapter 9: Going Up North*. After being truant and performing poorly in his tenth-grade year, Grillo’s teachers informed his mentor, Nicholas H. Martin. Martin had come to know Grillo when he hired him to be a ball boy for his tennis games. That Martin had the leisure time and money to play tennis is a testament to the fact that he was part of Tampa’s Afroethnic middle-class. He was a comptroller in the Central Life Insurance Company, an African American business owned by G.D. Rogers. Martin’s interest in helping children of Afro-Cuban immigrants pursue academic and social success in the African American community is a reflection of his class identity, an identity grounded in the panethnic politics of communal uplift and pragmatic nationalism. Grillo thankfully credits his high school teachers and Martin for having “shoe-horned” Afro-Cuban children into the life and culture of the African American community (51).

Concerned about Grillo’s academic performance, Martin arranges for Grillo to leave Tampa and move to D.C. to continue his education. In the summer of 1934, Martin, Grillo, Rogers, and Rogers’ seventeen-year-old son take a road trip for that

purpose. Grillo thinks of the trip in terms of the African American fugitive slave narrative: "We were sojourners escaping to the north" (53). After they survive a car wreck, a rollover, outside of Fayetteville, NC, they travel on and spend time with Martin's relatives in Richmond, VA. On the trip, Grillo develops a deep sense of filial affection and piety for Martin, who initiates him into the confraternity of African American kinship and manhood. Grillo describes the entire trip as "an acculturation process" (57). Martin, and Martin's uncle, treat Grillo like an adult and charge him with the duty of making African American Southern boys look exceptional by doing well at Paul Laurence Dunbar High, the prestigious African American college-preparatory school to which he was headed. Grillo is filled with a sense of mission and purpose, but, like a journeyman, he has to make the last leg of his journey alone, taking the bus from Richmond to D.C.

Fellowcraft in the North: The Popular Front and the African American Leadership Class

Like the archetypal fugitive slave hero who escapes the South, Grillo develops a strong sense of personal agency, collective identity, and communal purpose during his tenure in the North. He arrives in D.C. in the summer of 1934, when he is fifteen, and leaves D.C. in January of 1937 (Grillo 52 and 78). In D.C., Grillo's African American acculturation intensifies at Dunbar High. He enters Dunbar in the eleventh grade, on the college-track (Grillo 62). The administrators back at Booker T. Washington had falsified his transcript, making him out to be an "A" student. Dunbar was a cultural proving ground for Grillo. "There," he says, "I was introduced

to black history on a daily basis as we memorialized black heroes, or celebrated famous artists and scholars" (Grillo 41). Although Grillo writes, "I *thought* black American. I *felt* black American," Dunbar High was not without its transcultural tensions and challenges (66, emphasis in the original). Although he was not part of the upper class, Grillo socially benefitted from being light brown instead of dark brown in the color and class conscious environs of Dunbar High (67-68). Having his identity as an African American challenged was the racial incident that brought Grillo the most grief and trauma, much more trauma than the tally wop slurs he was subjected to back in Tampa. The incident occurs when Jim, a fellow student, publically calls into question Grillo's African American bona fides for making a sarcastic joke using the distancing phrase "You Negroes!" The group failed to see that Grillo was not expressing an earnest sentiment, but was instead mocking Euro-American condescension. Grillo compares Jim's public scrutiny to a lynching. The event is so traumatic that it irrevocably wounds Grillo: "I have resented Jim all my life. Not even his death several years ago has softened the feeling" (68). This incident and Grillo's intense reaction to it reveal the profundity of his conception of himself as a bicultural Afro-Cuban. The incident is not a classic racial initiation in the sense that Litwack defines the term, and yet it is. Because the incident occurs in an intraracial context, it is a racial initiation, but a racial initiation that, in addition to physiognomy, focuses on ethnicity as a racial authenticating device and signature.

During his years at Dunbar High, Grillo becomes a protégé of Rev. Howard and Sue Thurman, doing odd jobs for them around their house (Grillo 72-7). Rev. Thurman, like Grillo, was a Florida native, born in Daytona Beach, the home of

Bethune-Cookman College. Through the Thurmans, Grillo comes to know luminaries like Alain Locke, who earned his doctorate in philosophy from Harvard, became the first African American Rhodes Scholar, and was the father of the New Negro Movement.

By the time Grillo arrives in D.C. in 1934, Locke, according to the biographers Leonard Harris and Charles Molesworth, considered the New Negro Renaissance to be a failure and “began increasingly to focus his attention on adult education. This focus involved a deepening friendship with Arthur A. Schomburg, someone Locke first met during his early days at Howard” (282). While living in D.C., Grillo becomes Locke’s assistant (Grillo 87). Grillo likely works with Locke on the *Bronze Booklet* (1936-1938), a series of books designed as materials for community based adult education programs. The *Bronze Booklet* series arose out of Locke’s connection to Arturo A. Schomburg, the Harlem-based Afro-Puerto Rican bibliophile, essayist, community leader, and autodidact historian. According to Harris and Molesworth, the American Association for Adult Education (AAAE) and the Carnegie Foundation funded Schomburg’s Harlem Project in Community Adult Education and a similar project in Atlanta. Schomburg asked Locke to submit a report about the programs to the AAAE. Having surveyed the interest of the participants in the two programs, Locke, in his report, concluded “that adult education for Negroes should focus on Negro culture” (Harris and Molesworth 283). The *Bronze Booklet* series was published by the Associates in Negro Folk Education (ANFE), an AAAE affiliate whose founders included Schomburg, Charles Johnson, and Mary McLeod Bethune. Locke was the ANFE’s first president (Harris and Molesworth 282–283).

As Locke's assistant, Grillo was undoubtedly exposed to Locke's social values, cultural aesthetics, and Popular Front politics. According to the cultural historian James Smethurst, Locke, despite his bourgeois cultural nationalist leanings, published in radical, "liberal-left," and CPUSA associated journals like *New Masses* and *Modern Quarterly* in the 1920s (*The New Red Negro* 21 and 45-46). The literary theorist and historian Anthony Dawahare argues that Locke, in *The New Negro* (1925), distances himself from radicals and socialists and patriotically commits himself to American conceptions of democracy and capitalism because his patron Charlotte Osgood Mason "did not tolerate any truck with radicalism" (71 and 80). The socialist, Communist, and black nationalist writers who do appear in the *The New Negro*, argues Dawahare, are there to serve not only as specters of radicalism and but also as radical allies who are willing to be politically "reaffiliated" with an integrationist, bourgeois nationalist project that, in Locke's words, is "radical on race matters, conservative on others" (72 and 80). Locke's affiliation with radicals extends beyond the 1920s and *The New Negro*. Locke, argues Smethurst, was "associated with the Communist Left in the 1930s and 1940s," by which he means that Locke continued to publish in "CPUSA or CPUSA-initiated publications" like *Masses and Mainstream* and *Harlem Quarterly* well after the signing of the 1939 Hitler-Stalin non-aggression pact and well after the end of World War II in 1945 (*The New Red Negro* 21 and 45-46). Smethurst and Dawarhare's assessments suggest that Locke ascribes to what Tommie Shelby calls pragmatic black nationalism, a type of nationalism that acknowledges that race is a social construct

and that, in the enterprise of dismantling U.S. racial logic and customs, seeks to build coalitions across seemingly unbridgeable ideological fords.

Grillo also becomes familiar with other Howard University pragmatic nationalists like Rayford Logan and Ralph Bunche (Guridy 184). Logan, a historian, taught at Howard. Like W. E. B. Du Bois and Carter G. Woodson, Logan earned his doctorate from Harvard. As their protégé, Logan played an instrumental role in organizing Du Bois' 1921 Pan African Congress and in the development of Woodson's historical society, The Association for the Study of Negro Life and History ("Logan, Rayford W."). Bunche was equally illustrious. Like Logan, Bunche earned his doctorate from Harvard and taught at Howard. Trained as a political scientist, Bunche worked for the Office of Strategic Services (the precursor to the CIA) and later for the State Department. Bunche was a founding member of the United Nations, and he served as the U.N. mediator in the 1948-1949 Israeli-Arab peace negotiations that resulted in establishing the state of Israel. For his efforts in the Israeli-Arab negotiations, Oslo awarded Bunche the 1950 Nobel Peace Prize; he was the first African American and first non-white to receive it. William Allison Davis is another bourgeois nationalist leader who inspired Grillo (Grillo 17). Davis's roots were in D.C. He earned two master's degrees from Harvard and a doctoral degree in Education from the University of Chicago. If Davis and Grillo did not meet in D.C., it is likely that they met during the few years, 1935 to 1939, Davis taught at Dillard University in New Orleans (Robinson).

The three years Grillo spent in D.C., 1934 to 1937, transpired during the era of the Great Depression and the Popular Front. The Popular Front was a Communist

Party reaction to the Nazi suppression of the Communist Party in Germany in 1933 and the global threat of fascism. According to Smethurst, the long Popular Front in the U.S. lasted from 1935 to the 1950s and called for an interracial alliance between “various liberal or social democratic groups and individuals” (ch. 1 *The Black Arts Movement* “Foreground and Underground: The Left, Nationalism, and the Origins of the Black Arts Matrix”). Essentially, the Popular Front, writes historian Erik S. Gellman, was a coalition of radical and liberal organizations interested in labor, New Deal reforms, and the suppression of fascism (2). Sara R. Haviland concurs:

In the United States, the goal of the Popular Front movement was to unite leftist organizations and quietly influence activism across the nation and the world with Communist ideas. Communists got involved in a wide network of labor unions, civil rights organizations, and any other groups that explicitly opposed fascism. Instead of forcing these organizations to adopt strict Communist principles, Party members subtly influenced them with their ideas, suggestions, and methods. Between 1936 and 1938, the Communist Party doubled its membership, from about forty thousand to about eighty-two thousand, and the Popular Front’s antifascist, reform-minded platform was at the heart of that growth. (35)

Within the Popular Front there were several African American led and focused organizations. For example, the National Negro Congress (NNC) and its youth wing, the Southern Negro Youth Congress (SNYC), were Popular Front organizations

dedicated to advancing and achieving social and economic justice for African Americans, particularly in the South.

“The NNC, an organization that had ties to the CPUSA, the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, the Urban League, and the CIO,” writes Haviland, “offered black Americans a left-wing alternative to the liberal NAACP” (34). John P. Davis, James W. Ford, and Ralph Bunche co-founded the NNC in May of 1935, after their three-day Joint Committee of National Recovery (JCNR) conference concluded at Howard University. The idea for the NNC arose when JCNR leaders met at Bunche’s home after their conference ended (Gellman 1, 113, and 114). Davis, a graduate of Dunbar High, held a bachelors in law from Harvard (“John Preston Davis Papers”). Bunche was the founding chair of the Political Science Department at Howard and the adviser of the Liberal Club, a progressive student organization that protested racism, fascism, the U.S. involvement in World War II, and the racial inequalities of the New Deal programs (“Dr. Ralph J. Bunche”; Gellman 113). James W. Ford was a CPUSA organizer in Harlem (Russell; Salter). Davis and Ford had previously founded the JCNR in 1933. As a coalition of civil rights and progressive organizations, the JCNR protested the denial of access of New Deal programs to African Americans during the Great Depression. The NNC was a more racially particular outgrowth of the JCNR.

A. Phillip Randolph, a member of the JCNR, was at the May 1935 conference. Randolph, like Grillo, Howard Thurman, and James Weldon Johnson, was a Florida native. He graduated from the Cookman Institute, Florida’s first African American college. The Cookman Institute later became Bethune-Cookman College. Randolph

rose to national prominence in the mid 1920s when he founded the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters (BSCP), an African American labor union. When the NNC held its first conference in February of 1936 in Chicago, the attendees elected Randolph to be the organization's first president. The NNC's mission was to encourage the Roosevelt administration to end segregation in the military and secure unqualified civil and workplace rights for African Americans.

The SNYC was founded by young African American Southerners who had attended the 1936 NNC conference in Chicago, Southerners who wanted an organization that spoke to the specific needs of African Americans in the South. James Ashford conceived the idea of the SNYC in 1936 and proposed it to Edward E. Strong, the NNC youth chairman, writes Haviland (37). After doing the initial groundwork for its first conference, Strong passed those responsibilities on to James E. Jackson, Jr. Presumably, Jackson had contact with Mary McLeod Bethune and W. E. B. Du Bois, both of whom served on the SNYC's Adult Advisory Board. The first SNYC conference took place in February of 1937 in Richmond, VA. Using progressive coalition politics, the SNYC pursued desegregation, anti-lynching, and voting rights legislation in the South. The SNYC established chapters in ten Southern states and the organization lasted from its inception in 1937 to its demise in 1949 ("Guide to the Southern Negro Youth Congress FBI Files TAM.265").

James E. Jackson, Jr. and Esther Cooper, prominent SNYC leaders and CPUSA members, both spent time in D.C. in the 1930s. According to Haviland, Cooper's parents sent Esther to live with an uncle in D.C. so that she could attend Dunbar High, from which she graduated in 1934 (50-51). Evelio Grillo, of course, could not

have run across Cooper in the halls of Dunbar because he arrived in D.C. during the summer of 1934 and presumably started Dunbar that fall. However, Grillo's time in D.C., matches Jackson's tenure there. Coincidentally, Grillo, Jackson, and Strong would all wind up as conscripts in the China Burma India Theater (CBI) during World War II, with Grillo and Jackson both serving in the 823rd Engineering Aviation Battalion. Jackson, writes Haviland, served as a pharmacist in the 823rd (70).

Jackson was a graduate student at Howard from 1934 until 1937, but he had become a Communist in the summer of 1931, after his first semester as a freshman at Virginia Union University, in which he enrolled in February of 1931. According to Haviland, Jackson was not shy about his politics and political affiliations:

He became a well-known student activist and was best remembered at Virginia Union for organizing the Marxist Club, the Proletarian Students Party, and the Cooperative Independents Club. He remained active as a graduate student at Howard between 1934 and 1937. As a member of the Young Communist League, the Marxist Study Circle, and the Liberal Club, he participated in strikes for the passage of anti-lynching legislation, against war, and against the high cost of living. As a student activist, he protested school segregation at the Virginia capitol building with the University of Virginia student leader Palmer Weber. He fought unfair hiring and expressed support for the Scottsboro boys. (33)

Evelio Grillo and Jackson had mutual points of contact. For example, they both knew Ralph Bunche and Mary McLeod Bethune. Grillo knew Bunche through the

Thurmans. Jackson knew Bunche from the Liberal Club, SNYC, and their work together as research assistants on Gunnar Myrdal's *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*. While doing research for Myrdal in Tennessee, Jackson met Esther Cooper at Fisk University (Haviland 49). Jackson knew Bethune from the Adult Advisory board of the SNYC, while Grillo would have known her through his older brother, Henry, whom she mentored. Bethune's connection to the Grillo family and the Thurmans is robust.

In 1935, Bethune founded the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW); Sue Thurman was one of the founding members (Grillo 73). In 1936, Bethune accepted an appointment in D.C. as the Director of Negro Affairs in the National Youth Administration (NYA), a New Deal program that provided young people with academic work grants and job-training in Franklin D. Roosevelt's administration. This was the same year that Jackson co-founded the SNYC, when he was a graduate student at Howard. During the mid-1930s, Howard students, particularly those in the Liberal Club, to which Jackson belonged, organized several anti-war protest marches on their campus. Gellman writes:

Moreover, these students increasingly sought to join political movements outside of campus by joining in protest against fascism and racism in Washington. Coordination between these intellectuals and activists came as a result of a 1935 conference by John P. Davis, head of the Joint Committee on National Recovery, and Ralph Bunche, faculty member in the Social Science Division of Howard. This historic

conference laid the groundwork for the establishment of the NNC.

(113)

Evelio Grillo's brother, Henry, was in D.C. because he had followed Bethune there (Guridy 185). It is likely that Henry was also enticed to the nation's capital by the Thurmans, as well. Henry had come to know Sue Thurman when she used to visit Bethune-Cookman College when he was a student there in the early 1930s (Grillo 73). Given his social circle, it is hard to imagine that Henry, who was in his thirties during the 1930s, would not have come into contact with the young radicals and progressives of Howard University. Henry was definitely dedicated to Bethune and her causes. Henry served as the "business manager" for the NCNW's 1940 trip to Cuba, in which Sue Thurman participated (Guridy 182). Evelio Grillo, his sister, Sylvia, and Sylvia's husband, developed significant portions of the NCNW's contact list and itinerary (Guridy 185). Grillo's sister Sylvia had moved to D.C. before he graduated from Dunbar. "The Grillos' encounters with African Americans," writes Guridy, "widens the notion of 'blackness' so that it transcends the confines of the English-speaking 'African American' construction" (Guridy 185). It is likely that Evelio Grillo, through Mary McLeod Bethune, Ralph Bunche, and the Thurmans, knew of James E. Jackson Jr., prior to attending the 1940 SNYC conference in New Orleans in April of 1940.

Fellowcraft in the South: Interracial Popular Front Radicalism and African American Conservatism

After graduating from Dunbar High, Grillo goes to New Orleans, in January of 1937, to attend Xavier University, an historically African American Catholic college. Thanks to Howard Thurman, Grillo received a four-year full scholarship to Xavier. Grillo's journey to and time at Xavier constitutes an immersion narrative. Grillo recalls the humiliation of having to sit in the "colored" section of the train cars once he left D.C. (80). Grillo's racial pride intensifies in New Orleans. He resents the concept of "de-Negrofication," the idea that African Americans must temper their communal pride and advocacy to placate mainstream sensibilities (88). Grillo finds an outlet for his indignation with racial subordination and disparity in the mutual solidarity politics. For example, he organizes a fundraiser for the 200-plus African American victims of the Rhythm Club fire. The tragic fire occurred on April 23, 1940 in Natchez, MS, a few days after the SNYC conference in New Orleans. Grillo's unfounded implication that racially biased zoning laws contributed to the tragedy troubles his conservative mentor, Sis. Madeline (88).

At the end of his senior year, Grillo becomes enmeshed in the annual Southern Negro Youth Congress (SNYC). Johnetta Richards, a professor of African American Studies, shows that the SNYC held an annual conference in New Orleans in 1940 from April 18-21 (194-195). Presumably, Jackson was at the 1940 conference, given his prominent role in the executive leadership of SNYC. Haviland claims that Jackson was also in New Orleans in the spring of 1941. Haviland writes that Jackson "left for a two-week trip to New Orleans for SNYC duties" shortly after his marriage to Esther Cooper on May 8, 1941 (Haviland 55).

When the SNYC came to New Orleans in 1940, it put out a call for volunteers to staff the conference. Grillo answered the call. Grillo narrates this episode in a way that suggests that he was duped into working with Communists. Once at the conference, he grows suspicious of the SNYC because he had never encountered blacks and whites working and socializing together. Interracial cooperation would indeed have been an unusual sight and dangerous proposition in the Deep South because of segregation. De facto and de jure segregation are the main reasons that Popular Front organizations like NNC and SNYC were, by and large, staffed and led by African Americans. Grillo calls one of the African American male leaders of the conference “the Guru” (89). Grillo never reveals the Guru’s real name, but he disagrees with the Guru and SNYC’s support of the Seamen International Union’s no-strike pledge because the pledge denies African Americans political leverage in the fight against workplace discrimination.³⁸ Presumably, in the spring of 1940, SNYC perceives strikes as anti-patriotic and deleterious to the fight against global fascism. Despite its Popular Front commitment to “Negro liberation,” SNYC, in Grillo’s eyes, prioritizes the fight against global fascism over the fight against the domestic fascism of Jim Crow segregation and racial discrimination. Grillo feels that the people at the SNYC conference hold him in contempt for disagreeing with their no-strike position. He leaves the conference feeling that the SNYC is a “Communist front” that does not serve a “black cause” (89). Grillo’s stance is consistent with the bourgeois nationalist position of the intelligentsia with whom he engaged in D.C.:

³⁸ Grillo may have the name of this organization wrong. It is most likely the Seafarers International Union of North America.

the Thurmans, Alain Locke, Mary McLeod Bethune, Ralph Bunche, Rayford Logan, and Allison Davis. Grillo finds no comfort or solace back on Xavier's campus because there people suspect him of being a Communist for having volunteered at the SNYC conference. Jackson is a likely candidate for "the Guru." Other likely candidates are Edward E. Strong and Louis Burnham (Smethurst, personal email), and perhaps James Ashford. Even if Grillo did not cross paths with Jackson and his Popular Front politics in New Orleans, he certainly crossed paths with Jackson in India.

Master Mason in the Far East and the East Bay: Fighting the War Within the War

The third section of Grillo's memoir deals with his military service in India, and it reads like a captivity narrative. In 1941, the U.S. drafted Grillo into the Army. Lindsay Graham writes that Grillo did his "basic training at Fort George G. Meade in Maryland in June of 1941 and at MacDill Field in Florida" ("Evelio Grillo"). In 1942, the Army sent Grillo to India to serve in the 823rd Engineering Aviation Battalion, one of two African American battalions tasked with connecting the road between Ledo in India to Wanting in Burma. The other "colored" Engineers Aviation Battalions were the 849th and 858th. The 823rd worked in District Three on the section of the road from Namti to Myothit, while the 849th worked in District One and was responsible for the section of the road from Ledo to Shingbwyiang ("CORPS OF ENGINEERS UNITS"). The 858th worked on the Ledo Road from Jan. 1944 to May of 1945, when it was reassigned to China to maintain the Salween River to Kuming section of the Burma Road ("858th Engineer Battalion (Aviation)").

The U.S.S. Santa Paula took Grillo to the CBI. Grillo describes the fifty-eight-day voyage on the Santa Paula as if he were an African captive describing a voyage on a Middle Passage slave ship. None of the two hundred African American men who entered the dark bowels of the Santa Paula knew where in the world they were being taken. In the hold of the ship, they had to sleep packed together, like slaves, in rows of narrow bunks. There were no windows in the hold because it was below the waterline, and the stench of “the sweat, the farts, and the vomit” was overpowering (Grillo 93). To add insult to injury, the African Americans had to lounge on the bow, where they were constantly drenched by waves, and in their quarters they were forced to shower with seawater which caused them to itch. The Euro-Americans had freshwater with which to shower and they lounged on the stern of the ship where they were able to stay dry. The African Americans and Euro-Americans were even assigned separate times to eat their meals in the dining halls.

Grillo and his fellow conscripts were outraged at the indignity of having their humanity undermined and infantilized: “We were infuriated and depressed, and we felt impotent” (Grillo 94). Grillo characterizes his time on the Santa Paula as a battle in a larger war: “While on it, we were to fight the opening battle in the primary war for black troops in World War II: the war against segregation within the United States Army!” (93). To regain their sense of self-worth, the men ask Grillo to lead them in some form of protest. Grillo decides on a petition. He says that presenting a petition to Colonel Leland “would make our point but expose us to minimal retaliation” (97). All of the African American soldiers were in solidarity with Grillo, except one, a master sergeant “who ran the motor shop.” This master sergeant was

a “loner” named Jackson, and Grillo and his battalion consider him to be an “obsequious” “Uncle Tom.” This does not seem to be James E. Jackson, Jr. of the SNYC. The Jackson in Grillo’s memoir worked in the “motor shop” while James E. Jackson, Jr. served in the 823rd as a pharmacist. Jackson refuses to sign the petition and the battalion believes that he reports its fledging rebellion to the superior officers (Grillo 97–98). The protest was ineffectual, they were only allowed out of the hold for a few days.

On the way to the CBI and in India, Grillo makes several observations about racial identity, aesthetics, and protest. For example, when the Santa Paula stops in Durban, South Africa, Grillo meets a “swarthy” East Indian newspaper seller named Rajid. In the South African caste system, notes Grillo, Indians “occupied an uncertain niche between whites and blacks,” a sentiment that explains why Rajid is confounded by the notion that brown-skinned Grillo is considered ethnically and socially “black” by U.S. standards (Grillo 103). Skin color comes into play again when the 823rd reaches the tea-growing region of Assam in India. In Assam, Grillo and his fellow soldiers lust after the “beautiful dark bodies” of the bare-breasted, adolescent female tea pickers (Grillo 106). Grillo also draws attention to the relationship between color, intelligence, and rebellion. Once in the CBI, racial protest is highly curtailed: “Threats of courts-martial were reserved for ‘smart niggers,’ like me, who became involved in discussion with officers about injustices and discrimination” (Grillo 113). During their thirty-two month stay in the CBI, Grillo and his men become inured to the racial insult and subordination. For example, Euro-American soldiers were allowed independent furloughs to see the

historic sites of India while African American soldiers had to travel as a group and still live in camp like conditions even while on furlough in Calcutta (Grillo 116).

One of the few bright spots in Grillo's thirty-two-month conscription in the CBI is the arrival of Captain Robert Penn, an African American chaplain. Colonel Leland brings Penn on to serve as the Recreation and Morale Officer and Penn makes Grillo his assistant, having been apprized of Grillo's leadership skills. Under Penn's leadership, Grillo establishes a volunteer jazz band; a regulation-size, lighted basketball court; and a newsletter called *The Hairy Ears Herald*. The *Herald* is one of at least sixteen official CBI publications. Grillo positions the *Herald* as a needed alternative to the *CBI Times*,³⁹ which ran a racist caricature of an African American soldier driving a bulldozer (Grillo 120–121).

The final racial insult to the 823rd comes in the summer of 1944, just as the war is coming to a close. The incident involves Stg. Bender, another African American soldier whom the unit views as an Uncle Tom. One night, at 10 p.m., curfew time, Stg. Bender asks the men of the 823rd to shut down a birthday party which they are having for Stg. James, the mess sergeant. The jazz band is playing songs like "Take the A Train," and the men are dancing in a cypher and singing songs like "Pretend" and "Sunny Side of the Street." When Bender returns to the party thirty minutes later with a Lieutenant Simmons, Grillo tells the superior officer that he refused to take the order from Bender and that he would do it again if the order came from the same man and were delivered in the same gruff manner. In the

³⁹ Grillo misremembers the paper as the *CBI Times*. It was actually called the *CBI Roundup*.

morning, Grillo accounts for his insubordination in front of Major Broulliere. Surprisingly Broulliere is empathetic; he thanks Grillo for keeping the battalion's morale up and demotes Simmons and transfers Bender back to the U.S. Grillo portrays this scene as the confirmation of his status as a "hero" and of his skill as a "black American leader of men" (Grillo 129). Once at home, he recalls that it was more important to him than the Allied victory over the Germans and the Japanese: "I had earned my little victory in India, in the jungle, where I won one small battle in our private war against the most immediate enemy black soldiers faced in World War II, the status quo in the United States Army" (Grillo 129).

The time Grillo spent leading men, challenging authority, and protesting racial discrimination in the CBI grooms him for his final degree in the Freemasonry of African American identity and culture. He is discharged from the Army in September of 1945. After his discharge, Grillo spends three years pursuing a graduate degree in Latin American History at Colombia, and moves to Oakland, CA in 1949 (Grillo 130).

In New Orleans, Grillo distanced himself from the interracial and internationalist politics of the SNYC, but in California he gravitates back to organizations and individuals who ascribe to coalition politics. In Oakland, Grillo joins the East Bay Democratic Club (EBDC). The EBDC was an African American political advocacy group founded in the late 1940s by D. G. Gibson, C. L. Dellums, and other professional class African Americans in the East Bay area. Gibson and Dellums, natives of east Texas, were part of the Great Migration--the exodus of thousands of African Americans out of the South and into the North and West from

1915 to the 1970s. According to the historian Robert O. Self, Dellums was one of the most significant civil rights leaders in Oakland and in the state of California (77). Dellums was elected as the vice president of the BSCP in 1929 and as its president in 1966 (“C. M. Dellums, 89; Led Rail Porters Union”). The BSCP, as mentioned above, was founded by the socialist A. Phillip Randolph, who also served as the president of the Popular Front inspired NNC from 1936 to 1940. By the time Grillo arrives in Oakland in 1949, Dellums was serving as the regional chairman of the NAACP. D. G. Gibson, the leader of the EBDC, was a World War I veteran who settled in Oakland in 1920, where he entered the entrepreneurial class by becoming a real estate agent and newspaper and cosmetics distributor. In *Berkeley: A City in History*, Charles Wollenberg notes that during the 1920s Gibson was a Republican businessman who “started the Appomattox Club as a way of organizing East Bay African Americans into a voting bloc (129–130). In the 1930s, Gibson became a Democrat because of the growing African American support for Roosevelt’s New Deal policies. Gibson was an active supporter in the Democratic Party:

He served in the Democratic Party in multiple capacities as a club chairman, district coordinator, campaign coordinator, county coordinator, and state representative. He was a member of numerous East Bay civic organizations including the YMCA, East Bay Business and Professional Men’s League, Port of Oakland Club, NAACP, Men of Tomorrow, Inc., and the Berkeley Interracial Committee. (“D. G. Gibson Papers”)

Gibson “served as co-chair of the Democratic Seventh U.S. Congressional District (Berkeley and West and North Oakland) from 1954 until his death in 1973” (Self 79). In the late 1940s and early 1950s, liberal nationalist African American organizations like EBDC and NAACP distanced themselves from radical and Communist individuals and coalitions. In the wake of the 1946 Oakland general strike (Dec. 3-Dec. 5) and a 1947 attempt by a “liberal-labor group” to takeover the Oakland City Council, the EBDC was born (Wollenberg 129–130). The EBDC, writes Self, “joined with liberals within the Berkeley Democratic party to run a candidate for the California Assembly” (79). Wollenberg concurs: “In 1948 Gibson put together a coalition of CIO union activists, white liberals, and African American voters to campaign for the Sacramento Street pharmacist William Byron Rumford” (129–130). Rumford becomes northern California’s first African American state assemblyman, a feat that would not have been possible without the coalition politics of the EBDC. Coalition politics was Gibson’s lifelong strategy:

His approach influenced black politics in West Oakland from Rumford’s campaign in 1948 to the Black Panther Party’s electoral mobilizations in the 1970s. The seventeenth state assembly district in the Oakland-Berkeley flatlands, under the leadership of the East Bay Democratic Club, became an enduring lever of East Bay African American power. (Self 80)

From the late 1940s to the 1970s, Evelio Grillo was Gibson’s “principal collaborator” in the EBDC (Self 80). Grillo mentions that he worked as Gibson’s assistant for seventeen years, but he never mentions the EBDC by name (132-33). During his life

in Oakland, Grillo helps his fellow EBDC members get into and advance in public office. Such members include, state supreme court justice Allen Broussard and the judge Lionel Wilson, the first African American mayor of Oakland.

Grillo dedicates his adult life to advancing African American and Mexican American social causes at the municipal and state level in California. For example, Grillo writes in his epilogue that, in the Bay Area, he played a critical role in the development of the Community Service Organization, the Industrial Areas Foundation, the Mexican-American Political Association (MAPA), and the Spanish-Speaking Unity Council. Grillo seems particularly proud of the fact that he was mentored by Saul D. Alinsky, the radical founder of the community organizing movement in the United States. Grillo's activist cohorts included Abelicio Chavez, Cesar Chavez, Herman Gallegos, Fred Ross, and Arabella Martinez, men and women who were noted for their radical social justice advocacy.

Grillo played a significant role in several of Oakland's African American organizations and institutions. Grillo writes that he was the local NAACP vice-president and membership chairman, the chairman of Oakland Men of Tomorrow, the chairman of the Bay Area Black United Fund, and the founder of the Negro Political Action Association of California (Grillo 134). Grillo's highest achievement in public service was his appointment as an executive assistant in the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW), in the Carter administration.

Conclusion

Evelio Grillo's *BCBA* is a portrait of an activist as a young man. This Afro-Latino bildung memoir uses African American narrative strategies and cultural tropes to authenticate itself as a unique, if not uniquely, American text. The memoir structurally and thematically employs the classic symbolic geography of African American autobiography: an ascent narrative (Grillo's high school experience in Washington, D.C.), an immersion narrative (Grillo's undergraduate experience in New Orleans), and a neo-enslavement narrative (Grillo's tenure in the CBI). It promotes transethnic acculturation and pragmatic panethnic nationalism as contingent strategies for combatting racial oppression and subordination. For example, three expressions of pragmatic panethnic nationalism in *BCBA* include the bourgeois racial uplift of Mr. Martin, Grillo's matriculation at historically African American schools and colleges, and Grillo's participation in protest and coalition politics both as a soldier and as a civilian. These expressions of pragmatic nationalism underscore the importance that Afroethnic institutions often play in producing and perpetuating viable community leaders, political organizations, and social networks.

BCBA is a unique, but not uniquely African American text. It self-consciously taps into the formal structures and thematic concerns of African American autobiography. For instance, the first-person narrator of the African American memoir tradition functions both as an individual and as a collective voice. These narrators, as noted above, become articulate kinfolk, spokespersons representing communal causes, concerns, and experiences through their personal narratives of

heroic self-transformation through the symbolic geography of the African American experience. As the narrator, Grillo's personal voice stands in as the collective voice of Afroethnics in the U.S., vis-à-vis matters of and racial segregation and subordination. However, because Afroethnic identity seems to trump Latino identity in Grillo's memoir, determining whether Grillo's ethnoracial apprenticeship is a representative Afro-Latino experience can only be accomplished by putting *BCBA* in context with bildung narratives like *Down These Mean Streets* by Piri Thomas.

CHAPTER 3

JOHN OLIVER KILLENS, INDIGNEITY, AND RACIAL EMASCULATION IN PIRI THOMAS' *DOWN THESE MEAN STREETS*

Introduction

Down These Mean Streets (1967), by the Afro-Puerto Rican writer Piri Thomas, is a novelized bildung memoir about racially and ethnically coming of age in 1940s East Harlem and the Black Belt of the South. African American narrative strategies and cultural tropes like folk humor and vernacular idioms inform the thematic content and structure of Thomas' Afro-Latino bildung memoir, as do Robert Stepto's concept of the "immersion narrative" and Tommie Shelby's concept of "pragmatic black nationalism." In addition, the tropes of the indigenous noble savage and "Indian blood" also infuse the African American thematic features and formal elements in *Down These Mean Streets*.⁴⁰ Many Latinos with cultural roots in the Hispanic Caribbean believe that they possess

⁴⁰ Subsequently referred to as DTMS.

indigenous ancestry and that this ancestry is the contributing factor to the various and varying shades of darkness in their complexions. The notion that indigenous ancestry is exclusively responsible for somatic “blackness” is a point of brutal contention between Piri, the protagonist of *DTMS*, and his brother, who is somatically white. In addition to denying the African contribution to his family’s “blackness,” Piri’s brother also believes that Caribbean indigenous ancestry makes Latinos, even unambiguous Afro-Latinos, non-black, relative to African Americans in the U.S. Given the rigid, binary racial logic of the U.S., Piri’s brother pragmatically chooses to identify himself and his family as racially white even though Piri and his father are somatically black.

Marta Caminero-Santangelo discusses this ethnoracial conundrum in her essay, "'Puerto Rican Negro': Defining Race in *Down These Mean Streets*": “In the polarized racial dichotomy of white/black, ‘Indian blood’ gets ‘read,’ at least by Piri's brother, as ‘white.’ As a first step towards repudiating white privilege and constructing a sense of solidarity with African Americans, Piri rejects the comforting excuse of ‘Indian blood’ for the insistence on ‘moyeto’ or black blood;” (213). In her book *“Shakin’ Up” Race and Gender: Intercultural Connections in Puerto Rican, African American, and Chicano Narratives and Culture (1965-1995)*, Marta E. Sánchez argues that *DTMS*, a novelized memoir by Piri Thomas, employs the noble savage trope of La Malinche, the indigenous concubine of the Spanish Conquistador Hernán Cortés. “La Malinche,” writes Sánchez, “is coded as a mother-traitor to the nation because she collaborated, sexually and politically, with the Spanish colonizers of Indian civilizations” (42).

Through the lens of the La Malinche trope, Sánchez demonstrates that Piri “compensates for the racialized and feminized abjection of black men in the United States by making the abjection of women the guarantor of his ethnic and masculine privilege” (42). The correspondence that Sánchez draws between the “retroping” of La Malinche and Piri’s abjection of homosexual men and female prostitutes is intriguing.

In this chapter, I argue that Sánchez’s noble savage trope and Caminero-Santangelo’s observations concerning the discourse of “Indian blood” can be substantially extended and refined, if not amended. The La Malinche trope is useful, but it is, nonetheless, an imposed intertext; there is no explicit reference to female indigeneity in *DTMS*. There is, however, an explicit reference to the noble savage trope of the conquered male Indian warrior in *DTMS*, a reference that is couched in a racial joke about the putatively inherent cowardice of African Americans. This joke implicitly tropes the African American community as male. Thomas employs the “blood” of the conquered male Indian warrior as a symbol for ethnic, racial, and national character. Thomas uses this trope, I contend, to interrogate the discourse of the African American community’s feminization, emasculation, and supposed aversion to armed resistance against Euro-American racial terrorism. Furthermore, I argue that Thomas, using protest humor, repurposes a comedic African American folktale from *Youngblood*, the debut novel by his close friend, John Oliver Killens. This particular folktale, in its role as protest humor, rejects the Euro-American infantilization of African American men. Thomas’ repurposing of Killens’ protest

joke takes place in the last chapter of the immersion narrative in *DTMS*. The placement of the black infantilization protest joke in the conclusion of the immersion narrative signals that Piri's mastery of signifying is complete, that he is an adept in the fraternity of African American common oppression and heteronormative masculinity. This chapter explores how that panethnic, intercultural sense of fraternity is constructed and the significance of its relationship to the pragmatic nationalism of the Afroethnic Impulse and Renewal.

Part 1: Popular Front Aesthetics

Intercultural Influences: Piri Thomas, John Oliver Killens, and the Harlem Writers Guild

Born in Harlem Hospital in 1928, Piri Thomas was an American writer of Puerto Rican and Cuban descent who grew up in East Harlem (aka El Barrio). Scholars and critics consider *DTMS*, Thomas' bildung memoir, to be one of the key texts that inspired the Nuyorican literary movement of the 1970s. Curiously, Thomas has a sizable entry in the 1997 edition of *The Oxford Companion to African American Literature*. How and why does a Latino author wind up with an entry in an African American literary encyclopedia? The answer is contextual and transcultural. Thomas published *DTMS* in 1967, two years after the assassination of Malcolm X, the founding of the Black Arts movement, and the passage of the Voting Rights Act; and one year after the beginning of the Black Power movement and the founding Black Panther Party. *DTMS* is a product of its times, its authors' identity politics, and the influence of John Oliver Killens.

Killens was an advocate of the Black Aesthetic, an ideological leader of the Black Arts Movement, and one of the five founding members of the Harlem Writers Guild (HWG), of which Thomas became a member.

David L. Dudley, the author of the *Oxford Companion* entry on Thomas, notes that *DTMS* depicts “a previously ‘silenced’ group—the negritos, or black Puerto Ricans, of Spanish Harlem. Thomas was compared favorably with James Baldwin and Claude Brown as a writer documenting his successful struggle to achieve personhood despite the dehumanizing conditions of minorities in America” (728). Machismo, street life, drug addiction, gang and prison culture, and racial and sexual identity formation are central themes in *DTMS*, observes Dudley: “The book provides readers with the satisfaction of seeing Thomas escape from the horror of his early life—a story told in African American autobiography and fiction” (728).

Dudley's entry on Thomas does not mention Thomas' membership in the HWG, nor his close friendship with John Oliver Killens, the African American novelist who co-founded the guild in 1950 along with Rosa Guy, Dr. John Henrik Clarke, Willard Moore, and Walter Christmas. The HWG, writes James E. Smethurst, was a “Left-influenced” cultural organization (*The Black Arts Movement* 129). By “Left-influenced,” Smethurst means that the founding members of the HWG had ties to the CPUSA and roots in the Popular Front.

Aesthetically speaking, three broad thematic and formal concerns define Popular Front poetics: (1) intercultural fusion, (2) the relationships between racial, ethnic, and national identities, and (3) the significance of place, as realized

through the concepts of diction, dialect, neighborhood, region, metropolitan urbanity, and rural provincialism (Smethurst, *The Black Arts Movement* 26–29 & 36–38). These aesthetics informed the poetics of the African American literary Left from the 1930s to the 1950s. The five founding members of the HWG had roots in the Popular Front and its aesthetics. However, their Leftist politics varied in kind and degree over time. Rosa Guy was a Trinidadian immigrant with anti-colonial internationalist politics.⁴¹ FBI records supposedly link Killens to a Kings County branch of the CPUSA, but by the 1960s he repositioned himself ideologically as a Third World Marxist.⁴² Dr. Clarke was a self-declared Pan-African Black nationalist. Walter Christmas was a writer for *Masses and Mainstream*, a CPUSA cultural magazine.⁴³ Willard Moore was a member of Leftist organizations like the *Harlem Writers Club* and a contributor to the Leftist magazines *Harlem Quarterly*, *Liberator*, and *Freedomways*, and *The Worker*. He was, claims Smethurst, probably a member of the CPUSA at some point.⁴⁴

Concerning the Communist affiliations of these writers, Cheryl Higashida says:

The postwar Black Left was a movement of Black radicals allied to varying degrees with the Communist Party USA (CPUSA) Black artists and intellectuals on the Left such as Maya Angelou, Rosa Guy, and John O. Killens were especially open to allying with nationalists, even as many Communists Party cadres and rank-and-file Communists repudiated

⁴¹ See Higashida.

⁴² See Gilyard, *John Oliver Killens* 81 and 164.

⁴³ See Washington, 93.

⁴⁴ See Smethurst “Short Biography of Willard Moore,” Clarke 34, Shuman 17, Jackson 407, and Breman 133.

nationalism in the 1950s and 1960s. Figures who maintained or developed distance from the CPUSA due to their left nationalism or Third World Marxism, including Richard Moore, John Henrik Clarke, and Shirley Graham Du Bois, were also central to the Harlem anticolonial Left. (17)

The Communist taproots of the HWG are ensconced in the soil of the Committee for the Negro in Arts (CNA). According to Katrina Myers Caldwell, Guy, Killens, Clarke, and Christmas “met while working with the Committee for the Negro in Arts, a political and cultural organization created to help enrich opportunities for African Americans in the theater” (K. M. Caldwell). The literary and cultural historian Brian Dolinar locates the origins of the CNA in the National Negro Congress (NNC). Founded in 1935 at Howard University, the NNC was an interracial CPUSA Popular Front organization dedicated to ensuring that African Americans received the benefits of FDR’s New Deal reforms. Dolinar claims that after the NNC dissolved in 1947, its “Cultural Division changed its name to the Committee for the Negro in Arts” and continued to do its work (ch. 1, sec. 3 “Not the Hour to Retreat”). During the Second Red Scare (late 1940s to the 1950s), the U.S. Attorney General included the CNA on the Justice Department’s list of subversive organizations, which, presumably, provided the incentive for the CNA to rebrand itself as the HWG in 1950. Although the HWG has its organizational and ideological ancestry in the ethnic pluralism of the Popular Front, its coalitional practice is guided by a pan-African aesthetic.

In the HWG, Killens shared early drafts of his first novel, *Youngblood*. Thomas encountered *Youngblood* when he was incarcerated. He spent six years, 1950 to 1956, in prison for armed robbery and attempted murder. Thomas credits *Youngblood* as the book that inspired him to become a writer, the book that psychologically saved him from the degradation of prison life. Thomas discusses the seminal link between *Youngblood* and *DTMS* in a 1996 interview with Ilan Stavans. In the interview, Thomas says a fellow inmate, an African American, let him borrow *Youngblood*. The book made a strong impression on Thomas. After reading it, he says he "began to write what would one day be known as *Down These Mean Streets*. At that time, it was entitled *Home Sweet Harlem*" (Thomas, "Race and Mercy" 350).

After Thomas completed his prison sentence, he befriended Killens and joined the HWG. As Keith Gilyard's biographies of Killens demonstrate, Thomas became Killens' friend and protégé. When *DTMS* was published in 1967, Killens asked Hoyt Fuller to have it reviewed in *Negro Digest* (Gilyard, *John Oliver Killens* 231). Through Killens and the HWG, Thomas became deeply involved in the Black Arts Movement. In the late 1960s, Thomas and Killens performed and presented together at conferences on African American literature around the country. For example, starting in 1966, Killens organized three conferences focused on African American literature and the Black Aesthetic at Fisk University, an historically African American college where he taught as a writer-in-residence. The theme of the 1966 conference was "The Image of the Negro in American Literature"; the 1967 conference theme was "The Black Writer and

Human Rights”; and the theme of the 1968 conference was “The Black Writer’s Vision for America.” According to Keith Gilyard, Thomas was a panelist at the 1968 conference, which was held in April, just two weeks after Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s assassination (ch. 6 *Liberation Memories*). In his opening remarks to the conference attendees, Killens promoted the idea that African American literature should highlight “black legends, myths, and heroes . . . celebrate African American people and promote resistance against oppression, and . . . be presented in the African American vernacular” (Gilyard, *John Oliver Killens* 238–239).

In May of 1968, Thomas and Killens also participated in the “Arts and the Inner City” conference at Columbia College in Chicago (Gilyard, *John Oliver Killens* 240). In the spring of 1969, Thomas performed at a New York City book launch party for Nikki Giovanni’s poetry collection, *Black Judgment*. Giovanni had been a student in Killens’ creative writing workshop at Fisk, and Killens sponsored the party for her at *Turntable*, a night club owned by the Louisiana, R&B singer Lloyd Price (Gilyard, *John Oliver Killens* 246). In the 1970s, Killens accepted a writer-in-residence appointment at Howard University, and he hosted panels there from 1974 to 1978. Gilyard asserts that the first conference at Howard was the most significant; its theme was the same as the 1966 Fisk conference, but the title was changed to “The Image of Black Folk in American Literature,” reflecting the identity politics of the then waning Black Arts and Black Power movements (ch. 6 *Liberation Memories*).

Thomas' friendship with Killens and his role in the Black Arts movement provides the context needed to understand Thomas' familiarity with the African American autobiographical tradition and his complex and sympathetic treatment of African American literary and cultural tropes in *DTMS*. Concepts like colorism, dialect, vernacular idioms, the dozens, folk humor, lynching, passing, segregation, racial aesthetics (i.e. good hair), and racial etiquette are highly concentrated in *DTMS*. They are particularly dense in chapters thirteen to nineteen, which contain the memoir's immersion narrative. Over the course of these six chapters, Piri, the seventeen-year old protagonist, joins the Merchant Marine as a way to make it down South in order to discover what it means to be a "black man." Piri travels with Brewster "Brew" Johnson, his twenty-one-year-old, African American best friend. In their relationship, Brew is cast as an adept and Piri as a neophyte. Brew initiates Piri into the fraternity of "black" male identity politics and consciousness. On this ritualized journey of racial self-initiation, Piri and Brew make stops in Washington D.C.; Norfolk, VA; Mobile, AL; New Orleans, LA; and Galveston, TX. Prior to and at the end of Piri's journey to the South, Thomas uses African American folk humor and protest jokes about "black" male cowardice and infantilization to measure the development of Piri's "black consciousness." I interpret Piri's developing "black consciousness" through the lens of what Shelby calls "pragmatic black nationalism" (10, 23, 136, 149, and 214). The following sections in this essay explore the content, form, and function of the racial jokes in *DTMS*. In these sections, I analyze the jokes' relationship to African American and Afro-Latino heteronormative masculinities,

the trope of the African American immersion narrative, and the ethnoracial apprenticeship motif in the Afro-Latino bildung memoir.

Part 2: Slip the Yoke

"what the hell Indians had to do with all this":

The Noble Savage and the Black Male Cowardice Joke in *Down These Mean Streets*

"Americans began their revolt from the English fatherland when they dumped the tea in to the Boston Harbor, masked as Indians, and the mobility of the society created in this limitless space has encouraged the use of the mask for good and evil ever since" (54).

--Ralph Ellison, "Change the Joke and Slip the Yoke," 1964

Over the last sixteen years, scholars in Latino Studies have written about Piri's Southern journey of racial identity formation, but few have used conceptual tools from African American studies in their examinations.⁴⁵ For instance, scholars in African-American studies will immediately recognize that Piri's journey of racial identity formation exemplifies Stepto's concept of symbolic geography. Symbolic geography can manifest as an immersion narrative or as an ascent narrative. Piri's journey, for example, has much in common with the immersion narratives one finds in classic African American

⁴⁵ For discussions of the African American tropes in *DTMS*, see Caminero-Santangelo; Carpio; Perez; Sánchez; and Vázquez. In 2014, at the 28th Annual MELUS Conference, I presented a paper that linked the African American symbolic geography and folk humor in *Down These Mean Streets* to John Oliver Killens *Youngblood*. In the talk, I discussed, among other things, how *Down These Mean Streets* exemplifies Robert Stepto's concept of ascent and immersion narratives in African American literature. I mentioned Stepto's examples of *Cane* and *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*. For a comparison of Junot Díaz to Piri Thomas, see Carpio; Perez; Torres-Saillant, "Artistry, Ancestry, and Americanness in the Works of Junot Díaz."

texts like *Twelve Years a Slave* (1853), *Up From Slavery* (1901), *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912), and *Cane* (1923) (Stepo 66–67). This study brings African American conceptual tools and cultural tropes like Stepto's immersion narrative to bear on *DTMS*.

The impetus for the immersion narrative in *DTMS* is Piri's confusion about where he, as an Afro-Latino, ranks in the racial social order of America. As a Puerto Rican, Piri feels that he is at least ethnically distinct from, if not socially superior to, African Americans like his best friend, Brew. Piri's disbelief in Brew's faith that Afro-Puerto Ricans and African Americans share a pragmatic black nationalism causes tension between the two of them. Piri's belief in Afro-Puerto Rican exceptionalism, relative to African Americans, does not rely on a denigration of African heritage, somatics, or culture. It relies, I argue, on the discredited notion of "national character," an anthropological concept that was still popular in academia up until the 1950s (Hofstede 13). Although Piri resents being perceived as and treated like an African American, he does possess a strong sense of pride in his African heritage. We know this because Piri resents the fact that his own father and brother disparage their afrolatinidad. They deny their African heritage and history by insisting that dark-skinned Puerto Ricans, like Piri and his father, are the result of a mestizaje solely between Hispanics and the indigenous natives of Puerto Rico--the Caribe and Borinquén (150). The idea that dark pigmentation can be derived from indigenous heritage, without any Sub-Saharan African admixture, is not uncommon among peoples and communities from and in the Hispanophone Caribbean. This indigenous

construction of ethnoracial being provides Latinos with alternative conceptions of “black identity” not prevalent in the U.S.

The idea of "Indians" and having "Indian blood" is central to the racial identity politics in *DTMS*. Piri and his father are the darkest members in their family of six, which includes Piri's mother, sister, and two brothers, who are all considered white. Piri and his father are routinely racialized (i.e. unintentionally passed) by the public at large as blacks, where black is implicitly defined as being African American, as opposed to being African or Afro-West Indian. Piri, his father, and his brother, José, each reject being categorized as African Americans, but they reject it for different reasons. Piri does not attempt to deny that Puerto Ricans are, in part, people of African descent. He accepts this Caribeño tripartite conception of *mestizaje*. Ostensibly, Piri objects to being categorized as African American because it eclipses his ethnic and meta-national identity as a Puerto Rican and simultaneously threatens his masculinity.

Piri and his brother, José, get into a brutal physical altercation, arguing over whether "Indian blood" makes dark-skinned Puerto Ricans physically black but socially white. As I mention in the introduction, Caminero-Santangelo makes note of this uniquely Hispanophone Caribbean racial logic:

In the polarized racial dichotomy of white/black, "Indian blood" gets "read," at least by Piri's brother, as "white." As a first step towards repudiating white privilege and constructing a sense of solidarity with African Americans, Piri rejects the comforting excuse of "Indian blood" for the insistence on "moyeto" or black blood; but in so doing, he relies on

the very notions of race as biology and the one-drop rule that are the foundations of the racial structure of American society. In other words, he bases his argument on the grounds of biological essentialism, which will connect him to African Americans. (213)

The fight with José is the catalyst that causes Piri to leave his family and go on the trip down South with Brew.

On the first stop of his journey to the South, Piri encounters the disavowal of African American identity as it is embodied in the practice of racial passing, a custom that is intimately linked with tricksterism, another trope that is common in African American literature and culture. In Norfolk, VA, Piri and Brew meet a character named Gerald Andrew West. According to Piri, West is "tan-colored and not really very negroid-looking" (170). West is a tragic mulatto figure who lives and works among the African American masses in Norfolk, where he gathers material for a book on the "Negro situation" (170). Sánchez suggests that West's book project, polite manners, speech affectation, light complexion, and disavowal of "blackness" become markers of femininity, in the minds of Piri and Brew. West's opportunistic use of his racial ambiguity is particularly troubling for the two young men. Over the course of his conversation with Piri and Brew, West declares that he is "one-eighth colored," part English, part Malaysian, part Spanish, and part Indian, having "Indian blood from, uh, India" (173-74). By the end of the conversation, West admits that he is trying to pass for Puerto Rican so he can "make the next step to white" (177); he declares that he looks and feels white and that he intends to "go back to Pennsylvania and *be*

white" (177, emphasis in the original). Caminero-Santangelo claims that West's self-representation as thoroughly "blended" fits Gloria Anzaldúa's conception of the "new mestiza [who] learns to be an Indian in Mexican culture, [and] to be Mexican from the Anglo point of view" (205). However, West's pride in being East Indian rather than Native American highlights the understudied role that the rejection and acceptance of indigenous identity plays in racial identity formation in the African American cultural imaginary.

In the opening of his 1965 debate with William F. Buckley Jr. at Cambridge University, James Baldwin says, "It comes as a great shock around the age of five or six or seven to discover the flag to which you have pledged allegiance, along with everybody else, has not pledged allegiance to you. It comes as a great shock to discover that when you were rooting for Gary Cooper killing off the Indians, that the Indians were you" (Baldwin). Litwack reminds us of the longevity of this childhood trope of racial initiation in his discussion of how racial subordination and difference structured "interracial companionship and play":

That difference was made perfectly clear in the games a Virginia black remembered of a childhood spent both in slavery and freedom. When they played "Injuns an' soldiers," the white boys had been the soldiers and the black boys the Indians. When they later played "Yankee an' 'Federates," the actual outcome of the Civil War was irrelevant.

(8-9)

Admittedly, it is not safe to generalize about the role of the noble savage or conquered Indian trope in African American culture based on just two data

points, but I point these two out because of their relationship to Sánchez's deployment of the La Malinche trope.

As I note in the Introduction of this chapter, Sánchez uses La Malinche to demonstrate that Piri disassociates himself with African Americans because Euro-Americans discursively feminize and emasculate them (recall that Piri categorically tropes African Americans as heteronormatively male). To stress his masculinity and the implicit indigeneity of his *latinidad*, Piri asserts his patriarchal superiority over effete "black" males (i.e. Gerald Andrew West) and white prostitutes, throughout the course of his ethnoracial apprenticeship with Brew in the South. For Piri, I argue, the feminization and infantilization of African American men is primarily manifest in the perception that African Americans did not collectively defend themselves with armed resistance against lynching. Caminero-Santangelo comes close to making this point when she says, Piri's insistence on Puerto-Ricaness is "clearly a self-protective denial of shared experience with African Americans; if he is not black, he assumes, he need not fear being lynched" (211). Because of the premium he places on machismo, Piri does not want to be associated with a people whom he perceives to be a nation of craven victims, inviting, through their weakness, the violence visited upon them by white terrorists.

Piri's understanding of cowardice as a defining component of African Americans' national character is linked to paternalist conceptions of African Americans as infantile. Depending on the critic, African Americans are infantile either as a consequence of their genetics or as the result of the brutalization of

slavery. Stanley Elkins' discredited "Sambo thesis" gave some credence to the brutalization theory in the early 1960s, during the time in which Thomas was writing his memoir.⁴⁶ The claim of inherent African American pusillanimity is asserted rather than argued. In *Fatal Self-Deception: Slaveholding Paternalism in the Old South*, Eugene D. Genovese and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese write that the notion of "black cowardice" was commonplace in the U.S. cultural imaginary during the Colonial era and well into the age of abolition. "The black abolitionists John Rock and Frederick Douglass," they confirm, "had to reply to charges by Theodore Parker, among others, that blacks showed inherent cowardice by refusing to fight for their own freedom and that John Brown's raid had failed to spark a slave revolt" (Genovese and Fox-Genovese 145). In Piri's mind, African Americans deserve their inferior social status because they did not resist slavery, segregation, and racial terror militantly enough. They are a weak people that lack valor, bravery, and, as Brew implies, "heart" (Thomas, *Down These Mean Streets* 126).

Both Piri and Brew make clear the connections between "heart," "black cowardice," Indians, machismo, and the lynching of African Americans in *Chapter 13: Hung Up Between Two Sticks*. As scholars have noted, the two sticks in the chapter's title are allusions to the crucifixion of Jesus. However, I argue that Thomas intentionally uses the verb "hung" to call to mind the practice of racial lynching, an equally ritualized form of murder and social terror. By conflating crucifixion and lynching, the title of the chapter suggests that African Americans

⁴⁶ See Elkin's *Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life*.

are sacrificial Christ figures. Chapter 13 contains a crucial scene in which Brew confronts Piri about Piri's repeated refusal to identify as a "black man" and Piri's belief that Puerto Ricans are socially superior to African Americans. When playing the dozens with each other, Piri realizes that his belief in Puerto Rican exceptionalism offends Brew. Through lynching imagery, Piri's realizes that he, like Euro-Americans, subscribes to the abject status of African Americans in the U.S.:

I tried to dig myself. I figured I should get it back on a joke level. What the hell was I trying to put down? Was I trying to tell Brew that I'm better than he is 'cause he's only black and I'm Puerto Rican dark-skin? Like his people copped trees on a white man's whim, and who ever heard of Puerto Ricans getting hung like that? (*Down These Mean Streets* 122)

Piri's cavalier evocation of racial lynching as a sign of African American emasculated victimhood, if not cowardice, fails to take into account that there was a "continuum of lynching resistance," as Sundiata Cha-Jua notes in the abstract of his paper "Beyond the Rape Myth: Black Resistance to Lynching, 1867-1930." The five responses on the continuum include flight, self-defense, protest, collective armed defense, and mass exodus (Cha-Jua). We can credibly conjecture that collective armed defense was the least favored option because it could trigger massacres, like those that occurred in Chicago in 1919 and Tulsa in 1921. Clearly, there were practical and pragmatic reasons that account for African Americans' putative lack of "heart." However, hegemonic masculinity interprets African American pragmatism in the face of white racial terror as

cowardice, compromising Piri and Brew's ability to perceive that pragmatism as a type of courage.

The "copped trees on a white man's whim" phrase is the first in a series of references to lynching as crucifixion, which is the central motif in the chapter. Three other references follow it. Piri says to Brew "if you could dig the way I feel, you'd see I was hung up between two sticks" (122). Further along in the conversation, Piri says, "True, I ain't never been down South, but the same crap's happening up here. So they don't hang you by your neck. But they slip an invisible rope around your balls and hang you with nice smiles"(124). And finally, Piri asks Brew, "A cat's gotta be hung before he knows what's happenin'?" (126), by which Piri means that one can conceptually acknowledge the reality of anti-black racism and violence in America without having to experience it personally.

Interestingly, Brew is the one who verbalizes the notion that African Americans are craven, a notion that Piri restricts to his own internal monologue. Brew compares the history of oppression and racial terror suffered by African Americans to the genocide suffered by Native Americans: "Now those Indians sure had some kinda hard way to go, but they had heart." The comment puzzles Piri who asks "what the hell Indians had to do with all this" (126). Brew replies with a humorous folk expression that his father used to say:

The Indian fought the white man and died
An' us black folk jus' wagged ouah tails,
"Yas suhses," smiled and multiplied. (126)

This facetious folk poem falls into a U.S. genre of racial humor known as “black cowardice” jokes. In his book *The Game of Humor: A Comprehensive Theory of Why We Laugh*, Charles R. Gruner writes there were "two major stereotypes and/or comic scripts used in anti-black humor, most of which is generated by southern U. S. whites: blacks' supposed tendency to steal chickens and their supposed cowardice when danger looms" (184). Gruner goes on to write:

Davies suggests that black cowardice jokes may have been begun by southern whites to make fun of the blacks who had to remain at their most humble and meek around white folks who would otherwise lynch them or burn them out of their meager homes. He also implies that the large number of "black cowardice" jokes that came into being shortly after World War I were prompted by the perception of some that black soldiers in the war showed less courage than did whites (which the evidence does not widely support); and that the high percentage of blacks assigned to "work" or "service" units (as opposed to combat units such as rifle companies) compared to that of whites may have been a partial cause.

At any rate, there exist many jokes featuring the fearful black man, ready to run at the slightest glimmer of physical danger. For years this comic script was exercised and reinforced in American films by the antics of the black character actor "Stepin' Fetchit." (184-85)

The joke that Brew tells Piri clearly falls in the genre outlined by Gruner above. Brew's joke functions as comic relief, defusing the tension between him and Piri. After Brew tells the joke, he smiles knowingly at Piri, suggesting that he knew that Piri had also been thinking that blacks were cowards. Piri, acknowledging Brew's knowing smile with a knowing smile of his own, attempts to defend African Americans from Brew's charge of cowardice. "Maybe," says Piri, "it wasn't a bad idea to take it low when the weight was all on the other side. Dig it, man, the Indian fought the paddy and lost. And the Indian was on his own turf" (127). Piri's comment acknowledges the wisdom of African Americans pragmatism (i.e. masking and endurance) relative to collective armed resistance. On the heels of this realization, Piri decides to go down South to test his theory of Afro-Puerto Rican exceptionalism. In essence, the test of his Afro-Puerto Rican exceptionalism is a test of his manhood.

Unaccompanied by Brew, who disappeared on their stop in New Orleans, Piri travels alone to Galveston, TX, the final and southern most stop on his ethnoracial apprenticeship journey. In Galveston, Piri engages in tricksterism when he passes as a non-English speaking, Latino immigrant in order to enter a segregated brothel. The proprietor does not allow African Americans in his brothel because "we have to keep these damn niggers down" (133). Because Piri looks like an African American to the proprietor, the only way he can enter the brothel is to linguistically pass as a monolingual, Spanish-speaking immigrant. The white proprietor asks Piri's Mexican "interpreter" if Piri is a "nigger," by which he presumably means a U.S. born, Anglophone African American (*Down*

These Mean Streets 188). Piri's Mexican sponsor ensures the proprietor that Piri is not a "nigger," and he lets the two of them pass into the brothel. Although he is silently outraged at the proprietor's racism, Piri pays ten dollars for a prostitute, while his Mexican friend pays only five (*Down These Mean Streets* 188). Presumably, the surcharge is connected to Piri being a dark-skinned Latino rather than a light-skinned one. After having sex, Piri triumphantly proclaims to the prostitute, in English, "I just want you to know that you got fucked by a nigger, *by a black man!*" (*Down These Mean Streets* 189, emphasis in the original). This false unmasking constitutes a second act of trickster *passing*, as Piri is neither a "nigger" nor "black man" in the sense that the proprietor and prostitute understand the terms.

Piri went on his immersion journey down South to test the intersection of African American identity and Afro-Puerto Rican exceptionalism. That immersion ritual is part of his racial apprenticeship, part of his coming of age as a "black man." The ritual act that secures his rite of passage into "blackness," or rather pan-Africanity, happens in a racially segregated brothel with a white prostitute. Piri realizes a sad irony--the luxury of his revenge on white America costs him ten dollars and enriches the racial social order which he despises. The money, he says, meant nothing to him. He just "wanted to prove something" (188). The something he proved is that race is a social construction, a confabulation of the mind, and not a biological truth. What he also proves is that there is some merit to the reality of Afro-Latino exceptionalism, in the sense that

the white brothel owner makes an exception for Piri because he ethno-nationally perceives him to be superior to an Anglophone, U.S. born, African American.

Thomas' real life experience in the Merchant Marine may not be the only source of inspiration for the immersion narrative in *DTMS*. A second source may be Richard Myles, a character in Killen's novel *Youngblood*. It is important to remember the seminal impact this novel had on Thomas becoming a writer (Thomas, "Race and Mercy" 350). Seeing a feature of his own life mirrored in the fiction of Killens, his mentor, was surely one of the many elements that made *Youngblood* such an inspiring read for Thomas when he was in prison. The immersion narrative in *Youngblood* focuses on Richard Myles, a character who leaves his home in Brooklyn to become a schoolteacher in the fictional town of Crossroads, GA. Richard and Piri have a number of things in common. Both are young Afroethnic men from New York; both leave for the South after vexed confrontations with their fathers; and both mature in the South as their thinking about race and racial justice changes over time. The heroic construction of Myles would also have appealed to Thomas. Southerners perceive Myles as a radical because he does not bow and scrape before white authority figures, submissive behavior that Brew, Piri's black friend, refers to as the **ABCs**. **ABC** stands for the deferential posture African Americans in the South should adopt when dealing with whites; they should **A**ccept, **B**ehave, and **C**are. Brew's mother taught him this life-saving code of conduct when he was a child (*Down These Mean Streets* 133). Myles is also seen as a radical because he teaches his young charges "Negro history," a subject which they had not been previously taught.

The history lessons focus on figures, narratives, and songs of resistance. Although it may cost him his job, or even his life, Myles proceeds with his mission to encourage the community to develop racial pride and dignity. He also plays a key role in encouraging members of the community to form an interracial labor union. Crossroads, GA provides Myles with an opportunity to prove himself as a community leader who does not surrender to the Jim Crow racial order. In the macho language of Piri and Brew, Richard Myles has "heart."

Part 3: Change the Joke

The Repurposed Humor of Black Male Infantilization in *Down These Mean Streets*

"The white man's half-conscious awareness that his image of the Negro is false makes him suspect the Negro is always seeking to take him in, and assume his motives are anger and fear—which very often they are . . . Very often, however, the Negro's masking is motivated not so much by fear as by a profound rejection of the image created to usurp his identity" (55).

--Ralph Ellison, "Change the Joke and Slip the Yoke," 1964

Killens' influence on *DTMS* is seen in the one of the folktales that Thomas repurposes from *Youngblood*. William H. Wiggins Jr. writes about the link between black masculinity and folk humor in his 1971 essay "Black Folktales in the Novels of John O. Killens." Wiggins highlights a folktale in *Youngblood* that protests the infantilization of African American men by Euro-Americans. The folktale occurs in the first chapter of the third book of the novel. The principal characters in the scene are Ossie and Jim, two male teenagers who are best friends. Ossie is Euro-American and Jim Afro-American. One night, as the two boys are hanging out and enjoying each other's company, Ossie, naively, but

without malice, says to Jim, "You know some folks say your old man is the strongest colored boy on the plantation, and I b'lieve it's the truth" (239).

Perturbed, Jim uses a humorous folktale to indirectly express his displeasure with Ossie having called his father a "boy":

You know, what you just said remind me of a story I heard the other day, about a colored man in Waycross. This colored man--he was a great big colored man. He was walking down the street in Waycross minding his own business, when this cracker came up to him and said, "Hey, boy, where you going?" And the colored man looked at the cracker and said, "Mr. White folks will you tell me something please, sir? How big do mens grow where you come from?" (239)

The punch line of the story turns on the conceptual meanings of the words *big*, *man*, and *boy*. Jim is asking how big, physically, does a grown African American man have to be before he is acknowledged as a man by Euro-Americans? This humorous folktale seems to be the source of a similar interracial, man-to-man confrontation scene in *DTMS*.

Recall that Piri joined the Merchant Marine to make his way down South with his friend Brew. Piri was a "messman" on a ship called the *James Clifford*. One morning, while serving coffee to the captain and the chief mate, the captain says to Piri, "Son, please bring me a cup of coffee," (183). Ostensibly, being called "son" does not immediately bother Piri; he does not even seem to notice it. Perhaps, it is not immediately perturbing because it implies a sense of kinship. However, things change when the chief mate says, "Hey, boy, let me have

another cup of coffee" (184). Piri does not confront the chief mate directly about this slight. Instead, he expresses his displeasure by repeatedly bringing the chief mate cold cups of coffee. The chief mate is befuddled; he has no idea that he has done something to offend Piri. After breakfast, the chief mate confronts Piri alone, and asks why he brought him cold coffee on purpose. Piri, like Jim, responds by telling a thinly coded story about black male infantilization:

Well, it's this way. When I was a little kid, my momma told me that someday I'd grow up to be a man, and if I was a good boy and ate a lot, I'd grow into a real *chevere* man. Well, I've done what Momma asked me and I've grown into a man. If Momma is right, and I believe she is, I ain't no longer a boy. You understand, *sir?* (184-85)

Note how Thomas tropicalizes his version of Killens' folktale by using Afro-Latino idioms and his own personal experience of growing up Latino.⁴⁷ The fact that this scene takes place in the final part of the last chapter of the immersion narrative in *DTMS* signals that Piri is no longer a neophyte. His mastery of the verbal practice of signifying indicates that he is now an adept, that his

⁴⁷ Frances Aparicio and Susana Chavez-Silverman coined the term "tropicalism": "To *tropicalize* means to trope, to imbue a particular space, geography, group, or nation with a set of traits, images, and values" (8). Tropicalism is the New World equivalent of Orientalism. Furthermore, it is inherently dialogic. When performed by the dominant society, tropicalization tends to be hegemonic. That is, it creates and sustains negative "stereotypes of Latino/as as aliens, peasants, criminals, terrorists, or an 'exotic' constituency" (Allatson 234-235). Tropicalization tends to construct *latinidad* "via an imagery of sexuality, passion, and 'spice' that renders Latinos as an objectified and exoticized foreign 'Other'" (Caminero-Santangelo, "Latinidad" 21). When performed by Latinos, tropicalization can be either hegemonic or radical. By radical, Aparicio and Chavez-Silverman mean that it can be used to combat hegemonic tropicalizations and to construct new identities and ways of being Latino.

ethnoracial apprenticeship is complete. The formal and thematic influence of *Youngblood on Down These Mean Streets* and John Oliver Killens' personal and professional influence on Piri Thomas represents how Afro-Latino writers productively use Afro-American narrative strategies and cultural tropes to write themselves into American literary and cultural history.

Conclusion

Collectively, the autobiographical bildung novels of Thomas and Killens focus on racial identity formation, on what it means to come-of-age culturally and politically as a heteronormative Afroethnic man in the United States between the 1930s and the 1950s. The value of comparing and contrasting these novels lies in the insights they reveal about the ethnic, cultural, and regional diversity of Afroethnic heteronormative masculinity in the U.S. from the Popular Front to the Cold War era. The ethnoracial apprenticeship trope and immersion narrative in Thomas' autobiographical bildung novel reveal what it means to a heteronormative Afro-Latino by interrogating what it means to be a heteronormative African American male. As demonstrated, *DTMS* shares significant formal features with African American slave escape narratives, the very first form of African American autobiographical writing. It also shares features with African American passing literature, as demonstrated through the character Gerald Andrew West and through Piri's passing as Mexican.

Through the ethnoracial apprenticeship and quotidian intercultural diplomacy of his friendship with Brew, Piri develops competencies in various

forms of African American life and culture (folk and vernacular humor being the competency most relevant to this discussion). Brew and Piri's master/apprentice relationship mirrors Killens and Thomas' transcultural friendship. The competencies, or Afrofusions, that Piri acquires in the novel mirror the competencies Thomas acquired through his friendship with Killens and the other Old Left writers of the HWG. These Afrofusions reveal how Killens' Black Aesthetic ideology, political solidarity, literary production, and close friendship with Thomas mutually inform the African American cultural tropes and narrative strategies in *DTMS* and how they interculturally enrich its themes, conflicts, and characters. Uncovering the intertextual and interpersonal origins of the African American folk humor in *DTMS* enhances our understanding of the African Americanization of Latino literature and the "tropicalization" of African American vernacular idioms and the Black Arts Movement. The African American acculturation of Afro-Latinos, be it thinly or thickly, often leads to or is coterminous with active political and cultural solidarity. Thomas' use of the Black Aesthetic is emblematic of Shelby's concept of "pragmatic black nationalism" and Thomas' relationship with Killens and the HWG reveals the profound ideological and organizational continuities between the Old and New Left in the Black Arts Movement. Tracing the roots of these Afroethnic intercultural continuities in a foundational Nuyorican text reveals that *DTMS* expands our notion of both African American and Latino literature and exemplifies the aesthetic fusions and impulses of the Afroethnic Renewal.

CHAPTER 4
**FROM BOHEMIAN PIOLO TO BLACK LEFT JOROCÓN: THE PAN-
AFRICAN CONVERSION NARRATIVE IN CARLOS MOORE'S *PINCHÓN***

Introduction

Carlos Moore's Pinchón: A Memoir: Race and Revolution in Castro's Cuba

poses challenging questions about racial identity, literary history, transnationalism, and canon formation. A few questions come to mind. To what extent are U.S. Afro-Latino memoirs African American texts? Are there definitive ideological connections or ruptures between contemporary Afro-Latino bildung memoirs and movements like Pan-Africanism, Négritude, the Black Arts Movement, and the New Left? Exploring African American intertexts and intercultural influences and exchanges in *Pinchón* helps answer these questions. To date, no scholarly study examines how Moore, in *Pinchón*, constructs his racial identity. I address that gap by examining the family and interpersonal dynamics that contribute to Moore's transculturation and by investigating the sociocultural events, networks, institutions, and movements that inform his pan-Africanization.

This chapter focuses on Moore's life from his birth in Central Lugareño, Cuba in 1942 to his self-imposed exile from the country in 1963, at the age of twenty-one. I pay particularly close attention to the period between 1957 and 1961 because of its escape-and-return motif. During this period, Moore migrates from Cuba to the U.S. to escape the conflict between the Batista regime and the Revolutionary forces,

and he returns to Cuba in the spring of 1961 to support Castro's revolution.⁴⁸ The myriad representations of mobility, maturity, and Popular Front influence in this period make Moore's memoir particularly amenable to being read through the lenses of symbolic geography, pragmatic nationalism, and ethnoracial apprenticeship. I divide this chapter into three sections that examine the African American cultural tropes and intertexts in *Pinchón*.

In the first section, I examine Chapters 1 to 7 of *Pinchón*. These chapters focus on Moore's life in Cuba and the way he uses the tropes of the bad homeland, bad mother, and the forbidden white female to articulate the formation of his pre-immigrant racial identity. In this section, I use a key scene in *The Souls of Black Folk* as a transnational intertext to interpret a pivotal gendered racial initiation in Moore's childhood. I also examine the mass media imports of African American culture that shape Moore's view of hemispheric Afroethnic integration, respectability, masculinity, and potentiality. In the second section, I examine Chapters 8 to 14 of Moore's memoir. These chapters focus on Moore's life as an Afro-Cuban immigrant in Bedford-Stuyvesant, a prominent African American community in Brooklyn, New York. I explore Moore's racial apprenticeships in New Left and Pan-Africanist politics, organizations, and social networks. I pay particular attention to the gendered blues interventions and sermonic encounters that shape the development of Moore's radical Pan-African consciousness. In the third section, I examine Chapters 15 to 17. In this section I explore the consequences of Moore's

⁴⁸ Though not covered in this chapter, it is important to mention that Moore clandestinely escapes from Cuba in November of 1963, fleeing racial oppression and political persecution.

radicalization and trace the institutional histories of his New Left/Pan-Africanist affiliations to their roots in the Popular Front.

Carlos Moore and Négritude

Moore, a resident scholar at the Universidade do Estado da Bahia in Brazil, earned two doctorates from Paris Diderot University. He earned a Ph.D. in ethnology in 1979 and a Ph.D. in human sciences in 1983. Before settling in Brazil in 2000, Moore spent forty-one years living as an immigrant in various countries in North America, Europe, Africa, and the Caribbean. For instance, he lived in the U.S., France, Senegal, Nigeria, Martinique, and Trinidad and Tobago. Moore's intellectual interests focus on racial politics in Cuba; racism and Marxist political economy; the relationship between Fela Kuti's music, Pan-Africanism, Black Power ideology, and decolonial consciousness; racism and Cuba's foreign policy; and Négritude and racism in the Americas. Moore addresses these topics in the six books that he has authored and/or edited, to date: *Cuba: The Untold Story: Not Yet Uhuru* (1960s); *Were Marx and Engels White Racists?: The Prolet-Aryan Outlook of Marx and Engels* (1972); *Fela, Fela: Cette Putain de Vie* (1982); *Castro, the Blacks, and Africa* (1985); *African Presence in the Americas* (1995), and *Pinchón: A Memoir: Race and Revolution in Castro's Cuba* (2008). *Pinchón* is Moore's first foray into the genre of autobiography. In *Pinchón*, Moore focuses on his vexed relationship with Cuba from his birth there in 1942 to his return in 1997. The Afterword offers Moore's reflections on the state of race relations in Cuba in 2008.

Moore's scholarly reputation of challenging Castro's handling of the race question helps one better understand the ethos of and the critical response to *Pinchón*. For example, the critical reception of *Castro, the Blacks, and Africa* reveals why some of Moore's peers consider Moore to be inappropriately controversial.⁴⁹ Rodolfo J. Cortina finds that Moore's *CBA* makes a unique and valuable contribution to Cuban and Africana studies by focusing on the myth of racial democracy and the reality of racial hegemony in Castro's Cuba. However, Moore's tendency to overstate claims, his questionable sources, and his analytically dubious interpretations of evidence trouble Cortina (63–64). Lisa Brock and Otis Cunningham devote an entire scholarly essay to analyzing *CBA*. In general, Brock and Cunningham find *CBA* conceptually bankrupt, contextually deprived, anecdotal, memoirish, unenlightening, and reductively "racialistic" (171). Moore is daring in his willingness to address the topic of white supremacy in Castro's Cuba, asserts Anani Dzidzienyo, but his arguments and evidence are inaccurate incoherent, and/or contradictory. According to Dzidzienyo, Moore's reliance on "secret communications," sources which cannot be peer reviewed, makes his claims and arguments tenuous (215). For I. K. Sundiata, Moore's *CBA* is a failed chimera: "Part journalism, part polemic, part monograph"; Sundiata concludes that *CBA* is "a classic piece of exile literature" that unfortunately combines "good and detailed information" with "political gossip" (688–689). The critical reception of *Pinchón* focuses on Moore's voice and writing style rather than on his political ideology and his real and perceived analytical shortcomings. *Publishers Weekly* says Moore's

⁴⁹ From this point forward, I refer to the book as *CBA*.

story is unfocused, his voice stale, and his prose “bland,” “wooden,” “overdrawn,” and “self-absorbed” (“Pinchón”). *Kirkus Reviews* is more gracious in its evaluation, calling *Pinchón* a “Forthright, intimate look at the human toll of Cuba’s ‘beautiful dream,’ marred by rather wooden prose” (“Pinchón”). In *The Nation*, reviewer Joshua Jelly-Schapiro calls *Pinchón* a poignantly “tragic tale” recounted with “frank clarity.” *Pinchón*, writes Jelly-Schapiro, rehabilitates “*Castro, the Blacks, and Africa* (1989), a controversial radical critique of the revolution’s race mores whose exaggerated animus, given the experiences related in Moore’s more personal and worthwhile memoir, is perhaps now clearer at its source” (27–28).

Worthwhile indeed, *Pinchón* fills a gap in the analysis of the African American and Latino cultural histories of the Cold War era. *Pinchón* is a bildung memoir that highlights how Carlos Moore’s immigrant experience in the U.S. profoundly nurtured his Afroethnic identity and political ideology. At the core of that identity is a Pan-Africanist aesthetic governed by a philosophy of Négritude. Originating in early 1930s Paris and inspired by Alain Locke’s New Negro Renaissance, Négritude is an Afro-diasporic literary and cultural movement that valorizes African aesthetics, cultures, histories, and peoples. The Francophone poet/founders of Négritude were the socialists Aimé Césaire, Léopold Sédar Senghor, and Léon-Gontran Damas. In the early 1930s, Césaire, Senghor, and Damas were students at the University of Paris, and their salon contacts with expatriate New Negro Renaissance poets Langston Hughes and Claude McKay inspired them to start the anti-colonial, Pan-Africanist literary journal *L’Etudiant noir* in 1934 (*Diagne*).

After three years in the U.S., Moore returns to Cuba in August of 1961 and coincidentally meets Marc Balin and Walterio Carbonell. Balin and Carbonell are the Cuban mentors who introduce Moore to Négritude and deepen his understanding of Pan-Africanism and decolonial politics. Balin, a Haitian national, works in Che Guevara's Ministry of Industry as an economic consultant. Carbonell is a Marxist historian who teaches at the University of Havana, where Balin also teaches night classes in economics. Together, these two scholar/mentors make an indelible impression on nineteen-year old Moore, who has only just earned his high school diploma at Havana Pre-University Institute. Balin introduces Moore to the work of Cheikh Anta Diop, the Senegalese historian who studied the classical African origins of European civilization and promoted theories of African contact in the pre-Colombian Americas. Balin also introduces Moore to Carbonell, whose book, *Crítica: Cómo surgió la cultura nacional*, had been recently banned for criticizing Cuba's racially biased school books and discriminatory treatment of Afro-Cuban religions. Carbonell leads Moore to the philosophies and politics of Richard Wright, Kwame Nkrumah, and "Frantz Fanon and Aimé Césaire, Martinican theorists of a movement called negritude, a philosophy of black self-pride" (Moore 178). Negritude maintains an outsized influence in his political life. In 1987, the First Conference of African Communities in the Americas was held in Miami, Florida, during the last two days of February. The theme of the conference was "Négritude, Ethnicity, and Afro Cultures in the Americas." The socialists Césaire and Senghor, two of the original three founders of the Négritude movement of the 1930s, attended the conference, which was organized by Carlos Moore.

The significant point to note here is that Moore was primed for Balin and Carbonell's mentorship in Pan-Africanist consciousness and politics during his adolescence in New York City between late 1957 and the spring of 1961. Moore devotes a third of *Pinchón*, ten chapters, to these three years of his life, signaling how significant his teenage years in the U.S. are to the development of his political and racial consciousness. When Moore arrives in New York in 1957, the second decade of the Cold War is just getting underway and the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) will be founded in another four years. By 1957, African American writers and diplomats had won coveted literary and civic awards, the Civil Rights movement had made and was making significant advances against segregation and disenfranchisement, and African and Caribbean countries were rapidly decolonizing. In *The Black Arts Movement: Literary Nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s*, James Smethurst writes that American literature was transitioning from a comingled period of modernism and conformity (1930-1960), in which the New Critics and the New York Intellectuals developed an uneasy alliance, to a period of postmodern sensibilities and confessional poetics, noticeable particularly in the ascendancy of New American Poetry. Smethurst cogently argues that the early Cold War period of African American literature portrays rich continuities with the cultural and aesthetic politics of the Old Left/Popular Front.

Patria Mal, Chicas Blancas, y la Mala Madre: Race, Gender, and Mass Culture in Central Lugareño

Moore's lived experience of race during his first fifteen years in his motherland provides a stunning complement to Evelio Grillo's abstract knowledge about the relationship between class and *de facto* racial segregation in early twentieth-century Cuba. The sugar industry structured the political economy and pigmentocracy of Central Lugareño, Moore's rural hometown in Camagüey Province. The residential areas in Central Lugareño, writes Moore, were unabashedly segregated by race. Afro-Cubans lived in the abject "Barrio Negro" and a "separate area was reserved for celibate West Indian and Haitian migrant workers" (1). The social order in Central Lugareño, observes Moore, was based on vocation, citizenship status, and somatic aesthetics (2). For Moore, the descending scale of racialized class identities in Cuba includes, in his words, whites, chinos, and blacks. The racial category "white" includes Euro-Cubans (criollos), Euro-American immigrants, Spanish immigrants (gallegos), European Jews and Middle-Eastern immigrants (turcos), and abject and illiterate Euro-Cuban cane cutters known as guajiros. The guajiros were the descendants of nineteenth century slave bounty hunters and overseers. Their twentieth-century relationship with people of African descent was still characterized by racial terror: "On the least pretext, they would pull out machetes, ready to chop up a black, particularly a Haitian. The Rural Guards seldom arrested anyone for killing a Negro" (2). Chinos is the designation Moore uses for Chinese Cubans, a group that occupies "an intermediary position, marrying either up or down in the racial classification" (2). Blacks includes "native Cuban

blacks, known as Negroes, headed by fair-skinned mulattoes, then West Indians, with Haitians closing the pack” (3). This is the pigmentocracy into which Charles Moore Wedderburn was born on Nov. 4th in 1942.

Sibyllin Winifred Rebecca Wedderburn, Carlos Moore’s mother, immigrated to Cuba in 1925, when she was fourteen years old. She came to be with her mother who had already relocated there as an immigrant. Raped by her mother’s domestic partner, Winifred had her first child in 1929, a boy she named Richard. In 1932, Winifred met Victor Theodore Moore, a fellow Jamaican immigrant. Victor had been living in Cuba since 1918. Like many West Indians, Victor came to Cuba a few years after the 1912 Guerrita de Raza in Oriente Province. The 1912 civil conflict was a clash between the national government and El Partido de Independiente de Color (PIC), a black and mulatto political party whose membership was composed primarily of veterans of the 1898 War of Independence. PIC was an organized response to the increasing stream of Spanish immigrants (gallegos) and the de facto system of racial segregation that arose in Cuba after 1902 (Fraginals 161; Moore 14). The Cuban military, Euro-Cuban militias, and the U.S. Marines suppressed the PIC-led Afro-Cuban rebellion. Ostensibly requested by the Cuban government, the Marines were charged with protecting U.S., British, and Brazilian property and economic interests: mines, plantations, railroad infrastructure, and sugar cane fields and mills (Clark 98). Anti-PIC forces massacred thousands of Afro-Cubans during the Guerrita de Raza, a campaign of racial terror that included lynchings. After the war, there was a shortage of Afro-Cuban labor in Oriente Province; West Indian and Haitian migrants, like Winifred and Victor, came to Cuba to replace them (15).

Victor worked in the local sugar mill and Winifred did domestic work for the white elites.

In Central Lugareño, Winifred and Victor marry and have five children together, becoming one of fifty West Indian immigrant families in their town. The members of the Moore family vary in color and this affects their socio-economic standing and their interpersonal relationships inside and outside of the home. Moore's father, Victor, is a "fair-skinned" mulatto who has "wavy ash-colored hair" (32). Like their father, Moore's siblings Victor Jr. and Martha are considered mulatto because of their brown skin and wavy hair. Moore's brother Frank is considered Indio because of the combination of his wavy-hair and dark skin. Moore, his mother, his half-brother Richard, and his sister Esther are considered prietos, people with dark skin and kinky hair. The somatic features determine the social clubs the Moores are allowed to attend in Central Lugareño. There are three social clubs in the small town--one for whites, one for mulattos, and one for blacks. None of the Moores can enter the white club, but Frank, because of his liminal racial position, can attend either the black or the mulatto club. Moore's father desegregates the black and mulatto clubs by taking Winifred "to dance at the black club and the next day to the mulatto club"; Victor and Winifred's courage to cross the mulatto/black color line results in the two clubs dissolving and fusing into a single institution, *Amantes del Progreso* (26).

At the age of six or seven, Moore grasps how his afroethnicity and immigrant heritage positioned him at the bottom of the Cuban social order, his response is to do everything he can do to reject "being black and of Jamaican descent" (6). For

instance, at eight years old Moore latinizes his first name to Carlos, and at twelve he appropriates the surname Moré and spreads rumors that he is related to the renowned Afro-Cuban singer, Beny Moré. In addition, at home, he pretends not to speak English, even though it is his first language. Despite being whipped by his parents for rejecting his Afro-Jamaican heritage, Moore holds steadfast in his endeavor to become Afro-Cuban (6–8). Although Winifred despises panyas (whites) for their sense of racial superiority, she internalizes the concept of black inferiority. For example, Winifred applies clothespins to Moore’s nose to make it narrower, advises him to suck in his protruding lips when speaking, routinely presses her “bad hair,” and straightens Moore’s hair with commercial and amateur chemical treatments (96 and 117-118). Ironically, Winifred encourages Moore to fight white racists even as she racially and physically takes out her rage at being racialized on him, her own son.

Like Grillo’s memoir, the trope of the bad mother figures prominently in *Pinchón*. The physical abuse Moore suffers at the hands of his “bellicose” and “mecurial” mother is so bad during the first ten years of his life that he considers both running away and death as ways to escape the violence. Moore recounts those troubling years in *Chapter 4 Child of Anger: My Mother’s Blot*. Moore acknowledges that he was a “stubborn and rebellious” and “daring and uncontrollable” child (31 & 52). His misbehavior even provoked whippings from his father and older sister. However, his mother’s contempt for him is murderous. When he is seven she tries to drown him in a barrel of rainwater. When he is nine, she instructs his older brother, Victor Jr., to beat him with a “rawhide strap.” The strap cut lashes into

Moore's arm and he lost consciousness during the horrific beating. The prospect of being alone with his mother "terrified" Moore. He describes her as a wild maenad who in "an absolute frenzy" would hit him with as much strength as she could muster and with whatever was at hand. "None of my siblings," confesses Moore, "were set upon like that. So the idea that my mother hated me was planted in my mind" (39). Hatred spawns hatred. On the day Moore migrates to the U.S. at age fifteen, the day that could have easily been his last encounter with his mother-- Winifred slaps Moore in the face for refusing to give her a hug goodbye. By the time he is seventeen, Moore confesses that he had developed a feeling "akin to hatred" for his mother (122). Winifred's brutality toward Moore is comingled with her self-hatred and her moral shame.

When he is forty-years old, Moore learns that he was "the fruit of a clandestine, extramarital liaison"; his biological father is a dark-skinned Trinidadian named Whitfield "Trinidad" Dacosta Marshall (32 & 320). Marshall was a friend of Victor Moore, a friend who was supposed to look after Victor's family while Victor worked in another region of the country in 1941. As a child, Moore is the incarnation, the constant reminder, of his mother's infidelity. Her guilt and shame, reasons Moore, caused her to emotionally and physically abuse him for the first ten years of his life.⁵⁰ The subtitle of Chapter 4, *My Mother's Blot*, unsubtly suggests that

⁵⁰ The beatings stopped in 1952, the year when Victor and Winifred separated. When Victor was bedridden with tuberculosis, Winifred moved to Havana to make money to pay for his medication and treatment. After Victor's health improved, he discovered letters between Winifred and another man who lived in Havana. Victor may have been right about Winifred's new infidelity, but he did not have the moral highground. For years, he had an open affair in town with a married woman named

Winifred's violence toward Moore is motivated as much by internalized racism as it is by internalized moral shame. Moore's undiluted afroethnicity—his hair quality, facial features, and his dark skin—is a stain on his mother's conscious, a stain that she tries to rub out. Winifred's attempt to drown Moore is an attempt to cleanse him, and by extension herself, of being morally and racially coded as black.

The external pressure to socially distance himself from being Afro-Jamaican comes both from Moore's community and from his teachers. Moore shares none of the "mulatto" somatic features common to his father and siblings: "Rather than my father's 'good' hair, I had *pasas*, dried raisins, as Negro hair was designated. I was born with *bémbas*, swollen lips, and my nose was *chata*, flat. To crown it all, I was cross-eyed" (10 emphasis in the original). For this, whites in his community unmercifully tease Moore, calling him "*negrito malo*," "*negrito retinto*," and making hurtful insinuations about his dubious paternity. Moore's father is exceedingly gentle with him, instructing Moore to ignore the hateful taunts.

Unlike in Grillo and Thomas' lives, there is little that is racially uplifting in Moore's academic experience; there are no teachers who function as savior figures. "School," writes Moore, "exacerbated everything that was wrong in my life" (6). Moore psychologically transfers his anger at his teachers to José Martí, the Cuban martyr of independence whom students are forced to valorize every Friday, on Civic Day:

Mable Cross. When Victor confronted Winifred about the letters, they got into a fight she attempted to stab him with a pair of scissors. She moved to Havana permanently after the altercation, see 34 & 51.

Martí came to symbolize everything I hated about school: the white teachers, their white lies, and the disdain they inculcated in black kids against our own color. I wish no one the psychological bruises that being schooled by prejudiced teachers inflicts. I was made painfully aware that my parents were not Cuban (Moore 6).

Moore also has negative racial encounters with fellow students. One day at school Moore and a girl named Angela argue over a ball. The confrontation ends with them spitting on each other and Moore snatching the ball away from her. Angela goes to the teachers and falsely accuses Moore of sexually touching her. Moore admits, “We boys did pinch the girls to trigger their anger, but on this occasion she had lied” (28). Regardless of the truth, Moore receives six lashes with a wooden yardstick from the teachers. An hour later, when Moore’s father picks him up from school, he walks Moore to Guanajay, a jail for juvenile delinquents located at the Army headquarters in the north of town. At his father’s request, the Rural Guards handcuff Moore and throw him in a jail cell until the afternoon when his father returns for him. Twelve-year old Moore falls apart: “Terrified, shaking from head to toe, I crumbled in a corner and wept”(29). Later that night, Moore and his father talk about how the incident was a warning intended to teach him obedience and deter him from ending up in jail in earnest.

The incident with Angela is one of two racially charged incidents in Moore’s childhood that involves Euro-Cuban girls. The quotidian pressure to reject Jamaican immigrant heritage and disparage afroethnicity also exists outside of school for

Moore. The traumatic racial initiation that provides the title of the memoir occurs between Moore and his neighbor, Zoila:

At a time when play was all that occupied my mind, I stumbled on the scorching message of hate attached to the term *pinchón*. My initiation was thanks to Zoila, a seven-year-old white girl who lived next door and often played with my little sister Martha through the chicken wire fence separating our yards” (7)

Moore’s mother proscribed him and his siblings from going in Zoila’s yard because Zoila’s parents did not want her to play with black people. Despite his mother having warned him to stay away from Zoila and Martha when they were playing, Moore approaches Zoila one moment when she is alone at the fence. Seemingly provoked by his mere presence, Zoila screams “*Negríto de mierda, nigger shit! Go away!*”; “*Go away, pinchón!*”; and “*Pinchón, go away!*” (7–8). Incensed, Moore shakes the fence in anger. Zoila responds by poking him in the eye with a broom handle. Although, Moore had never heard the word *pinchón* before, he immediately senses from the context that it is a racial epithet. In addition, he learns, later that evening, that *pinchón* is also an anti-immigrant slur—and, even more stunningly, that he himself is the son of immigrants.

Until that day, Moore had no idea that he was Jamaican. Moore’s father is the bearer of the bad tidings. The news that his parents are Jamaican immigrants astonishes Moore. It was incomprehensible to him that he was anything other than Cuban, since he was born in Cuba, spoke Spanish, and pledged his loyalty to his country, its flag, and its martyr just like all of his other school mates. Victor explains

to Moore that a pinchón is the child of a jancrow, jancrow being the name of the black buzzard that is a familiar part of the fauna of the Caribbean islands. However, jancrow is also an antiquated racial slur that Cubans, during the Great Depression, used to refer to West Indian immigrants.⁵¹ During the Depression, those West Indians and Haitians who were neither deported nor massacred, writes Moore, traipsed the country begging for food. Cubans called these abject West Indian and Haitian immigrants jancrows because they congregated, like black vultures, around slaughterhouses to collect the bones and offal the butchers threw out, taking the discarded scraps home to cook for meals. During the Great Depression, homeless West Indian and Jamaican migrants slept in cemeteries to avoid being detected by the Rural Guards (the military), and so the word pinchón also came to be associated with cannibalism because Cubans suspected voodoo-practicing Haitian immigrants of stealing and eating dead bodies (9). Being called a pinchón wounded more than Moore's racial pride; it ruptured his conception of himself as an authentic Cuban.

Moore's experience with Zoila intertextually calls to mind W. E. B. Du Bois' account of his seminal racial initiation in *The Souls of Black Folk*:

It is in the early days of rollicking boyhood that the revelation first bursts upon one, all in a day, as it were. I remember well when the shadow swept across me. In a wee wooden schoolhouse, something put it into the boys' and girls' heads to buy gorgeous visiting-cards—ten cents a package—and exchange. The exchange was merry, till one girl, a tall newcomer, refused my card,—refused it peremptorily,

⁵¹ Note the similarity between jancrow and Jim Crow.

without a glance. Then it dawned upon me with a certain suddenness that I was different from the others; or like, mayhap, in heart and life and longing, but shut out from their world by a vast veil. I had thereafter no desire to tear down that veil, to creep through; I held all beyond it in common contempt, and lived above it in a region of blue sky and great wandering shadows. (Du Bois 37–38)

Admittedly, the two incidents are not completely bijective. For example, Du Bois' initiation occurs in nineteenth century New England and Moore's in the post-World War II Cuba. Du Bois' occurs at school and while Moore's happens at home. Du Bois' occurs between relative strangers and Moore's between neighbors. Du Bois' involves emotional violence and Moore's involves both emotional and physical violence. Despite their differences, the two incidents share significant and meaningful points of comparison: (1) both occur in childhood, (2) both involve a "white girl" and the specter of miscegenation, (3) both involve the proscription of interracial home visits, and (4) both are traumatic enough that they warrant retelling and positioning as seminal racial initiations. I compare the two incidents because Moore, an advocate of the Négritude movement, is, I presume, conversant with the scholarly and creative work of fellow Pan-Africanists, like Du Bois. Like *Souls of Black Folk*, *Pinchón* portrays racial initiation through the lens of a uniquely personal yet hemispherically representative narrative. Intertextually comparing the thematic and structural similarities of Moore's racial initiation with Du Bois' underscores the hemispheric continuity of race in the Americas over time and historically locates *Pinchón* in a African American and Pan-African literary tradition.

Besides learning that he is Jamaican, what lesson does Moore draw from his racial initiation? Zoila's exaggerated reaction intuitively teaches Moore that racial violence against Afroethnic men is gendered violence. Recall that Zoila routinely plays at the fence with Moore's little sister, Martha. In the absence of other indicators, it appears that the confluence of Moore's race and gender prompts Zoila's repugnance and her reification of Moore as human shit and a shit-eater.

Extended family and U.S. movies reinforce the taboo of black male/white female contact. Don Miguel Rosado, Moore's gallego godfather, tells eight year-old Moore that God does not endorse racial exogamy, causing Moore to question the benevolence and relevance of a white supremacist God (28). U.S. movies reinscribe the taboo of interracial sexual relations even as they simultaneously dismantle it. In 1957, *Island in the Sun*, a movie about interracial romance and politics, brings the citizens of Moore's town to the brink of racial violence. Moore, a teenager, watches the film in the town's racially segregated movie theatre, where blacks sit upstairs and whites sit below. *Island in the Sun* stars Harry Belafonte as David Boyeur and Joan Fontaine as Mavis Norman; the sexually suggestive scenes between David and Mavis outrages Euroethnic Cubans. According to Moore, the Afro-Cubans in his town view David's conquest as "a sweet piece of revenge" that confirms the stereotype that Euroethnic women prefer black/mulatto men because of their "bigger and better pingas." The Euroethnic Cubans view Mavis as a puta who is attracted to David's "sangre blanca," to the fact that he is a mulatto. The interracial sex and the leading man role in *Island in the Sun* make Harry Belafonte a paragon of African American masculinity for Moore (21).

The movie theatre is not Moore's only means of African American cultural contact. The influence of African American culture and icons reaches Moore through various modes and modalities: U.S. radio and periodicals and the Cuban grapevine and press. Moore's home becomes a social nexus in his neighborhood because they are the first family in the community to own a radio. Moore recalls his mother intently listening to the July 18, 1951 battle between the African American boxers Jersey Joe Walcott and Ezzard Charles. Unlike his mother, Moore was interested in non-violent pastimes. Late at night, after everyone else is sleeping, Moore turns on the radio to listen to jazz, an exotically foreign, English language guilty pleasure. The affective force of jazz is so sublimely arresting that Moore often finds himself in tears as he listens to the music alone in the darkness: "These clandestine moments were the only times I did not feel ashamed of the foreign language that branded me a *pinchón*" (44, emphasis in the original). Through the Cuban press and grapevine, Moore keeps abreast of the progress of the U.S. Civil Rights movement and of incidents like Nat King Cole being denied service at the Hotel Nacional de Cuba, in 1956, even after he performed at the hotel (56). African American print media also finds its way into Moore's home. Two weeks before marrying Moore's father, Gladys King brings a copy of *Ebony* magazine to Moore's home when she visits from the U.S. The magazine confirms the stories Moore had heard of African American affluence, respectability, professionalism, and power: "There was not a single white face in it—only healthy-looking, well-dressed, authoritative, handsome blacks! *Ebony* was full of stories about doctors, engineers, baseball players, boxers, teachers, architects, university students, and military

men—the black americanos of whom I had heard so much” (58). These African American influences and exchanges infatuate Moore with African American life and culture. Through them he comes to see the U.S. as a dream world, an Afroethnic promised land. They prime him for the ethnoracial apprenticeship he enters when he moves to New York in 1957.

The Female Blues Impulse, Male Sermonic Rhetoric, and the Transnational Racial Apprenticeship

Carlos Moore’s teenage years in Cuba take place against the background of the Batista coup (1952-1958), years in which radicals resort to terrorist bombings to oust the Batista regime from Havana and Santiago. In 1952, Fulgencio Batista, “the Big Mulatto,” takes over the Cuban government and rules until Castro’s revolutionary forces defeat him in 1958. Moore claims that during the early years of the coup, Afro-Cubans were receptive to Batista, “a populist, benevolent dictator,” because Euroethnic Cuban elites racially despised and mocked his speech, hair, and underclass upbringing. They were also receptive because Batista supported Santeria, appointed three Afro-Cubans to work as cabinet ministers, passed equal opportunity laws, and desegregated the federal government, the military, the police, the banks, and other public institutions (53–56). During the late 1950s, various revolutionary factions in Havana and Santiago begin to violently attack the Batista regime, which becomes increasingly repressive and suspicious of the polity. Batista’s indiscriminate repression causes Afro-Cuban support for him to wane, asserts Moore. When the Rural Guards beat Moore’s brother, Frank, for suspicion of

being anti-Batista, Victor Moore decides to bring the rest of his family to the U.S. Victor Moore had been living with his new wife, Gladys King, in Brooklyn, saving up money to bring the rest of his children there.⁵² However, Victor is in Cuba when Frank is beaten in 1957. Victor immediately puts his house up for sale and has Gladys claim his children as her stepchildren. Not long after, Carlos Moore arrives in New York City, the site of his comingled sexual, political, and racial apprenticeships.

In New York, Moore imbibes shows like *Amos and Andy* and listens to singers and bands like Nat King Cole, "Sam Cooke, the Platters, James Brown, Jackie Wilson, and Brook Benton" (73). Like Evelio Grillo, Moore is harassed by African American males in his age cohort. However, Moore's harassment by the local African American gang was not related to his ethnicity; it was related to him being the new kid on the block. To wriggle himself out the gang shakedowns, Moore pretends not to speak English. Recall how this tactic of passing as a monolingual speaker was employed by Piri Thomas in *Down These Mean Streets*. This racial initiation is part of a complex matrix of encounters, interventions, mentorships, and romances that exposes Moore to various and competing religious, cultural, intellectual, and political ideologies, movements, and groups. The black nationalist, ecumenical, and radical left elements in the matrix vie for hegemony over Moore's sexual, political, and racial identity development. The primary expression of this battle is on Moore's body and in his social and sex life. Upon arriving in New York, Moore routinely

⁵² King is a pious Costa Rican of Jamaican descent. Moore's aunt Vera, who lives in New York, plays matchmaker by showing Gladys a picture of Victor. Gladys and Victor exchange letters and phone calls for two years before she comes to visit the Moore family in Cuba (Moore 57-58).

bleaches his skin and chemically straightens his hair (73–74, 96, 109, 113–114, & 117–120). After his relationship with Georgia Jeffries, an African American girl from Georgia, is ruined by her drug addiction, seventeen-year old Moore is able to actualize his *Island in the Sun* fantasy of having an interracial romance. Moore embarks on a series of mind-expanding sexual relationships with Euro-American girls and women, most of them five to ten years older than him. In Cuba, de facto racial segregation proscribed him from interracial contact with the opposite sex, as the incidents with Angela and Zoila testify. Unbridled by such a proscription in the U.S., Moore’s series of Euro-American female lovers underscore the significance that interracial sex and romance plays in shaping Moore’s sense of his virility and Afroethnicity. Moore meets Doreen, his first Euro-American love interest, at Brooklyn Baptist Church, his family’s house of worship, in which there are very few Afroethnic congregants.⁵³ Moore’s heavy petting with Doreen is a gateway to his addiction to interracial romance and the first step to his becoming a “piolo,” a Cuban term for a black person who exclusively associates with whites (115). His conversion to Christianity becomes opportunistically intertwined with his obsessive, and failed, quest to penetrate the “young white churchwomen” of his congregation, an act, he says, that would permanently blacken their souls and wash his clean in their whiteness (93). Note how the baptismal metaphor recalls Moore’s mother’s attempt to drown and whiten him when he was a child.

⁵³ Moore’s father, a pious Moravian Christian, bristled at the concept and practice of “racial separatism” and so he refused to attend the de facto racially exclusive African American churches in Brooklyn (Moore 91).

In the latter part of 1959, Moore “discovers” the bohemian/beatnik outpost of Greenwich Village. The Village is where Moore’s quest for sexually available Euroethnic women bears fruit. The series of leftist and liberal Euroethnic women Moore meets includes Lorna, Helen, and Karina. These women are five to ten years older than Moore and are, to use his words, more politically and culturally “sophisticated” than he is. Moore self-consciously uses teaching and learning metaphors to describe the effect of these women on his political and cultural development. Moore describes Lorna, a fellow Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and Fair Play for Cuba (FPCC) member, as his “tutor.” She introduces him to Isaac Deutscher’s three-volume biography of Trotsky. The trilogy says Moore, “had an impact on me equal to what I had felt on reading *King Leopold’s Soliloquy*” (103). Moore does not use an education metaphor to describe Helen, one of his Jewish lovers, but Helen happens to be a professional academic--a high school English teacher. It is not clear how or where she and Moore first meet. However, Helen loves jazz, so Moore takes her to see his friends Abbey Lincoln and Max Roach perform songs that would appear later that year on their album *We Insist! Max Roach’s Freedom Now Suite*. In the section on his Afroethnic mentors, I talk more about the seismic consequences of Moore’s date with Helen. Another of Moore’s lovers is Karina, an Irish woman who attends the Martha Graham School of Dance and introduces Moore to poetry readings, “modern dance, theater, and ballet” (116). During his time with Karina, Moore slowly comes to realize the fact that the disapproving looks that he and Karina receive in public have nothing to do with his Cubanidad (i.e. his “foreign ways, halting accent, and non-American body language”)

and everything to do with his somatic Afroethnicity (116). No longer able to maintain his self-delusion, Moore begins to wonder if he is a self-loathing piolo. The prospect of being a piolo confuses him because he appreciates the intellectual and cultural progress he has made by fostering interracial friendships and romances. For example, he says, “I liked *whites*—period! I felt good being around them; they accepted me. Thanks to consorting with liberal whites in the Village, I had graduated from black to Human Being” (115, emphasis in the original). Before he started associating with “whites,” Moore was politically naive, having little to no knowledge about the revolution in Cuba, the U.S. Civil Rights movement, or the decolonial movements in Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean. Of this period Moore writes, “But I was interested in nothing that might disrupt my maiden voyage to the utopia of interracial delights. I was living in a wonderful cocoon, self-immured within walls that made me impervious to any telling realities” (97).

As Moore learns about American culture and values through his interracial sexual “paradise” in the Village, he simultaneously gets an education in leftist radicalism and black nationalism. In the Village, Moore meets Arnold (Arnie) and Nina, a Jewish couple that guide his political education. They introduce him to radical theories of government and political economy. For instance, with Arnie and Nina, Moore discusses anarchism, anti-Semitism, Bolshevism, capitalism, fascism, imperialism, Marxism, socialism, Stalinism, and Trotskyism; they also discuss jazz, racism, and *Homage to Catalonia*, George Orwell’s memoir about fighting fascism in the Spanish Civil War (95). Influenced by Arnie, Moore joins the FPCC and they routinely attend meetings together. Through the FPCC, Moore becomes connected

to the SWP and begins reading its weekly magazine, *The Militant*. By October of 1960, Moore considers himself to be a Marxist, but a Marxist who has a growing affinity for Garveyite black nationalism and Pan-Africanism.

Moore meets a number of Afroethnic mentors who introduce him to people, books, organizations, and ideas that challenge his fetish for Euroethnic women and his racial self-loathing. These mentors and associates include Mr. Callender, J. A. Rogers, Lewis Michaux, Richard Gibson, Dan Watts, Robert Maynard, Calvin Hicks, LeRoi Jones, Harold Cruse, Maya Angelou, Abbey Lincoln, Max Roach, Laura (an African American lover), and Mburumba Kerina.⁵⁴ Callender, Michaux, Cruse, Angelou, Laura, and Kerina have significant impacts on Moore's developing and contradictory consciousness of Afroethnic pride, panethnic nationalism, and political radicalism.

Mr. Callender, a Christian Scientist, is Moore's high school English teacher. An Afro-Panamanian of Jamaican decent, Callender introduces Moore to African American music, history, literature, and print culture like *Amsterdam News*, *Ebony*, and *Jet*. Callender inculcates Moore's love of reading and public libraries. Due to Callender, Moore reads Bertrand Russell's *Why I'm Not a Christian* (1927) and meets

⁵⁴ I would like to include Mr. Cooper in this list, but it is not clear if Cooper is Afroethnic. However, he has an indelible impact on Moore's life. Mr. Cooper, a police officer, is Moore's neighbor and family friend. Cooper and his wife take Moore on a long trip to what turns out to be a prison. At the prison they meet Darell, the Coopers' son who is imprisoned for murdering a rival gang member. The prison visit and the murder of a neighborhood drunk by Moore's local gang, the Buccaneers, is enough to scare him straight and deter him from joining the street life (Moore 81-82). Note how the prison visit hails the time that Moore's father had him imprisoned as a twelve-year old.

J. A. Rogers at a Christian Scientist political lecture.⁵⁵ Rogers encourages Moore to purchase his books--*World's Great Men of Color* (1946-47), *Sex and Race* (1941, 1942, and 1944), *Nature Knows No Color Line* (1952)--"at the National Memorial African Bookstore in Harlem, which Mr. Callender had already mentioned" (79).

Known by its tag line the "House of Common Sense and Proper Propaganda," Moore describes the National Memorial African Bookstore (NMAB) as a depot for Harlem's activists. David Emblidge, an historian of American booksellers, concurs. Emblidge says NMBA "attracted a loyal clientele, championed famous writers and artists, and hosted international leaders (especially Africans). A rallying point for political speeches, often delivered in front of the store, in its period, there was no other black bookstore in America with Michaux's influence" (267). In January of 1960, Moore goes to NMAB for the first time.⁵⁶ Using academic and developmental metaphors, Moore describes the NMAB "as the academy that set my mind ablaze and groomed my soul. It was there that the most compelling encounter of my youth took place; thereafter nothing in my life would be the same" (99). That encounter is with Maya Angelou, which I will discuss below. Lewis Michaux, the proprietor of NMAB, is a "fire-and-brimstone black nationalist" whose singular passion is "to talk to people about Marcus Garvey, Africa, and the history of black people" (99 and 101). At the time Moore discovers the NMAB, international media is focused on the revolution in Cuba and Congo's independence movement. During this period, Moore becomes infatuated with Patrice Lumumba and the history of the Congo. To satiate

⁵⁵ This was the first political lecture that Moore ever attended.

⁵⁶ The NMAB was located at 125th and Lennox.

Moore's preoccupation with the Congo, Michaux gives him *King Leopold's Soliloquy* by Mark Twain. The book initiates Moore's interest in Africa and the development of his Pan-Africanist worldview and decolonial consciousness.

Of the several "black leftists" Moore meets, Harold Cruse is the one who has the most significant impact on Moore's faith in Marxism's ability to combat racism. Moore meets Cruse after Cruse returns from his first trip to Cuba. Both Moore and Cruse are Trotskyite Marxists and members of the SWP and FPCC. Moore says Cruse was "the man who shook the foundations of my nascent Communist aspirations and sowed the first grains of suspicion about Marxist socialism" being unable to address and dismantle white supremacy (104).

Maya Angelou is the mentor who had the most transformative influence in the expansion of Moore's racial and sexual identity politics. Angelou's intervention in the development of Moore's political consciousness is the first in a series of four encounters that result in Moore veering off the road of liberal individualism and on to the path of radical Pan-Africanism. Moore explicitly compares the nature of his Pan-Africanist transformation to St. Paul's conversion to Christianity on the road to Damascus. The comparison is apt given that spiritual conversion narratives, autobiographies, and bildungsromans have thematic roots in the Christian pietism of the 17th and 18th centuries.⁵⁷ In *The Self and the Sacred: Conversion and Autobiography in Early American Protestantism*, Rodger M. Payne notes that the development of what we might call the autobiographical self was coterminous with

⁵⁷ I discuss the pietistic origins of the bildungsroman in the Introduction to this dissertation.

“the rise of various pietistic traditions that emphasized personal and affective experience” (7). Payne goes on to say, “Only the transforming self constitutes both the subject and the object of proper autobiographical activity” and that “true salvation implied the negation or extinction of the self” (16 and 41). In *The Puritan Conversion Narrative: The Beginnings of American Expression*, Patricia Caldwell argues that the Puritan conversion narrative is uniquely characterized by transnational disenchantment: “It is as if, for most of the people, there is an unexpected deadlock between their experiences of the migration and the fulfillment of their religious hopes” (P. Caldwell 120). The Puritans’ disappointment in America anticipates Moore’s immigrant disillusionment when he realizes that America is not the unadulterated “promised land” he imagined it to be when he lived in Cuba. As mentioned above, Moore explicitly compares his political transformation to St. Paul’s religious conversion. The difference, however, is that St. Paul’s conversion is sudden and epiphanic whereas Moore’s spiritual transformation is relatively gradual and episodic.

The four pivotal episodes in the development of Moore’s Pan-Africanism are his two encounters with the female blues impulse and his two encounters with male sermonic rhetoric. According to Craig Werner, author of *A Change is Gonna Come: Music, Race, & the Soul of America*, the blues impulse is the need to use the cathartic and communal function of the blues as a source of personal affirmation, historical continuity, and ameliorating resilience in times of joy and pain (68-71). Though eschatological and teleological, the function and expression of African American sermonic rhetoric, according to Dolan Hubbard, is categorically and historically

related to the blues impulse. Hubbard makes several significant points about the relationship between African American sermonic rhetoric and the blues. First, like the blues, “survival and resistance” is the “central impulse” of the African American sermon (Hubbard 6). Second, the African American sermonizer is a “transformational agent,” much like the blues, jazz, or gospel soloist (Hubbard 14). Third, the sermon’s “mode of expression is colored by a blues sensibility, if by blues one means the working out of the tension between what Richard Wright in ‘The Literature of the Negro in the United States’ refers to as the sensualization of pain and pleasure as opposed to the transcending of pain and pleasure” (Hubbard 23). Moore’s conversion narrative displays many of the characteristic features of the blues impulse and African American sermonic rhetoric, and parts of his narrative deploy those features in novel and unorthodox stylistic patterns.

The blues theme and antiphonal arrangement of the episodes in Moore’s conversion narrative call to mind Countee Cullen’s poem “Colored Blues Singer.” In *Hot Music, Ragmentation, and the Bluing of American Literature*, African American Studies scholar Stephen C. Tracy analyzes the cultural significance of the blues impulse and the female blues icon in the “Colored Blues Singer.” Tracy’s analysis of the “Colored Blues Singer” provides a useful lens for interpreting how the archetype of the Afroethnic female blues singer provides racialized gendered structures and meanings to Moore’s episodic conversion narrative. For instance, the ABAB English quatrain pattern in “Colored Blues Singer” structurally mirrors the pattern of antiphonal episodes in Moore’s conversion to radical Pan-Africanism. The first and third episodes in Moore’s Pan-African conversion narrative involve female blues

interventions. These episodes correspond to the letter A in the ABAB narrative structure mentioned above. The first intervention is with Maya Angelou, the most significant of Moore's New York mentors. The third intervention involves Laura, one of Angelou's fellow disciples. These female blues encounters with Angelou and Laura occur in "spaces of sincerity" and exemplify "candid ambivalence," concepts developed by African American literature and popular music scholar Emily J. Lordi in her book *Black Resonance: Iconic Women Singers and African American Literature*.

The second and fourth episodes in Moore's Pan-African conversion involve male sermonic interventions. The first male encounter is with the Garveyite soapbox orator. Repeated and prolonged exposure to the orator's moral suasion convinces Moore to value the Africinity of his own body by relinquishing the practices of hair-straightening and skin-bleaching. The second male encounter is with the political speeches and sermons of Malcolm X, orations that seduce Moore into moving from rhetorical resistance to the resistance of direct action. I read Moore's encounters with Malcolm X through Hubbard's analysis of the political and psycho-affective value of sermonic rhetoric in the African American literary imagination. I use a close reading of the four pivotal episodes in Moore's conversion to argue that the quatrain of alternating one-to-one and one-to-many episodes in Moore's bildung conversion narrative reveal an antiphonal gendered relationship between the jazz-rendered blues of "candid ambivalence" and the blues impulse of transformative African American sermonic rhetoric.

As mentioned above, the most significant mentor in the development of Moore's Pan-Africanism is Maya Angelou. Moore meets Angelou in the NMAB. At

the time, the revolution in Cuba was in the national press and like many of the people Moore meets in this period, Angelou takes an intellectual interest in him primarily because he is Cuban. However, part of her interest in Moore is no doubt panethnic, maternal, and sororal. Fifteen years older than Moore, Angelou calls him “little brother.” Moore becomes the object of her pragmatic nationalism; he becomes her own personal racial uplift project. Angelou introduces Moore to her friends Abbey Lincoln and Max Roach, and she invites him to listen to the couple perform songs that would later become part of their album *We Insist! Max Roach’s Freedom Now Suite* (1960). Moore commits the social faux pas of bringing his white lover, Helen, with him to hear Lincoln and Roach perform in the Village. Angelou, Lincoln, and Roach, writes Moore, “were displeased at the way I had come into the club exhibiting a white woman as if she were the sole symbol of my worth They had hoped I would connect with the message of black pride their music sought to convey” (109).

Angelou becomes so concerned about Moore’s internalized racism that she stages a one-on-one intervention. She invites him over to her house on what Moore thinks may turn out to be a sexual escapade. However, Angelou, wearing an Afro, spreads out the albums of Nina Simone, Odetta Holmes, and Miriam Makeba on a table. Moore is completely unfamiliar with the singers, but he notices that they “all wore their hair natural like Maya’s. That made a powerful impression on me, since my own hair was straightened and fell slickly over my head” (110). Moore’s recollection of the album covers is not quite accurate. Makeba’s hair is natural on her 1960 album cover and so is Odetta’s on her 1959 and 1960 album covers, but

this is not true of any of Simone's pre-1967 album covers. Moore listens to the music and Angelou signs and gives him a copy of her 1957 album *Miss Calypso*. The biographical profile on the album cover claims that Angelou is the Cuban-born child of a Watusi immigrant. The fake profile was a "marketing gimmick," says Angelou. (111). To get work as a "black" singer in the U.S., she had to deny her African American identity and pass as an Afro-Cuban immigrant. Angelou and Moore poignantly laugh at the subterfuge necessary to counter the unique absurdity of U.S. racial logic and subordination. Their sense of panethnicity and common oppression brings them together ideologically. Angelou feels comfortable enough to have a long conversation with Moore about self-esteem, racism in the U.S., the Civil Rights movement, and what she sees as his racial obligation to date women of African descent. "Listen, little brother," she tells him, "next time I invite you some place, don't march in with one of those white women as if you were a gladiator! If you can't come with a *sister*, come by yourself" (112).

From a contemporary progressive individualist perspective, Angelou's insistence that Moore must not date, or must not exclusively date, Euro-American women seems racially separatist and morally indefensible. However, the philosopher Charles W. Mills claims that Angelou's stance, under certain parameters, can be morally justified. Mills argues that one can, without necessarily advocating ethnic separatism, ground Angelou's argument in a relatively defensible, non-racist philosophical context. In "Do Black Men Have a Moral Duty to Marry Black Women?," Mills suggests that "using conventional moral theories, and without making racist assumptions about whites, or even appealing to any controversial

separatist ideology—an interesting case can in fact be built for a position quite widespread in the ‘commonsense morality’ of the black community” (150). Mills claims that “the differential social status of subordinated and dominant races, especially blacks and whites, generates *moral asymmetries*, so that whereas the claim, e.g., that ‘whites should only marry whites’ *will* in general be based on philosophically uninteresting racist reasons, the case for black endogamy is (at least in some versions) more respectable” (131, emphasis in the original).

Mills provides six arguments for the defense of heteronormative “black endogamy.” Some are weaker than others, but taken together they “show the mistakenness of the knee-jerk white liberal (or, for that matter, black liberal response that no defensible case could possibly be made for the existence of such a duty”(149). Mills’ sixth argument, the one he considers to be his most defensible, is one that involves four morally “questionable motivations” for interracial coupling: “(i) sexual exoticism and forbidden fruit-picking, (ii) racial revenge, (iii) racially differentiated aesthetic attraction, and (iv) racial status-seeking and personhood by proxy” (144). Essentially, Mills’ theory of racialized subconscious motivation suggests two rationales for the avoidance of racial exogamy with Euroethnic females: (1) because Afroethnic men can never be sure that their motivations are completely free of internalized racism, they should not engage in exogamy with Euroethnic females and (2) even if their motivations are purely based on romantic love, exogamy with a Euroethnic female will be perceived by some as a sign of contempt for one’s Afroethnicity and serve to foster and perpetuate the ideology of white superiority (149). Angelou’s implicit argument and Moore’s own admission of

self-hate (i.e. hair conking and skin bleaching) and racial revenge fall (i.e. the *Island in the Sun* debates) in line with Mills' sixth argument. So according to Mills and Angelou, racial endogamy for African Americans is an act of cultural resistance, a panethnic, existential obligation. The question is would Moore have become the Pan-Africanist that he is if he had not first been a piolo who only dated Euroethnic women? I argue no. Without those experiences, Moore's conversion narrative would be less compelling because the magnitude of change would be less profound. As we shall see below, Moore, like the apostle Saul, has to move from one extreme to the other to make his conversion narrative extremely compelling, memorable, and exemplary. In *Spiritual Autobiography in Early America*, Daniel B. Shea Jr. notes that conversion narratives are proselytizing texts. They are designed to bring potentials into the fold through grace: "The spiritual autobiographer is primarily concerned with the question of grace: whether or not the individual has been accepted into divine life, an acceptance signified by psychological and moral changes the autobiographer comes to discern in his past experience" (Shea xi). Moore's conversion narrative is about him receiving the secular grace (i.e. the strategic favor, charity, and acceptance) of a Pan-Africanist mentor and a pragmatic nationalist community.

Moore leaves Maya's apartment on good terms, realizing that the point of the intervention was about his hair straightening, skin bleaching, fear of Afroethnic women, and his general flight from his "black self" (113). However, Moore is not immediately converted. Angelou's "foolishness about 'black pride'" does not sink in until a Garveyite soapbox orator at Nostrand Ave. and Fulton St. mocks Moore's

processed hair in front of a crowd of “fifteen or so other people” (118). The orator calls out, “Hey, hey, hey, Mr. Negro!”; “Look at your hair, Mr. Negro! You’re ashamed of your hair!”; and “Look at Mr. Negro! He doesn’t know he’s a lost African” (Moore 117). The taunts triggers a flashback, a self-reflexive reverie in which Moore recollects the days when his mother used to press her “bad hair” and chemically process his. He recalls how “the white boys laughed at our [Afro-Cubans] features, likening our nostrils to saxophones, our lips to bloated beef, and our hair to the *marabu* bush that was full of prickly thorns” (118). Worming their way into his psyche, the orator’s taunts haunt Moore long after the public sermon is over. “I could not,” says Moore, “get the man’s litany out of my head”:

Hey, Mr. Negro, you’re ashamed of your lips.

Of course I was not ashamed of my lips!

Hey, Mr. Negro, you’re ashamed of your nose.

Nonsense, I was not ashamed of my nose.

Hey, Mr. Negro, you’re ashamed of your African hair.

Ridiculous, I was not ashamed of my hair; it was just easier to handle when straight. (119 emphasis in the original).

The antiphonal litany of italicized accusations and non-italicized remonstrations form a kind of prose poem, a series of three trochaic couplets rhyming AABBCD. Thematically, if not structurally, the litany is a blues poem because it captures the pathos of Moore’s double consciousness, the struggle between the cultural forces that urge him to love himself as he is and those that push him to adopt Euroethnic standards of beauty. The latter force is particularly huge and hard to ignore. Recall

that Moore's mother used to process his "bad hair" as a child. So it is not surprising that as a teenager Moore desires to copy the straightened hairstyles of his African American idols: Nat King Cole, James Brown, the Platters, Brooke Benton, and Jackie Wilson. "The men," says Moore, "fashioned their artificially straightened hair into marcel waves. To have a marcel became my goal" (73). The non-italicized protestations represent the rationalizations Moore makes to himself, the responses he wishes he had articulated to the orator and the congregation. The litany represents the tragic-comic bind that alienates Moore from himself and the Pan-African social circles in which he increasingly travels. After the initial harangue by the soapbox orator, Moore vows to avoid his pulpit, which is on Moore's normal route to school. However, instead of avoidance Moore inexplicably chooses engagement. Although Moore does not say it, I argue that Angelou's blues intervention motivates that choice. Moore maintains his school route and encounters the orator on a second occasion. On his second encounter, Moore, spellbound, listens for hours to the soapbox orator lecture about Marcus Garvey, UNIA, the glory of Africa, and being of African descent. Moore's mentor Mr. Michaux often talks about Garvey and this is what compels Moore to listen to the soapbox orator a second time. Moore develops a habit of regularly listening to a variety of soapbox orators preach about Garvey and collective self-reliance. After listening to one such sermon for hours, Moore embraces his Afroethnic pride. He goes home and disposes all of his skin bleaching and hair straightening products. However, his transformation is not fully complete.

Angelou invites Moore to come back to the Village to listen to Lincoln and Roach play for a second time. Moore comes alone to the club and Angelou introduces him to Laura, a twenty-four-year-old African American woman. After leaving the club, around two or three in the morning, Moore goes to Laura's house to have sex with her. Instead, he winds up having a conversation that temporarily makes him sexually impotent, but that also liberates him from his internalized racism. The intellectual engagement with Laura is much like the engagement Moore had with Angelou when she staged her intervention. Before having sex, Laura entices Moore into a conversation about his cultural origins, the circumstances of his immigration, and his relationship with his mother. Laura's questions expose Moore's ignorance about his parents' origins and lives in Jamaica. The questioning makes Moore uncomfortable because Laura pushes him to deal with the one subject he did not want to deal with—his past as a *pinchón*. On the record player, Sarah Vaughan sings "If You Could See Me Now," as Moore and Laura lay naked in bed. When Laura finally concedes to sex, she mounts Moore. Moore had never had a woman on top of him before; the newness and passiveness of the position, combined with Laura's general self-confidence, overwhelms Moore and he goes limp: "With Laura, I felt inadequate, overpowered by her assertiveness" (123). Ella Fitzgerald scats in the background on the record player as Moore spirals into panic and shame. Instead of acting on his impulse to leave, Laura has Moore stay and continue a conversation in which she explicitly links his lack of "virility" to her being a woman of African descent.

During the conversation Moore asks Laura why African American women are racist, why they disparage “black men who date white women” (123) Laura explains, that it is not racism per se, but offense at the fact that black men perfunctorily afford Euroethnic women a level of prestige that pales in comparison to the level of esteem they afford Afroethnic women. Afroethnic men, says Laura, treat Afroethnic women like “dirt” and Euroethnic women like “war trophies” and “goddesses” (124). Laura’s reference to race war recalls Moore and Mill’s references to interracial coupling as an act of self-loathing revenge. Laura puts her sense of insult in its historical context, starting with the brutalization and violation of Afroethnic women by Euroethnic men during slavery. Moore counters her narrative by arguing that Afroethnic men suffered during slavery too and that dwelling on the past will not change the present.

What is aesthetically interesting is that this conversation departs from conventional representations of dialogue in prose. Formally speaking, Moore’s dialogue with Laura is the most compelling scene in the conversion narrative because the radically altered formal structure of the narrative reflects the radical change in consciousness that Moore undergoes in Laura’s presence. As with traditional dialogue, a new line is devoted to each speaker. However, there is only one quoted speaker and that is Laura, who delivers a monologue on the female experience of racial slavery. Moore renders Laura’s monologue as direct, quoted speech, placing ellipsis marks at the beginning and end of her dialogue to indicate the points at which he audibly disrupts her speech. Although Moore punctuates

Laura's sermon soliloquy with his defensive and "insistent interruptions," he renders those interruptions as summarized dialogue, that is, without direct quotes:

"For four hundred years we black women had to fend
for ourselves . . ."

Was that the black man's fault? Of course not!

". . . raise children we had not desired, or have those we
desired seized from us . . ."

But black men were in chains, too.

The typographical effect of putting Laura's voice in direct quotes privileges her narrative and point of view. It creates the illusion that Moore does not audibly interrupt Laura in the moment, that his disruptive ripostes are snatches of a stream of consciousness interior monologue to himself. This modernist technique creates an artificial silence on the page. This phantom silence heightens the real silence that occurs as Laura's sermon on the "terrors of the past," "the epoch of blood," pushes Moore into a "perilous abyss" of actual silence that ultimately leads him to articulate his empathy and his desire to save Laura from the traumas of the past. The antiphonal nature of dialogue between Moore and Laura replicates the antiphonal structure of the conversion narrative of which it is a component part.

Laura and Moore only become sexually intimate after they arrive at a mutual point of empathy through a sense of a shared history and a common destiny. Laura puts Billie Holiday's "Don't Explain" on the record player and she reads poetry to Moore, as she lies next to him. Ironically, Holiday's song suggests that Moore does not have to explain his transracial peccadillos because Laura prefers to have him

with her than to not have him at all. The lyrics of "Don't Explain" also foreshadow Moore's infidelity to Laura. She eventually breaks up with Moore because he refuses to stop simultaneously dating Helen.

When Dinah Washington's "Bitter Earth" plays on the record player, Moore and Laura begin to make love in the sunlight of the new day. Moore starts slow, itemizing and valorizing, like the soapbox orator, the Africanness of Laura's body: "I kissed her fleshy lips, tentatively at first, then increasingly zealously. I kissed her nose, her eyes, her hair. It was the first time I had kissed hair that was not straight. I kissed her breasts, moved down lower and kissed her legs. As they parted, I began kissing her sex, until her body trembled" (126). The seminal act of kissing Laura's natural hair reflects the new day dawning in the development of Moore's racial and political consciousness; it is a symbolic act that manifests the meaning of "Encounter with Myself," the title of the chapter in which the scene occurs. Kissing Laura's hair and "her sex" is an act of self-love, an act that starts to free Moore not only from "the weight of centuries" but also from the self-hate his mother instilled in him. An Afroethnic woman helped trap Moore in self-hate and it takes a village of Afroethnic women to free him from it.

At this point, I want to use Tracy's reading of Cootie Stark's poem "Colored Blues Singer" and Lordi's concepts of "candid ambivalence" and "spaces of sincerity" to further interpret Moore's female blues interventions. Tracy notes that the "Colored Blues Singer" is a significant blues poem because it challenges the stylistic and thematic conventions of the genre (particularly as practiced by Langston Hughes); it implicitly acknowledges that there are blues singers who are not

“colored;” it culturally equates American vernacular culture with European high culture; and it highlights the unique significance of the African American female blues singer as an icon of personal suffering, creative self-expression, and transformative endurance in the face of a tragic past and present. Regarding the contrast between European and American national cultures, Tracy writes: “Cullen measures his phenotypical blues singer against famed beautiful operatic soprano prima donna Maria Jeritza, and the lively subject matter of the blues singer against the celebrated notated staves of operatic über-composer Giuseppe Verdi” (335–336). Tracy points out that “the blues singer’s song is a lament with agency—‘You make your grief a melody’ (line 7)” (337). Tracy argues that in contrast to the blues the conventional subject matter of European opera is detached from contemporary communal experience. A colored blues singer’s subject matter is inherently personal and restorative: “This is the great comfort of the blues, that it fosters creativity and provides solace, ameliorates rather than merely dramatizes a situation. Further, the songs of the blues singer connect to hidden personal origins, not merely mythological stories from foreign cultures but real songs and occasions of loss” (338). This last point, despite the contrast it draws, explicitly acknowledges that European opera and the American blues are both rooted in the folk narratives, national mythologies, and ethnic preoccupations of their respective cultures. As Tracy points out, the “Colored Blues Singer” recognizes Africa, Africans, and the histories of slavery and racialization in the Americas as “the source tragedies of the triumphant blues” (338). Understanding the archetype of the Afroethnic female

blues singer in Cullen's poem, helps better articulate its transcultural significance in Moore's Pan-African conversion narrative.

Like Cullen's poem the "Colored Blues Singer," the archetype of the Afroethnic female blues singer provides structure and meaning to Moore's episodic conversion narrative. For instance, the first and third episodes in Moore's Pan-African conversion involve female blues interventions. The first encounter is with Maya Angelou and the second with Laura. As demonstrated above, Angelou and Laura both deploy "colored" female blues singers in their attempts to convert Moore. Like Angelou, Laura exclusively uses African American female blues/jazz singers to decolonize Moore's mind: Sarah Vaughan, Ella Fitz Gerald, Billie Holiday, and Dinah Washington. Recall that Angelou uses Abbey Lincoln, Nina Simone, Odetta Holmes, and Miriam Makeba to make Moore receptive to the somatic aesthetics and the radical politics of Pan-African nationalism. The female singers in these episodes combine a blues ethos (thematic concerns) with a jazz modality (the structural rendition). The female interventionists, Angelou and Laura, impress upon Moore the connection between the history of Afroethnic slavery in the Americas and contemporary Afroethnic Civil Rights and decolonial liberation struggles.

These female blues interventions can be convincingly read as what Lordi calls "spaces of sincerity," times and spaces in which African Americans feel free to drop the pragmatic mask that veils their omnipresent indignation with Euro-American hegemony. Lordi develops this concept, along with the co-concepts "timbre of sincerity," "candid ambivalence," and "integrative practice" in the second chapter of her book *Black Resonance: Iconic Women Singers and African American*

Literature. Lordi culls the concepts from “As the Spirit Moves Mahalia,” Ralph Ellison’s review of Mahalia Jackson’s performance at the 1958 Newport Jazz Festival. The draft title of Ellison’s article was “Mahalia, The Timbre of Sincerity.” Lordi notes that this was Ellison’s “only article on a female (sacred) singer” (67). Lordi’s four concepts articulate the love-hate relationship--the Freudian emotional ambivalence--African American communities and individuals can often have with the dominant culture, institutions, and media in the U.S. African Americans can love America for its unique culture and lofty ideals but simultaneously hate America for its racist practices and ways.⁵⁸ The expression of this “candid ambivalence,” this Du Boisian double consciousness, can be particularly pronounced at certain ritualized times and in certain ritualized spaces in the African American community. For Lordi, these ambivalently charged “spaces of sincerity” are “those *moments* when the obligation to wear the mask diminishes—as it might in safe spaces that are located, in Sondra O’Neale’s words, ‘beyond the mask’” (71 emphasis mine). Notice that Lordi defines “spaces of sincerity” in terms of *time* and against the idea of duplicitous/protective masking that the “white gaze” often prompts and demands of Afroethnics. Lordi’s theoretical example of a space/time of sincerity is on a Sunday morning in an exclusively African American church that is spellbound by a gospel singer. Free from the “white gaze,” the enraptured African American congregation experiences a catharsis as a result of the gospel singer’s “timbre of sincerity.” Lordi, summarizing, Ellison, notes that the Mahalia Jackson on stage on Saturday at the

⁵⁸ A literary example of “sincere ambivalence” is “The Job,” a poem by Willard Moore. See Breman 277.

Newport Jazz Festival is not the same Mahalia Jackson in the choir on Sunday in the Newport Mount Zion AME Church. The Newport stage is the site of an exceptional performance, but the choir (i.e. the architectural space) of the Newport Mount Zion AME Church is a space for authenticity, for the timbre of sincerity.

According to Lordi, the timbre of sincerity is a moral trait, an “ethical function,” characterized by “integrative practice.” Integrative practice is “the performance of stylistic variation and citational range” (Lordi 67). In other words, integrative practice is the act of harmoniously fusing heterogeneous aesthetics, themes, styles, modalities, subjects, and affects; it is a valorization of multiplicity over singularity, simultaneity over antiphony, and hybridity over purity. Put simply, reading for the timbre of sincerity means analyzing how artists “engage at once subversively and affirmatively with the prior texts they cite and refashion” (Lordi 69).

Moore’s dialogues with Angelou and Laura are spaces of sincerity in which Moore has to confront his candid ambivalence and his integrative practice. Inside these spaces Angelou and Laura force Moore to reconcile his love of African American music and culture with his exclusive dating of Euro-American women, his hair-straightening, and his skin-bleaching. Moore uses the unconventional typographic dialogue techniques to reify his candid ambivalence as well as the resolution of that ambivalence. Angelou and Laura’s dialogues, and the Afroethnic soundtracks to those dialogues, impress upon Moore the particularized voice, suffering, and celebration of Afroethnic women and womanhood, and in doing so

they help him to get further along in the process of converting from a self-loathing piolo to a radical jorocón.

Maya Angelou's female blues and black aesthetic intervention, the moral suasion of the soapbox orator's sermonic discourse on natural hair, and Laura's lecture on the historic suffering of Afroethnic women in slavery collectively lead to Moore's final rite of passage, attending Malcolm X speeches in Harlem during the summer of 1960. Moore attends at least two of Malcolm X's lectures that summer; both seem to take place between May and June. The first lecture takes place at a Nation of Islam mass rally inside the 369th Field Artillery Armory in Harlem at 142nd St. and Fifth Ave.⁵⁹ The Armory was originally called "the Negro or Colored Regiment of Infantry, later the Fifteenth Regiment (Harlem Hellfighters) during World War I, and the 369th Regiment after World War I" ("369th Regiment Armory"). At the mass rally, Malcolm X discusses how the imperial U.S. oppresses people of color globally and how internalized racism underdevelops the African American capacity for self-government, erodes African American self-confidence, and leads to a culture of self-debasement (132-133). After the speech, Moore becomes an avid reader of *Muhammad Speaks*, a weekly magazine which the Nation of Islam began publishing in May of 1960. The second lecture is held at "the Muslim mosque in Harlem that was under Malcolm's leadership" (134). This mosque would have been the famous Temple Seven of the Nation of Islam. Moore attends this sermon in Harlem with "Mburumba Kerina, an Ovaherero nationalist" who was

⁵⁹ According to the NYS Division of Military and Naval Affairs, the site was did not take this name until 1961. From 1940 to 1961 it was known as the 369th Coast Artillery Regiment.

introduced to him by Maya Angelou. Kerina worked as a lobbyist for the South-West Africa People Organization (SWAPO), promoting its cause to the United Nations Committee on Decolonization. Through Kerina, Moore comes into contact with other African diplomats in the UN. Kerina and Moore “disagreed sharply” on the efficacy and relevance of Malcolm X’s speech at Temple Seven. Kerina finds the “sermon” to be more political than religious. Without providing specifics, Moore describes the sermon as an “electrifying speech” about the condition of “blacks” in America. After the first speech, Moore says, “I felt that something beyond the merely unusual had happened to me” and after the sermon in Temple Seven he says, “I had been seeking precisely the political explanations Malcolm offered” (134). Note that both speeches occur in spaces of sincerity, spaces where the pragmatic mask is completely dropped. Moore describes the effect of Malcolm X’s sermonic rhetoric in military and biblical terms: “Malcolm X took my mind and soul by storm” and “But the scales had fallen from my eyes” (132 and 133).

The second metaphor, the revelatory one, is an allusion to the faith healing of Saul of Tarsus by the prophet Ananias. Saul, generally known by his Roman cognomen St. Paul, is “often considered the second most important person in the history of Christianity” (“Saint Paul, the Apostle”). Saul, a Hebrew, was known for persecuting Christians. However, on the road to Damascus, Saul converts to Christianity after a heavenly light blinds him and the voice of Jesus questions him about his reputation for oppressing the religious.⁶⁰ When Saul arrives in Damascus,

⁶⁰ The voice is audible to both Saul and his retinue, which leads the blinded Saul to Damascus.

Ananias, a disciple of Christ, receives him, and, as previously instructed by the voice of Jesus, Ananias lays hands on Saul, miraculously restoring his sight: “And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized” (King James Version, Acts 9:18). By comparing himself to Saul, Moore casts himself as an apostle of the modern Pan-Africanist movement and Malcolm X as both Jesus and Jesus’ agent, Ananias. Malcolm X’s sermonic rhetoric is the healing philosophy that completes Moore’s transformation into a committed Pan-Africanist and reveals how the grace, gospel, and practice of Afroethnic solidarity, self-reliance, and self-love can combat and dismantle Eurocentric cultural hegemony. Moore’s encounter with Malcolm X is the second of two male sermonic interventions. Recall that the first sermonic intervention is Moore’s encounter with the male Garveyite soapbox orator. This encounter corresponds to the first B episode in the conversion narrative’s ABAB plot structure. Like the soapbox orator, Malcolm X takes on the role of “transformational agent,” the same role Hubbard ascribes to the African American preacher. This is the same ameliorating and transformative function that Tracy and Lordi ascribe to the iconic African American blues singer. The sermonic rhetoric of the soapbox orator and Malcolm X’s political speeches seduce Moore into moving from rhetorical resistance to the resistance of radical direct action (a point which I cover in detail in the final section of this chapter).

The quatrain of alternating blues and sermonic episodes in Moore’s bildung conversion narrative reveal an antiphonal gendered relationship between jazz-rendered blues and the African American sermonic rhetoric of community-based

self-transformation. The blues interventions call out the pain and suffering of the African American condition through the particularized experience of betrayed and/or alienated African American and Afroethnic women. The sermonic encounters answer those calls with masculinized appeals for revolutionary self-love, self-reliance, and self-transformation. The gendered episodes of Moore's conversion suggests that the intimacy of the one-to-one female blues interventions and the empathy of the one-to-many male sermonic encounters was the only combination strong enough to liberate Moore's heteronormative political consciousness from the self-hate taught to him by the dominant society and reified in the aesthetic grooming practices of his mother.

The New Left/Old Left Continuities of Carlos Moore's Radical Pan-Africanism

The profundity of Moore's conversion to Pan-Africanism can be best understood by examining the zeal with which he pursued his new faith in the wake of his transformation. After attending Malcolm X's speeches, Moore's political activism becomes increasingly radical and focused on Castro's revolution and decolonialism in the Congo. For example, between June 1960 and June 1961, Moore becomes a speaker for several pro-Castro groups (Fair Play for Cuba Committee, On Guard for Freedom, and the July 26 Movement) and develops a terrorist plot to seize or destroy the Belgian Consulate in New York. His work in the July 26 Movement achieves him an introduction to Castro when Castro stays in Harlem's Teresa Hotel in September of 1960. Patrice Lumumba becomes Moore's "first political hero" (135). He admires Lumumba for his "Pan-African nationalism" and his efforts to

free the Congo from the neocolonial influence of the West (153). Moore's admiration leads him to skip school and volunteer in the Congo Mission to the United Nations. After Lumumba is deposed in a coup d'état, Moore concocts a plan to convince Egyptian ambassador Omar Loufti, a friend of his from the UN, to help him and his compatriots, Maurice and Jomo, to reach the Congo and free the imprisoned Lumumba. When Loufti refuses to comply, Moore and his coconspirators develop a plan to coerce the Belgians to free Lumumba by threatening to blow up the Belgian consulate in New York.

Maya Angelou, Abbey Lincoln, Max Roach, and Angelou's group of "women militants" are equally outraged at the CIA-supported assassination of Patrice Lumumba (153). Angelou's group, the Cultural Association for Women of African Heritage (CAWAH), expresses its outrage by organizing the February 15, 1961 protest that disrupts Adlai E. Stevenson's speech at U.N. Security Council. The female membership of the HWG, which included Maya Angelou, Rosa Guy, Sarah Wright, and Abbey Lincoln, founded CAWAH in 1960 (Smethurst, *The Black Arts Movement* 118; K. M. Caldwell). Lincoln and Roach's home served as a salon for the HWG and African American radicals and leftists like Malcolm X, Ossie Davis, and Ruby Dee (Joseph). CAWAH held its second meeting in Lincoln's home. In her 1981 memoir, *Heart of a Woman*, Maya Angelou writes that CAWAH was designed to support and raise funds for "black civil rights groups":

The Cultural Association for Women of African Heritage had its second meeting at Abbey's luxury penthouse apartment on Columbus Avenue. Several weeks before, we had agreed on a charter, a policy

statement and a name: CAWAH. It sounded exotic. We agreed. The newly founded organization included dancers, teachers, singers, writers and musicians. Our intention was to support all black civil rights groups. The charter, as drawn up by Sarah Wright and signed unanimously by the membership, stated that since the entire power of the United States was arrayed in fury against the very existence of the Afro-Americans, we, members of CAWAH, would offer ourselves to raise money for, promote and publicize any gathering sincerely engaged in developing a just society. It further stated that our members, multitalented, would agree, after an assenting vote, to perform dance concerts, song fests, fashion shows and general protest marches" (Angelou 168).

CAWAH and HWG were inextricably linked through their intersecting membership and their shared admiration for the Congolese liberation struggle. "The HWG, particularly the fluent French-speaking Guy," writes Smethurst, "had formed a sort of extended family for the Congolese U.N. delegation, which had felt isolated in New York because French was the only European language most of the delegation spoke proficiently" (*The Black Arts Movement* 118). Lumumba's assassination, says Smethurst, inspired the "HWG to contact a wide range of Left and nationalist groups within the black community of New York" to protest at the U.N. (*The Black Arts Movement* 118).

Angelou writes that CAWAH, not HWG, was the ideological source, organizational foundation, and public face of the 1961 U.N. protest. Rosa Guy,

having heard of the death of Patrice Lumumba from her husband's U.N. contacts, breaks the news to CAWAH, which decides to stage a peaceful protest that involves standing silently in the chamber of the U.N. until led out. Women protesters would don black veils and men black arm bands. Six of the ten women in CAWAH balk at the plan and choose not to participate, being either too conservative, too nationalist, or both. The remaining members ask Lewis Michaux to gather the Harlem community in front of the NMAB for their call to arms. Angelou claims that a crowd of thousands congregated to hear Guy, Lincoln, and her announce the purpose and plan of their protest (Angelou 168-177).

To Angelou's disbelief, throngs of people gathered at the U.N. on Feb. 15, 1961 with the expectation of gaining entry into the Security Council in order to voice their indignation at the U.S. involvement in Lumumba's assassination. Angelou recalls that the African delegations were supposed to provide Rosa Guy with tickets for the prospective protesters. Guy is only able to secure seven tickets. She gives the tickets to Moore who takes in six to seven people at a time. In total, CAWAH is able to move about sixty protesters into the U. N. In recounting the incident, Angelou recalls Carlos Moore's good looks and his hot temperament. Angelou says, "Carlos was little and pretty and reminded me of my brother"; but she also remembers Moore as "an angry young man who moved through Harlem's political sky like a luminous meteor" (Angelou 190 and 182). As Moore tells it in *Pinchón*, he repeatedly uses his U.N. pass to get demonstrators, in batches of ten, inside the U.N. Security Council (153).

Amece Guy, Rosa's sister, and her daughter Jean were among the CAWAH protesters inside the U.N. On edge and panicky, Amece inadvertently screams when Adlai Stevenson begins his speech:

Rosa continued, "Amece said she looked down and saw Stevenson and thought about Lumumba. She reached to caress her daughter, but Jean jumped and Amece screamed. Unfortunately, she had her arm around Jean's neck. So when Jean jerked, Amece tightened her grip and kept screaming. Nobody was going to hurt her baby. So she screamed." Rosa laughed. "Nobody but Amece. She nearly choked Jean to death." (Angelou 187-188)

Amece's scream sets off a chain of disruptive shouts and denunciations from other demonstrators. The protesters interrupt proceedings and accuse the U.S. of cooperation in the political assassination of Lumumba. Fighting breaks out as the police try to suppress the disturbance. In the ensuing chaos, Moore leaves the U.N. to rendezvous with Jomo and Maurice to carry out their plan to seize the Belgian consulate. Maurice does not show up,⁶¹ but Jomo does, his only weapon a concealed bottle of gasoline. Moore charms his way into the Belgian consulate. As previously planned, the protesters at the U.N. march to the Belgian consulate, unwittingly providing a distraction for Moore's terrorist plot. Inside, Moore has a loss of nerve at the thought of setting the building on fire and killing innocent people. He calls the

⁶¹ Perhaps Maurice is Maurice Laurenci. The New York Times reports that Laurenci, a "Negro" student, was arrested and charged "with disorderly conduct for attempting to wrest away placards carried by the pro-United Nations pickets" ("Riot in Gallery Halts U.N. Debate: American Negroes Ejected After Invading Session").

plan off. He and Jomo exit the building by passing as Francophone African students: “I spoke in French, which they didn’t understand. Jomo and I ceased to be ‘blacks’; we were harmless foreigners. We made our way through the police lines and melted into the crowd” (156-157).

The CAWAH protest which provided the cover for Moore’s failed terrorist plot was supposed to be nonviolent, but Amece Guy’s screams set off a chain of events that the *New York Times*, the following day (February 16, 1961), characterized as an American Negro riot. Although it does not name the CAWAH, the *Times* reports that several nationalist groups, groups that distinctly distanced themselves from Communism and the Left, participated in the protest: “The demonstrators inside the Security Council chamber included members of the United African Nationalist Movement, the Liberation Committee for Africa and On Guard, groups of apparently nationalist and anti-colonialist hue” (“Riot in Gallery Halts U.N. Debate: American Negroes Ejected After Invading Session”). According to Smethurst, the United African Nationalist Movement (UANM) and its founder James R. Lawson were “neo-Garveyite (and extremely anti-Communist)” (*The Black Arts Movement* 117). Founded in June 1960, the Liberation Committee for Africa (LCA) was a racially inclusive organization with a Pan-Africanist, anticolonial mission (Bracey, Sanchez, and Smethurst 213–214). Its chairman, Daniel H. Watts, distanced himself from the CPUSA, but had, particularly in the early years of LCA, working relationships with leftist, radical nationalist, and Communist identified organizations and individuals: HWG, OGFF, RAM, John Henrik Clarke, Captain Hugh Mulzac, George Murphy, Richard Moore, Ossie Davis, Harold Cruse, James Baldwin,

and possibly Louis Burnham (Smethurst, *The Black Arts Movement* 127–128). According to Kalamu ya Salaam, On Guard, like LCA and UANM, ascribed to a nationalist ideology:

In 1960 a Black nationalist literary organization, On Guard for Freedom, had been founded on the Lower East Side by Calvin Hicks. Its members included Nannie and Walter Bowe, Harold Cruse (who was then working on *Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*, 1967), Tom Dent, Rosa Guy, Joe Johnson, LeRoi Jones, and Sarah Wright, among others. On Guard was active in a famous protest at the United Nations of the American-sponsored Bay of Pigs Cuban invasion and was active in support of the Congolese liberation leader Patrice Lumumba. From On Guard, Dent, Johnson, and Walcott along with Hernton, Henderson, and Touré established Umbra. (ya Salaam)

It is not surprising that the CAWAH protest attracted nationalist groups given that it made the announcement for the U.N. demonstration at Michaux's NMAB, which, according to Smethurst, "was frequently described as inspiring chaos" (*The Black Arts Movement* 121). The historian Peniel E. Joseph frames the U.N. protest as a "black nationalist" political rebellion, but he stops short of giving full credit to CAWAH for spearheading the event. "The Lumumba demonstration," writes Joseph, "partially originated from meetings held at the penthouse apartment of jazz singer Abbey Lincoln and jazz drummer Max Roach. Lincoln was the most prominent member of the recently formed Cultural Association for Women of African Heritage" (Joseph). Summarizing Smethurst, Cheryl Higashida insists that the CAWAH

“instigated” the U.N. protest, which “became pivotal in the revival of the Black nationalist consciousness in the United States Bringing future Black Power/Black Arts activists together with the older anticolonial Left, the demonstration led Sarah Wright and fellow novelist and Harlem Writers Guild member Calvin Hicks to form On Guard for Freedom to solidify the coalition” (54). According to the *New York Times* article, OGFF was not an outgrowth of the February 15, 1961 U.N. rebellion, but a participant in it. This is chronologically consistent with ya Salaam’s claim that OGFF was founded in 1960.

The *New York Times* article stresses that the U.N. protesters were American Negro nationalists and anti-colonialists who refused to let Euro-Americans and Communists participate in their picketing. The *Times* reports that the demonstrators rejected Benjamin J. Davis Jr., “the national secretary of the Communist party and a Negro” (“Riot in Gallery Halts U.N. Debate: American Negroes Ejected After Invading Session”). Smethurst writes that other accounts claim that the protesters also rejected Paul Robeson Jr. Smethurst goes on to say, “However, since the Left-influenced HWG played such a large part in the organization of the demonstration, it is unclear whether Davis and Robeson would have been excluded simply for their association with the CPUSA” (*The Black Arts Movement* 129). By “Left-influenced,” Smethurst means that the founding members of the HWG had ties to the CPUSA and that the roots of CAWAH’s genealogy are in the Popular Front. Take, for example, the five original founding members of the HWG: Rosa Guy, John Oliver Killens, John Henrik Clarke, Walter Christmas, and Willard Moore. Their Leftist politics varied in kind and degree over time. Guy was a

Trinidadian immigrant with anti-colonial internationalist politics.⁶² FBI records supposedly link Killens to a Kings County branch of the CPUSA but by the 1960s he repositioned himself ideologically as a Third World Marxist;⁶³ Clarke was a self-declared Pan-African Black nationalist; Christmas was a writer for *Masses and Mainstream*, a CPUSA cultural magazine;⁶⁴ and Moore, a member of Leftist organizations like the *Harlem Writers Club* and a contributor to Leftist magazines *Harlem Quarterly*, *Liberator*, and *Freedomways*, and *The Worker*, was probably a member of the CPUSA at some point.⁶⁵

Concerning the Communist affiliations of these writers, Higashida says:

The postwar Black Left was a movement of Black radicals allied to varying degrees with the Communist Party USA (CPUSA) Black artists and intellectuals on the Left such as Maya Angelou, Rosa Guy, and John O. Killens were especially open to allying with nationalists, even as many Communist Party cadres and rank-and-file

Communists repudiated nationalism in the 1950s and 1960s. Figures who maintained or developed distance from the CPUSA due to their left nationalism or Third World Marxism, including Richard Moore, John Henrik Clarke, and Shirley Graham Du Bois, were also central to the Harlem anticolonial Left. (17)

⁶² See Higashida.

⁶³ See Gilyard, *John Oliver Killens* 81 and 164.

⁶⁴ See Washington, 93.

⁶⁵ See Smethurst "Short Biography of Willard Moore," Clarke 34, Shuman 17, Jackson 407, and Breman 133.

The Communist taproots of the HWG are in the soil of the Committee for the Negro in Arts (CNA). According to Dr. Katrina Myers Caldwell, Guy, Killens, Clarke, and Christmas “met while working with the Committee for the Negro in Arts, a political and cultural organization created to help enrich opportunities for African Americans in the theater” (K. M. Caldwell). The literary and cultural historian Brian Dolinar locates the origins of the CNA in the NNC, a CPUSA Popular Front organization. Dolinar claims that after the NNC dissolved in 1947, its “Cultural Division changed its name to the Committee for the Negro in Arts” and continued to do its work (ch. 1, sec. 3 “Not the Hour to Retreat”). During the Second Red Scare (late 1940s to the 1950s), the U.S. Attorney General included the CNA on its list of subversive organizations, which, presumably, provided the incentive for the CNA to rebrand itself as the HWG in 1950. Although the CAWAH has its organizational and ideological ancestry in the cultural nationalist aesthetics of the Popular Front, its coalitional praxis is guided by Pan-Africanism. This coalitional praxis brought Moore into the orbit of Angelou and the CAWAH.

Embarrassed by his failure to carry out the Belgian consulate seizure/bombing, Moore resolves that he would rather be trained in Castro’s army as a merciless revolutionary than live in America as an ineffectual one: “I no longer had any illusions about American imperialism. I deemed myself to be earnestly at war with the United States on several fronts: Cuba, the Congo, the civil rights struggle of black Americans. I would never revert to the person I was before coming to America. My place was in Cuba” (158). The FBI questions Moore for an hour about his whereabouts during the day of the U.N. protest, but they do not arrest him.

The FBI interrogation and the April 17, 1961 Bay of Pigs Invasion expedite Moore's resolve to leave the U.S. as quickly as possible. With the help of the July 26 Movement, Moore arrives back in Cuba in June of 1961, radicalized by his association with the SWP, FPCC, On Guard, and the Pan-African nationalism of the pre-Black Arts/Black Power era. Moore's claim that he would "never revert to the person [he] was before" underscores how his encounter with Malcolm X was the ultimate intervention that cleared the scales from his eyes and prepared him to receive the gospel of Négritude from Carbonell and Balin in Cuba, as covered in the beginning of this chapter.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Moore's pre-immigrant encounters with African American culture through radio and film, his immigrant encounters with the New Left, and his racial apprenticeships with African American anti-colonialists and Pan-African nationalists reveal how transnational intertexts and intercultural influences and exchanges shape Afro-Latino identity in contemporary Latino bildung narratives like *Pinchón*. Like *A Puerto Rican in New York* and *Black Cuban, Black American*, *Pinchón* contains ascent and immersion narratives in Chapters 8 to 17. These narratives underscore the significance of the relationship between symbolic geography and racial identity development in the Afro-Latino bildung memoir. Maya Angelou, Abbey Lincoln, Max Roach, Harold Cruse, Lewis Michaux, Richard Gibson, Dan Watts, Robert Maynard, Calvin Hicks, and LeRoi Jones demonstrate the significance that the Black Left played in Moore's racial apprenticeship. The photos

in Moore's memoir provide visual evidence of how connected Moore was to the Black Left. The photos document that he spoke with Castro when Castro visited the Hotel Theresa in Harlem; that he served as translator for Robert F. Williams in Havana in 1961; and that he had a conversation with Malcolm X in 1964. Moore's ethnoracial apprenticeship in Harlem under the tutelage of the Black Left speaks to how contemporary Afroethnic relations and Pan-African understandings of "blackness" can lead to productive intercultural solidarities and long-lasting political coalitions and alliances, as evidenced by Maya Angelou's having written the small but wholly endorsing Foreword to *Pinchón*.

CHAPTER 5

THE PITFALLS OF TRANSCULTURAL ASCENSION IN VERONICA CHAMBERS' *MAMA'S GIRL*

Introduction

On July 15, 1979, President Carter delivered his infamous “Crisis of Confidence” speech to the nation, his fifth major speech on the energy crisis that was strangling America in the mid to late 1970s. In the speech, Carter admonishes citizens for their flaccid work ethic, weak family ties, loss of communal responsibility, lack of religiosity, and profligate consumerism: "In a nation that was proud of hard work, strong families, close-knit communities and our faith in God, too many of us now tend to worship self-indulgence and consumption. Human identity is no longer defined by what one does but by what one owns" (Carter). Many of the social ills in President Carter’s admonishment populate Veronica Chambers’ Afro-Latina memoir, *Mama's Girl*, which opens in 1980 during the last year of the Carter administration. However, the emotional core of the memoir is its fraught mother-daughter relationship, as indicated by its epigraph, which is the second stanza of “BLACK MOTHER WOMAN” by Audre Lorde:

But I have peeled away your anger
down to its core of love
and look mother
I am
a dark temple where your true spirit rises
beautiful and tough as a chestnut

stanchion against your nightmares of weakness
and if my eyes conceal
squadrons of conflicting rebellions
I learned from you
to define myself
through your denials. (Lorde 222)

Like the persona in Lorde's poem, Chambers learns to use her mother's emotional callousness and rejection to define herself as a durable and sacred being, tapping into the "strong black woman" or "superwoman" trope. *Mama's Girl* chronicles Chambers' life from age ten to twenty-two, narrating her dogged, if not unrealistic, pursuit of academic perfection from grade school through college. The plot begins with her abusive childhood and adolescent years in the 1980s and it ends in 1992, when she becomes fully independent as a New York magazine writer/editor and starts supplying her mother with lavish gifts, upscale experiences, and financial advice. The epigraph is the interpretive key to *Mama's Girl*. It establishes the memoir's mother-daughter conflict and speaks to Chambers' capacity for resilience and forgiveness. Ultimately, after wrestling with the post-traumatic stress of her childhood, Chambers establishes an imperfect yet healing relationship with her mother.

In this chapter, I separate my analysis of *Mama's Girl* into three sections: "Exodus and Immersion," "The Fading Afro-Latina," and "Onward and Upward." In "Exodus and Immersion," I examine the relationships between transculturation,

cultural nationalism, racial apprenticeship, and the exodus narratives that literally and symbolically structure *Mama's Girl*. In "The Fading Afro-Latina," I catalogue and compare the memoir's African American and Latino cultural tropes in order to develop conjectures about their relationships to the critical reception and commercial success of *Mama's Girl*. In "Onward and Upward," I analyze and interpret representations of consumerism, educational excellence, and ascension as a metaphor for personal expertise, freedom, and upward socioeconomic mobility.

Mobility, migration, and exodus narratives are key structural and thematic tropes in *Mama's Girl*. Chambers' maternal grandmother, Flora, immigrated from Martinique to Panama in the 1920s (42 and 62). Cecilia, Chamber's mother, was born in Panama, and Chamber's father was born in the Dominican Republic. Her father, however, immigrated to the U.S. "in 1962 when he was twelve years old" (12). After he finished high school, Chamber's father joined the Army and was stationed in Panama (12). Chambers was born on a U.S. military base in the Panama Canal Zone in 1970 (190). After Chambers' father left the military in 1975, the family migrated to Brooklyn, where Chambers lived until she was fourteen or fifteen (12).

Chambers is the genetic embodiment of intercultural fusion, but she also embodies Pan-African transculturation. Her father, she writes, "joined the civil rights movement and later the Black Power movement" (13). During Chambers' first ten years, her parents were united in their effort to socialize her and her younger brother as African Americans rather than as Afro-Dominican Panamanians. As a second-generation Afro-Latina, Chambers grows up and forms her racial

identity in Brooklyn. Much of that identity is the result of her parents' cultural nationalism. For example, Chambers' father wanted to name her Angela Davis Chambers, but her mother rejected the name. However, they named her younger brother Malcolm X Chambers (13). In addition, every Black History Month Chambers' parents insisted that Chambers and her brother write reports for them about significant African American cultural heroes. Chambers parents also watched and discussed documentaries about the Civil Rights movement with her and her brother, and her grade school taught its students the national Negro anthem, "Lift Every Voice and Sing" (51-53). It also seems that Chambers' parents actively neglected to teach their children Spanish, which is a significant contributor to Chambers' strong affinity with African American history and culture.

Although Chambers' Caribbean parents demonstrate solidarity around what Greer calls "black socialization," they lack conjugal solidarity. Her parents' marriage starts to break apart when her father quits his job at an insurance company to pursue his dream of becoming a ventriloquist and magician. His path to success is not easy, the family falls on hard times, and the fights between Chambers' parents escalate (17-22). Eventually, Chambers' father becomes involved with another woman. He rarely stays home, always running off, saying "I'm gone. Beep me" (24). One day, Chambers' mother moves to smash the father's beeper with a hammer, but he takes the hammer away from her and bashes her in the head with it instead. Chambers never forgets the incident (25). After her father leaves, the family slides into poverty and emotional disrepair. Slowly, Chambers comes to learn the root of her parents' dysfunction, and why her mother is emotionally indifferent to her and

her brother, denying them physical affection and routinely speaking to them cruelly. As it turns out, her mother had married her father not because she loved him but because she had gotten pregnant and did not want to bring shame on her family by being an unwed mother (70-71). Chambers' mother tells her that having children dashed her hopes of becoming a lawyer, and later Chambers surreptitiously learns that her mother might have chosen to abort her and lived a different life had abortion been legal (59). Years later, Chambers' mother more explicitly blames her children for confining her to an unhappy marriage.

Exodus and Immersion: Symbolic Geography and Pan-African Identity Development

Exodus and immersion narratives, in the form of interstate migration, structure the plot and symbolic geography of Chamber's adolescence. There are two exodus and two immersion narratives in *Mama's Girl*. The first immersion narrative takes place when Chambers is eleven years old and after her grandmother, Flora, dies (64-65). The trip becomes part of her ethnoracial apprenticeship as a cultural, if not ethnic, African American. Chambers' mother sends her to spend "July and August 'down south'" in Florida with a family that used to live next to them in Brooklyn (66). Going down South excites Chambers because it is the first time that she, as one of the "black girls from the islands" participates in a coveted summer ritual unique to "black girls from America" (66). The trip evokes mixed feelings of fear and anticipation--fear of the racial violence she associates with the South from reading African American history books and the anticipation of eating regional

delicacies, riding bikes, and being part of an extended family (66). The trip to Florida is ordinary and uneventful, but for Chambers the mere fact that she participates in such a uniquely African American ritual is personally enriching. She uses the trip as a device to authenticate her identity as an acculturated African American.

California is the destination of the first exodus narrative in *Mama's Girl*. During her ninth grade year, Chambers and her mother leave Brooklyn and move to South Central Los Angeles (86–89). Chambers' brother does not come with them. By this time, he was living with his father and Guyanese stepmother (67). Chambers' mother's desire to marry Tono, a new boyfriend, motivates the move to California. The new family lives in a Crip-dominated neighborhood, which Chambers hates because of the constant violence and gunfire. She also finds no peace inside of her home. Insolent and sullen, Chambers refuses to show filial deference to Tono, a military veteran who desires order and respect of one's elders. Chambers also has trouble fitting in at school. Local girls want to fight her, but, as a high achiever and perfectionist, school is where Chambers feels most authentically herself. She constantly seeks to participate in accelerated programs and to apply for scholarships to advanced high schools and colleges. For instance, she invests an inordinate amount of time and emotional energy applying for a coveted scholarship to Choate Rosemary Hall, an East Coast boarding school, but her mother, Cecilia, actively discourages her from pursuing her dreams:

My mother reacted to all this [the Choate application process] like it was bad news. I read once that Zora Neal Hurston's mother told her,

'Jump at de sun, chile. You may not reach it, but at least you'll get off the ground.' I didn't understand my mother at all; what happened since the days of the movement? Wasn't this the point of it all—to give black boys and girls like me a chance to fly? (91).

Since she was eight or nine-years old, Chambers was a high achiever who craved recognition. In second grade, she tested into Intelligent and Gifted Children (IGC) classes (40), and from then on she dreamed of attending Ivy League colleges like Harvard, "NYU, Bryn Mawr, Howard, and Spelman" (71). Her mother, however, always "downplays" or belittles Chambers' academic ambitions (40). After Chambers fails to win the Choate scholarship, she redoubles her efforts to be a paragon of academic success (93).

After a year or so, Chambers, Cecilia, and Tono grow tired of the Crips and South Central. To escape the gang violence, they move from L.A. to northern New Jersey, a move that constitutes the memoir's second immersion narrative. "Los Angeles," Chambers laments, "was strictly divided between Mexicans and American-born blacks, and my mother was neither" (94). Cecilia, "as a Spanish-speaking black person," was an "anomaly" (94). The cultural alienation was too much for Chambers' mother, who longed for the "Caribbean community" and "posse of girlfriends" she left back East (94). Chambers resettles in northern New Jersey, but she brings her insolence from L.A. with her. She disrespects both her mother and father by refusing to wash dishes when *The Cosby Show* and *A Different World* are playing (96). *A Different World* debuted in 1987, which would mean that Chambers was at least seventeen years old at the time, yet she is supposedly fifteen and still

two years away from finishing high school in this scene (98-99). This is the second of the memoir's niggling temporal anomalies. Having refused to wash the dishes, Chambers goes to her room and slams the door. Later that night, her mother has a candid talk with her:

For ten years, I stayed in a marriage that was miserable because of you kids. Now I have a chance at happiness and you want to ruin it by being rude. Tono has been talking about leaving, and let me tell you something, if he leaves, pack your bags and go to your father's.

Because I've had it. (97)

The revelation devastates Chambers; she compares it to the beatings her mother, her brother, and she received from her father (97). To emotionally wound her mother, Chambers moves out and goes to live with her abusive father and Guyanese stepmother in the suburbs of Philadelphia.

The move to Pennsylvania is the memoir's second exodus narrative.

Chambers spends her sophomore and junior years of high school in an upscale suburb of Philadelphia. Chambers and her stepsister share a room together in the attic of her father's four-story townhouse. Although Chambers flees New Jersey to escape the chores her mother and stepfather expected her to obediently do, her flight is an unexpected descent into hell. Life with her father and stepmother is appalling. Chambers suffers from their verbal tyranny, vicious neglect, and horrific physical assaults. Chambers' stepmother does not allow her access to common areas nor to the family foods, deciding that Chambers is "too ugly and disgusting" to eat at her kitchen table, to eat off *her* dishes, and to eat *her* groceries" (108,

emphasis in the original). When Chambers' father suspects her of prostituting herself with Don, a neighborhood college boy from Sri Lanka, he beats her unmercifully with a belt both inside and outside of the house (120-122). The Guyanese stepmother also physically abuses Chambers. In one fight, she slaps, punches, and chokes Chambers, as they tumble down a flight of stairs. The fight ultimately ends with the stepmother biting a hole in Chambers' arm (132-33). It is as if Chambers has become a nineteenth-century slave in the Deep South; the violence of her parental masters literally consumes her.

The Fading Afro-Latina: Acculturation and Racial Initiation

Interestingly, Chambers two-year sojourn in her father's household contains the majority of the memoir's African American cultural tropes and icons. For example, Chambers mentions several historic and contemporary African American cultural heroes whom she admires for their professional expertise, artistic excellence, political resistance, and in the case of black Barbie and Wesley Snipes, their good looks. The list includes: Michael Jordan (1); Martin Luther King Jr., Shirley Chisholm, Rosa Parks, and Malcolm X (51); Frederick Douglass and Harriet Tubman (52); Charlayne Hunter-Gault, Bill Cosby, and Arthur Ashe (53); Gheri curls (55 & 177); Zora Neal Hurston and the character Tootie from *The Facts of Life* sitcom (91); Langston Hughes and Lorraine Hansberry (93); Wesley Snipes (109); Booker T. Washington, W. E. B. Du Bois, and Mary McLeod Bethune (143); Run DMC, M.C. Hammer, Young MC, and Bob Marley (145); black Barbie (151); Linda Brown of *Brown v. the Board of Education*, Richard Roundtree of *Shaft*, Sidney Poitier of *Guess*

Who's Coming to Dinner, Diahann Carroll, Diana Ross, and Lena Horne (152); Vernon Reid of *In Living Color*, Terence Trent D'Arby, Michael Jordan, and Sade (153); Sade, Anita Baker, and Billie Holiday (164); Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (169); Alexandre Dumas (172); and Snoop Dog (177).

Chambers saturates her memoir with African American cultural references and tropes. This saturation may be one of the reasons *Mama's Girl* did not garner wider critical acclaim when it was published in 1996. In the 1990s, the publishing industry rushed to publish literature that was "post-colonial," literature from American writers who had ethnic roots in the Caribbean and India. *Mama's Girl* was, perhaps, too American to be an exotic immigrant narrative, and too African American to be a Latino one. For example, Chambers references *Ebony* and *Essence*, major African American magazines, the latter of which employed her (153 & 160); and she mentions classic anthems that are highly associated with the New Negro and Civil Rights movements--"Lift Every Voice and Sing" and "We Shall Overcome," respectively (52). The memoir includes braggadocio playground rhymes and chants that employ hyper-local references and African American vernacular and idiomatic expressions (2, 5, & 142).

Colorism, hair aesthetics, the pitfalls of interracial romance, talking white, and accusations of being a sellout, Oreo, and Buppie figure prominently in *Mama's Girl*. For instance, Chambers unfavorably compares her body to her mothers: "I don't look anything like her. I am darker. My nose is different, my eyes are set closer together, my hair is kinkier, as difficult to detangle as the steel-wool threads of a Brillo pad" (10). She also recounts how her evil, fair-skinned, straight-haired

Guyanese stepmother harps on her looks, making her feel “ugly” and “unattractive.” To add injury to insult, the Guyanese stepmother refuses to take Chambers to get her hair straightened, even though she routinely takes her biological daughter to the hairdresser’s salon. The solution, Chamber’s mother counsels her, is to wear a “short Afro” instead (106-107).

Chambers connects her issues with Afroethnic female beauty and interracial dating to childhood doll play. Chambers recalls how, as a child, she wondered why there was a black Barbie, but no black Ken. She contemplates if the corporate decision makers at Mattel were sending a veiled message: “I wonder now if black Barbie, like the glamor figures of our day—Diahann Carroll, Diana Ross, and Lena Horne—was expected to transcend race and become betrothed to white Ken. I never thought about white boys before high school and my nigger-ball experience” (152). The “nigger-ball experience” is a reference to a traumatic racial initiation Chambers experienced in high school, an experience that is associated with the prospect of African American and Euro-American interracial romance.

While staying with her father and stepmother in the suburbs of Philadelphia, Chambers attends a predominantly white high school. The African American kids ostracize her for talking white. The accusation was not new to Chambers; even in tenth grade in L.A., her manner of speaking “baffled some, irritated others” (104). She attributes the way she sounds to reading immensely, unconsciously absorbing regional vernacular, and to avoiding, as her mother sternly taught her, African American slang and speech practices like “ain’t,” “I be,’ ‘she be,’ or ‘we be’” (104). The African American kids think Chambers is a sellout because of the way she

speaks and because she mostly hangs out with white kids. Chambers is an avid member of the drama club, which, like the school, is predominately populated by white students. Although she liked “beautiful Wesley Snipes” types and was skeptically receptive to the proposition that “Black men are the best lovers in the world” (109 & 111), in high school Chambers develops “a crush on a white boy for the first time” (109). Jim, the boy Chambers develops a crush on, is a fellow drama club member. Chambers’ attraction to Jim probably has less to do with his ethnicity and more to do with the fact that as drama club members they share a common interest and spend inordinate amounts of time together working on a group endeavor. One day as the drama team is riding in a car together, Jim points to the construction in his neighborhood and says, “They’re putting a nigger-ball court up over there.” Luckily, Chambers had not yet revealed her feelings about Jim to any of her white girlfriends, nor to him. When one of the other girls asks Jim to apologize to Chambers for his language, he refuses, saying, “Veronica’s not a nigger” (112). Chamber’s crush immediately dissipates. The Jim incident is one of two of her adolescent racial initiations.

On the morning of her sixteenth birthday, Chambers experiences a second racial initiation involving the opposite sex. At the request of her girlfriend Stacey, Don, Chambers’ nineteen-year old Sri Lankan neighbor, takes Chambers shopping at the mall. As they eat at the food court, Don discusses the color prejudice he experienced in London: “Putting his arm next to mine, he said, ‘I’m black like you are, you know. Sri Lanka or Africa, it makes no difference’” (119). The experience with Don initiates Chambers into an Afro-Asiatic awareness of the global

pigmentocracy and anticipates her participation in the People of Color Coalition at Bard College. She pays a high price for the lesson--recall the beating her father gives her for going out with Don.

Although Chambers is phonetically and socially black enough for Don, she is not black enough for her mother. Chambers ventures into this territory at the end of the memoir, when she reflects on the relationship between her college years and her current position as a successful editor for *Glamour* magazine: "When I was in college, my mother once called me an Oreo—black on the outside, white on the inside. The word so cruel when it came from my black peers, was like a punch in the face coming from my mother—as if I were a total stranger and not her own child" (186). This is the second time that Chambers equates her mother's verbal abuse with physical abuse. The fact that Chambers was a student at Bard College at Simon's Rock, an "early college" that admits 10th and 11th grade students, made the insult sting more than it might have had she been a student at Howard or Spelman.

At Bard, Chambers becomes a W.E.B Du Bois Scholar and joins the People of Color Coalition, but she is "frustrated about being the 'token minority' on campus" (143). There are no African American teachers or staff members at Bard, which is located in the predominantly white town of Great Barrington, MA, home of W. E. B. Du Bois. Of the three hundred students on Bard's campus, only twelve are Afroethnic, and Chambers is one of those twelve. To combat her sense of social alienation, Chambers joins "the black women posse," a trio of sophomore girls who become her close friends. Together, they watch African American shows, listen to

Afroethnic music, and use African American vernacular and idiomatic expressions (144-145).

Although she has a small Afroethnic community, internal struggles and insecurities still plague Chambers. In her first year at Bard, Chambers develops an unhealthy consumerist obsession for apparel. It is so bad that she has to stop going to “malls and shops” (187). Though she never ordered anything, she “collected mail-order catalogues, marking them up with stars and circling the outfits [she] liked in the colors and sizes [she] wanted. Desire became a game, and playing the game was satisfying in its own way” (187). The catalogue ritual is an embarrassing coping mechanism to help her maintain her abstinence from brick and mortar stores. More gravely, Chambers has a brush with death when she nearly drowns in the campus river one night in March. Even though she “can barely swim,” she decides to swim alone (183). She develops a cramp in her leg and starts to sink. Her struggle to stay afloat is fruitless. Just at the moment when she “resigns” herself to drowning, she decides to scream for help. Someone, a person she never names or describes, hears her cry and saves her life. Chambers recounts the situation to imagine what living in “ghetto” poverty and criminality must feel like for her brother, Malcolm. The story illustrates how the pride of self-reliance and ethnic authenticity can sometimes be suicidal. One has to be wise enough to know when to ask for help.

As an adult, Chambers painfully comes to accept that her education and socioeconomic status culturally separate her from working-class African Americans, including her mother and drug-dealing brother. For instance, when Chambers, a well-paid professional writer/editor, mentions that she wants to see a certain play or

purchase a certain painting, her mother affectionately calls her a “Buppie.” However, it is the kind of pride that Chambers, even as an adult, finds difficult to process: “Her voice says at once, ‘I am proud of you—but you are now an entirely different being than I am’” (186).

The list of Latino and Panamanian cultural tropes in *Mama’s Girl* pales in comparison to the catalogue of African American authenticating devices. The Latino cultural signifiers exclusively appear in the third chapter of the memoir. For example, Chambers’ mother buys incense and oils from a Puerto Rican botánica and uses them to spiritually cleanse her home of her ex-husband’s essence (30). Chambers’ mother’s friends were women “from Panama or the islands,” who slipped in and out of Spanish and English as they talked and who quenched their thirst with “sorrel or ginger beer” (44-45). Chambers’ mother also embodies the concept of mariology. Cecilia, “like most Panamanian women,” thinks housework is female work, and she invests more of her emotions in the prospects of her son’s success than in those of her daughter (47).

The paucity of Latino cultural tropes may explain why some reviewers exclusively categorize Chambers and her memoir as African American (Seaman 1486; Kraft 109; Cassel 126; “Chambers, Veronica,” *Booklist* Jan. 1997; McHugh 29, Rochman 1494, and *Reading Group Choices* 48). A few reviewers, however, correctly acknowledge *Mama’s Girl* as an Afro-Latino and/or Caribbean text (Stuttaford 63, Harlan and Mifflin 56, Huneven 3). Overall, the critical reception of *Mama’s Girl* was favorable. Reviewers positioned *Mama’s Girl* as a literary text, in the same vein as *Krick? Krack!* by Edwidge Danticat and *Drown* by Junot Díaz, both of which were

published in the same year as Chamber's memoir. Chambers, Danticat, and Díaz moved in the same literary orbit. Chambers and Danticat contributed writing to a 1996 article in *Essence* that promoted both of their books; and Chambers and Díaz were both published by Riverhead. *Drown*, Díaz's autobiographically inspired short story collection, is outstanding for its vernacular language, clever metaphors, poignant scenes, and candor about gender and sexual identity formation. Díaz's MFA training at Columbia (like Danticat's at Brown) exposed him to the stylistic conventions the publishing industry prizes in literary fiction. Relative to *Drown*, *Mama's Girl* is more event-driven, dated, reportorial, and didactically triumphal than it is lyrical, timeless, psychological, and morally ambiguous. The scarcity of thick and rich Latino and Caribbean cultural identifiers may also explain why Chambers' memoir failed to receive the national acclaim that Díaz and Danticat received in the mid to late 1990s. There was simply more demand for unambiguous immigrant and post-immigrant Afroethnic fiction than there was for an Afro-Latino memoir written in the Black Aesthetic mode.

Onward and Upward: Consumerism, Exceptionalism, and the Agency of Ascension

The specificity and plurality of popular culture references and icons in *Mama's Girls* may deny its purchase on the stylistic attribute of timelessness, but they illuminate the complex ways in which consumerism and the concept of ascension inform the memoir's narrative ethics. There are three significant ascension metaphors in *Mama's Girl*. The first is in the epigraph, which describes a

mother's true spirit rising in the dark, beautiful, and tough temple that is her child (Chambers, Epigraph). Clearly, Chambers sees herself as the embodiment of the aspirations that her mother failed to achieve.

The second important ascension metaphor is in the first line and paragraph of the memoir:

Ten years before Air Jordans, I learned to fly. It's like the way brothers pimp-walk to a basketball hoop with a pumped-up ball and throw a few shots, hitting each one effortlessly. Like a car idling before a drag race, there is an invitation, perhaps even a threat, in the way their sneakers soft-shoe the pavement and the ball rolls around in their hands. (1)

Chambers uses the opening paragraph to describe what playing Double Dutch is like before she actually reveals the name of the sport to her reader in the second paragraph, a paragraph that further compares playing Double Dutch to prancing, doing a layup, dancing mambo, and doing a pirouette (1-2). Chambers relishes the power of liminal space and the agency of ascension: "There is a space between the concrete and heaven where the air is sweeter and your heart beats faster. . . . if you're good enough you can do anything and be anything you want" (2).

The Air Jordan reference in the memoir's first line achieves a formal and a thematic goal. Formally, it establishes 1975 as the year of the opening scene, given that the first Air Jordan shoe debuted in 1985. However, there is a continuity problem with the chronology. Chambers was born in 1970 and migrated from Panama to the U.S. in 1975. The portrait of Chambers in the first chapter is not the

portrait of a five-year old girl. The dialogue between Chambers and her friends is too sophisticated for them to be five-years old. It is more likely that the year in the opening scene is 1980. I argue for 1980 because the first and second chapters are contemporaneous and in the second chapter Chambers is ten-years old when her father leaves the family. Thematically, the Michael Jordan reference introduces African American professional expertise and excellence as key components in the racialized construction of Chambers' gender and ethnic identity. Chambers compares playing Double Dutch to Michael Jordan playing basketball because of the shared themes of virtuosity and ascension. Ascension is visually encoded in the Air Jordan logos. The first logo for the shoe line consisted of a winged basketball ensigned by a banner bearing the words "Air Jordan" in capital letters. The Wings logo, as it is called by Nike shoe aficionados, was retired in 1988 and replaced with the Jumpman logo, a silhouette of Michael Jordan dunking a basketball with his left hand. There appears to be no irony in Chambers' choice to use a male-dominated sport and a male icon of virtuosity as the yardstick for female swagger, mastery, "longevity," "patience," and power. Chambers is unperturbed about defining female ability, identity, and camaraderie through references to pimping, male basketball culture, and mass-market representations of male excellence, a point which reviewers either missed or ignored.

The third significant ascension metaphor in *Mama's Girl* occurs in the fifth chapter, which deals with Chambers' aspiration to get into the Choate Rosemary Hall boarding school. Chambers uses jumping and flight as metaphors of personal achievement and social progress, respectively. For example, she uses the Zora Neale

Hurston quote, “Jump at de sun, chile” as a motto for the quest for achievement in one’s chosen field of endeavor, and she believes that the goal of the civil rights movement was to give African American children “a chance to fly” and “have a better life” (91). Chambers derives her idea of what the promise of civil rights looks like, or ought to look like, from 1980s situation comedies. After quoting Hurston, Chambers mentions how she always imagined herself as Tootie, the African American girl who attends an elite boarding school on the situation comedy *The Facts of Life* (91). Televised situation comedies have a substantial influence on Chambers’ vision of herself as a candidate for the professional class. Recall the importance Chambers places on watching *The Cosby Show* and *A Different World*. Both of these shows stress the significance of undergraduate and postgraduate credentials, employment in the professional class, the benefit of upper-middle class networks, and the value of African American history and culture.

Chambers’ most salient educational role models are characters from African American themed television shows. It is hard to imagine that Chambers became as successful as she did without any help from tangible role models in her life. What, then, is the outcome of excluding from the memoir the names of the teachers, counselors, advocates, and associates who, I presume, helped Chambers achieve her success? What is the effect of not even naming or describing the person that saved her from drowning? Although the names might have been left out to preserve the peoples’ right to privacy, the lack of acknowledgement in Chambers’ narrative of heroic self-transformation has the effect of privileging individualism over communalism. Chambers sees her sudden “*jump* from poverty to solvency” as “a

jump [she] made alone” (187, emphasis added). One interpretation of her claim is that it is purely descriptive. It is descriptive in the sense that she merely uses it to stress the point that *the rest* of her family still lives in poverty. Another interpretation is that the statement is judgmental, judgmental in the sense that she made the jump alone and unaided because her family members were not morally or intellectually fit enough to meet the challenge.

Mama's Girl reinforces the social myth that tenacity, self-restraint, and self-reliance *always* trump structural oppression and cultural hegemony. Chambers' explicitly advocates the emotionally seductive idea that personal misfortune is often, if not solely, the result of personal imprudence. Chambers lacks sympathy for her often-incarcerated, drug-dealing brother and she harbors outrage at the fact that her mother's sense of self-worth is dependent on whether Malcolm turns out to be a success. Chambers blames her mother for enabling Malcolm's poor choices: “There is a saying that black women mother their sons and raise their daughters; when it comes to my mother, that saying is too true” (181). Chambers' sentiment corresponds to a 20th century stereotype of African American women as pathologically unfit for motherhood either because they are domineering or because they are lax. Chambers' view, as objectionable to some as it may be, acknowledges the role societal norms and expectations play in shaping racially gendered identities and the choices that flow from adopting or from having those identities imposed on oneself. Chamber's final analysis, however, discounts the role of racialized gender identity to justify her self-imposed isolation and her ethics of personal responsibility:

I felt sympathy and wanted to support Malcolm and all the other young brothers in his situation. But unlike my mother and the black women of my childhood, I wasn't going to support a black man at the expense of myself. This realization changed everything about how I viewed Malcolm, how I viewed my mother, and how I viewed my father. It was like we were all playing this black woman-black man game and then I moved my piece right off the board. . . . So many times I've tried to explain to my mother that there is a difference between circumstance and choice. My brother and I grew up under the same circumstances, but we made a million different choices along the way. The circumstances we could not control, but the choices were ours to make. (181-182)

By discounting the roles racialized gender identity and socioeconomic disparity play in life outcomes, Chambers' places the onus of upward mobility entirely on the individual, which also ignores the function of sociobiological temperament in the outcome of one's relative success or failure in the social order.

The final chapter the memoir suggests that money heals all wounds, for it is largely through her identity as a consumer that Chambers comes to value the Civil Rights movement, "the benefits of integration," and her relationship with her mother (190-191). The final anecdotes of the memoir articulate this most forcefully. For Mother's Day in 1992, Chambers buys her mother a gift certificate to Elizabeth Arden, but her mother refuses to use it for almost a year because she is afraid that the merchandizer does not allow "black" people to shop there. When she does

finally use the gift certificate, Cecilia tells Chambers that the people in the store were just like Chambers--professional and upper-class. Cecilia's description of the Elizabeth Arden experience evokes an epiphany for Chambers. It is only then that Chambers realizes how profound the gulf is between her and her mother. In her mother's eyes, Chambers' education, friends, and career obscure Chambers' black authenticity if not black"identity (190). Chambers finds consolation in the prospect of reforming her mother by buying her off: "She could call me an Oreo and a Buppie and try to keep what I represented at a safe distance. But the things I bought her, the restaurants I took her to, forced her to consider life differently" (191). In the end, Chambers encourages her mother to start a budget and save money for retirement, as it is only through smart choices and purposefulness that Cecilia will have a chance at realizing her dreams of going on international trips and collecting African-American art. Although she recognizes Chambers' wisdom, Cecilia refuses to give up buying lottery tickets as part of her financial life strategy. Playing the lottery is an indulgence with which Chambers can live as long as her mother is actively saving for retirement.

Conclusion

Mama's Girl, without any sense of skepticism or doubt, promotes self-reliance, prudence, and tenacity as antidotes to the vicissitudes of structural oppression and cultural hegemony. In this sense, the memoir follows the pattern of a classic bildung narrative, in that the bildungsheld becomes a productive and satisfied member of the nation-state who seeks to interpolate others and replicate

the system. More interestingly, the memoir transcribes a process of transcultural erasure or intraethnic assimilation. As Chambers becomes more educated, financially secure, and cosmopolitan representations of afrolatinidad fade away, leaving a self-portrait almost exclusively inspired by icons, narratives, music, and events from African American history and culture. That Chambers does become successful suggests that her parents' investment in African American cultural nationalism paid off. Chambers' always defines her sense of filial duty in terms of African American identity and the interracial goals of the Civil Rights movement. In the end, Chambers' communalism trumps her individualism, vis-à-vis her mother. The Elizabeth Arden experience and the mutual budget planning bring Chambers and her mother together in a way that Chambers never anticipates. Chambers' emotional investment in her mother's welfare is the implicit gesture of forgiveness that allows the two of them to move beyond their history mutual abuse to a present of mutual healing and laughter.

CHAPTER 6

FRATERNAL TRAUMAS, SILENCES, AND DESIRES: *FUKÚ AMERICANUS* IN THE BILDUNG FICTION OF JUNOT DÍAZ, PIRI THOMAS, AND JOHN OLIVER KILLENS

Introduction

During the early years of the Black Power and Black Arts movements, *Down These Mean Streets* (1967),⁶⁶ the novelized memoir by Piri Thomas which I discuss in Chapter 4, ushered Latino literature into the literary marketplace and popular imagination of the U.S. The politics of the critics and scholars who reviewed *DTMS* reflected the contending ways in which it was categorized and promoted. Marta E. Sanchez writes, “*Down These Mean Streets* was read and marketed as either a black cultural nationalist text in black journals or a white mainstream narrative of habilitation in mainstream newspapers and journals” (44). Set between the 1930s and late 1950s, between the Great Depression and the age of atomic warfare, *DTMS* tells the story of Piri,⁶⁷ a young, Puerto Rican boy born in Spanish Harlem. The gritty memoir focuses on Piri’s struggles with poverty, drugs, gang life, and racial and gender identity formation. Considered the founding text of modern U.S. Latino literature, and of the Nuyorican literary movement in particular, *DTMS* inspired an entire generation of contemporary U.S. Latino writers, writers like Pulitzer Prize winner, Junot Díaz. Díaz takes the social issues Thomas tackles in *DTMS* and reworks them in *Drown* (1996), *The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007),

⁶⁶ Subsequently referred to as *DTMS*.

⁶⁷ Here and after, I use Piri to refer to the protagonist of *DTMS* and Thomas to refer to the actual author.

and *This Is How You Lose Her* (2012).⁶⁸ Yunió, Díaz's "alter-ego," is the principle narrator of these three autobiographically inspired books (Díaz, "Mil Máscaras"). Although Díaz besets Yunió with a set of challenges that mirrors Piri's, there are significant personality and cultural differences between the two boys. Yunió is a diffident, nerdy, bookish, shoplifting, drug-selling Afro-Dominican immigrant who comes of age in Parlin, New Jersey in the 1980s and 1990s. Piri is a hyper-masculine, drug-using, Afro-Puerto Rican gang member who does seven years in prison for armed robbery, during the years leading up to the death of Emmett Till and the beginning of the classic Civil Rights movement.

In an interview with Diógenes Céspedes and Silvio Torres-Saillant, Díaz discusses the profound impact *DTMS* and African American literature had on him as an emerging thinker and writer: "I had a powerful reaction to two books I read when I was in college. Side by side, I read Piri Thomas's *Down These Mean Streets* and Toni Morrison's *The Song of Solomon*, and it was all over. They just opened my mind to the power of words" (Díaz, "Fiction Is the Poor Man's Cinema: An Interview with Junot Díaz" 900). Scholars of U.S. Latino literature have examined African American tropes in *DTMS* as well as the relationship between *DTMS* and the fiction of Junot Díaz,⁶⁹ but none have examined the relationship between Díaz's fiction and the African American literary influence that inspired Piri Thomas to write his genre-blurring memoir. This study fills that gap. Just as Díaz was compelled to write fiction by *DTMS*, Piri Thomas was compelled to become a novelist by John Oliver

⁶⁸ The latter two books are subsequently referred to as *Oscar Wao* and *This Is*.

⁶⁹ See Note 44.

Killens and his social realist novel *Youngblood* (Thomas, "Race and Mercy" 350). Killens, an African American novelist from the South, founded the Harlem Writers Guild in 1950, which Thomas, after being released from prison, enthusiastically sought out and joined in 1956.⁷⁰

This chapter reveals a genealogy of trauma, transgressive desire, and fraternal silence in *Drown*, *This Is*, *DTMS*, and *Youngblood*. I examine how each text explores the relationships between sexual violation, homosocial camaraderie, and ethnic and gender identity formation. My methodology is comparative, intercultural, intertextual, intersectional, and interdisciplinary. Although I primarily rely on cultural poetics and close textual analysis, I also incorporate twenty-first century theories and findings from the fields of biological anthropology and neuroscience to draw causal and associative connections between the gendered brain, empathy, and hyper-masculinity. I use comparative literary analysis and influence and source theory to construct an intercultural genealogy of African American and Latino literature in the fiction of Junot Díaz, Piri Thomas, and John Oliver Killens. The linked tropes of sexual trauma and fraternal silence in the fiction of Junot Díaz, I argue, can be intertextually traced through the male friendships in Thomas' *DTMS* to those in Killens' *Youngblood* (1954). My analysis begins by explicating Junot Díaz's *fukú americanus* trope and examining its presence in select stories from *Drown* and *This Is*. Using influence theory, I eradicate the roots of *fukú americanus* in the salient homosocial relationships and the traumatic sexual

⁷⁰ Other founding members of the Harlem Writers Guild include: Rosa Guy, John Henrik Clarke, Willard Moore and Walter Christmas, see *The Harlem Writer Guild*.

encounters of *DTMS* and *Youngblood*.⁷¹ This theory of influence expands the literary histories of both U.S. Afro-American and Latino literature and reveals new insights about the African American literary ancestry of masculinity construction, camaraderie, and sexual trauma in the bildung trilogy of Junot Díaz.

Part 1: “one of the great silences in *Oscar Wao*”: The Secret Trauma of Yunior de Las Casas

In 2007, Junot Díaz introduced a new Caribbean trope to U.S. literature and culture—*fukú americanus*. In Dominican vernacular culture a *fukú* is a curse and a *zafa* is a curse-breaking counterspell. Díaz takes *fukú*, a demotic expression, and transforms it into a master trope that thematically unifies his three books, *Drown*, *Oscar Wao*, and *This Is*. *Fukú americanus* makes its debut in the preamble of *Oscar Wao*, which reifies *fukú* as the set of demonic hegemonies unleashed on the Caribbean and the Americas by European colonization and settlement:

They say it came first from Africa, carried in the screams of the enslaved; that it was the death bane of the Tainos, uttered just as one world perished and another began; that it was a demon drawn into Creation through the nightmare door that was cracked open in the Antilles. *Fukú americanus*, or more colloquially, *fukú*—generally a curse or a doom of some kind; specifically the Curse and the Doom of the New World. Also called the *fukú* of the Admiral because the

⁷¹ There are at least thirteen taboo or traumatic sexual encounters in *Youngblood*. They include age disparity, interracial coupling, homoeroticism, and rape. This study focuses on only one of those encounters, the one between Oscar Jefferson and Jim Kilgrew.

Admiral was both its midwife and one of its great European victims; despite “discovering” the New World the Admiral died miserable and syphilitic, hearing (dique) divine voices.⁷² In Santo Domingo, the Land He Loved Best (what Oscar, at the end, would call the Ground Zero of the New World), the Admiral’s very name has become synonymous with both kinds of fukú, little and large; (Díaz, *This Is How You Lose Her*)

As the preamble suggests, the lesser fukú, *fukú americanus minor*, if you will, operates on the microsocial plane, variously manifesting itself as physical impairment, hamartia, chronic misfortune, psychological trauma, and/or social death.⁷³ In contrast, macrosocial fukú, or *fukú americanus major*, ravishes nations, regions, and hemispheres. It is a shibboleth for colonial and imperial victimization.⁷⁴ In specialist terms, the greater fukú is the reification of colonialism, imperialism, global capitalism, neocolonialism, Eurocentrism, the genesis of racial categorization, and the *longue durée* Caribbean discourse of “historical trauma.”⁷⁵

Put simply, *fukú americanus major* is the rape of the New World, the discourse of white supremacy, and the public silence that continues to sustain and perpetuate each of these traumatizing realities. “White supremacy,” says Díaz, “is the great silence of our world, and in it is embedded much of what ails us as a

⁷² The Admiral is Christopher Columbus.

⁷³ Social death is a concept in African Americans studies that deals with the dehumanization of lower castes peoples by the dominant culture, see Patterson.

⁷⁴ See Deresiewicz 37-38 and Salvídar 122-123.

⁷⁵ For fukú as an expression of a “world colonial system” of Americanness, see Salvídar 120-121; and for fukú as a Caribbean discourse, see Jelly-Schapiro 169-170.

planet." Díaz makes this declaration in "The Search for Decolonial Love," a 2012 interview with Paula M. L. Moya, one of his Cornell MFA cohorts. In this interview, Díaz discusses his conception of literature as a tool for racial and social justice. He was inspired to fight white hegemony by the women writers he read in when he attended Rutgers as an undergraduate: Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Maxine Hong Kingston, Leslie Marmon Silko, Sandra Cisneros, Anjana Appachana, Octavia Butler, Cherrie Moraga, and Audre Lorde (Díaz, "Decolonial Love")

Díaz singles out Morrison and Butler for special praise. He says that in their work "we are shown the awful radiant truth of how powerfully constituted we are of our oppressions" ("Decolonial Love"). Díaz describes the writings of Morrison and Butler as a "movement toward liberation," a liberation that requires people of color to bear witness to their own role in the sustainability of white supremacy. Díaz says, "this internal bearing of witness, raised the possibility of denying our oppressive regimes the true source of their powers—which is, of course, *our* consent, *our* participation. This kind of praxis doesn't attack the head of the beast, which will only grow back; it strikes directly at the beast's heart, which we nurture and keep safe in our own" ("Decolonial Love"). Díaz's critique of white supremacy indicts all Americans, especially those beneficiaries whose humanity is compromised by their false consciousness or consenting silence. If we refuse to acknowledge both the existence and significance of white supremacy, argues Díaz, then we cannot defeat it:

The silence around white supremacy is like the silence around Sauron in *The Lord of the Rings*, or the Voldemort name which must never be

uttered in the Harry Potter novels. And yet here's the rub: if a critique of white supremacy doesn't first flow through you, doesn't first implicate you, then you have missed the mark; you have, in fact, almost guaranteed its survival and reproduction. There's that old saying: the devil's greatest trick is that he convinced people that he doesn't exist. Well, white supremacy's greatest trick is that it has convinced people that, if it exists at all, it exists always in other people, never in us. ("Decolonial Love")

Díaz connects the protective silence around white supremacy to the silence that masks male sexual trauma in the lives of Ramon "Yunior" de Las Casas and Oscar de Leon. Yunior is the principal narrator that unifies Díaz's three books. Oscar is the titular character of the short story and similarly titled novel *The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. Oscar is also the brother of Lola, one of Yunior's college love interests. College roommates, Yunior and Oscar, share a love of writing, women, and a history of sexual abuse. Oscar's overeating, obesity, and inadequacy with women are the Freudian consequences of "intergenerational transfer of rape trauma between mothers and their sons" (Díaz, "Decolonial Love").⁷⁶ Sexual abuse is the curse that plagues Oscar and his family. "For me," says Díaz, "the family *fukú* is rape.

⁷⁶ The full quote reads: "In the same way that there is intergenerational transfer of trauma from mothers who are rape victims to their daughters, there is also intergenerational transfer of rape trauma between mothers and their sons. But most readers don't notice how Oscar embodies some of the standard reactions of young rape victims to their violations. Many women in the aftermath of sexual violence put on weight—in some cases as an attempt to make themselves as unattractive as possible. Oscar isn't fat just to be fat—at least not in my head. His fatness was partially a product of what's going on in the family in regards to their bodies, in regards to the rape trauma." See Moya, "Decolonial Love."

The rape culture of the European colonization of the New World—which becomes the rape culture of the Trujillato (Trujillo just took that very old record and remixed it)—is the rape culture that stops the family from achieving decolonial intimacy, from achieving decolonial love” (“Decolonial Love). The de Leon family symbolically represents all Dominicans, both natives and émigrés, who, through historical circumstances, are in kinship with each other wherever they are in the world. As such, the rape fukú that haunts the de Leon family also haunts Oscar’s Dominican best friend and honorary family member, Yuniór de Las Casas.

Fukú americanus as a metaphor for sexual trauma is introduced and defined in *Oscar Wao*, but it makes its debut in Junot Díaz’s first book, *Drown*. In *Drown*, Díaz uses Yuniór to explore the silences that sexual assault victims maintain around their traumas. Yuniór experiences a psychologically staining series of sexual traumas that begin in childhood and culminate in high school. In the Moya interview, Díaz contrasts Yuniór’s victimization by macrosocial fukú (e.g. hegemonic discourses of hyper-masculinity, anti-African chauvinism, third-world poverty, and the trauma of immigration) with his victimization by microsocial fukú (e.g. assault, predation, sexual age disparity, a fatherless household, and philandery): “But Yuniór’s a victim in a larger, second sense: I always wrote Yuniór as being a survivor of sexual abuse. He has been raped, too. The hint of this sexual abuse is something that’s present in *Drown* and it is one of the great silences in *Oscar Wao*. (“Decolonial Love”).⁷⁷ Unlike Oscar, whose overeating and obesity are the result of the

⁷⁷ The remainder of the quote reads: “This is what Yuniór can’t admit, his very own *página en blanco*. So, when he has that line in the novel: “I’d finally try to say

psychological transferal of his mother's rape trauma, Yuniór personally experiences sexual trauma as a child and as a teenager. What Yuniór and Oscar both have in common is that the symptom of their traumas is a ravenous appetite. Oscar overeats to make himself fat and unattractive to would be predators while Yuniór has a gluttonous appetite for sex. Yuniór's "compulsive promiscuity," says Díaz, is a "typical reaction to sexual abuse" (Díaz, "Decolonial Love"). *This Is How You Lose Her*, Díaz's third book, deals with the personal consequences of Yuniór's addiction to philandery and provides new insights about the full extent of his teenage trauma in the story "Miss Lora." However, the history of Yuniór's sexual trauma begins in the stories of *Drown*.

the words that could have saved us. / _____," what he couldn't say to Lola was that "I too have been molested." He could bear witness to everyone else's deep pains but, in the end, he couldn't bear witness to his own sexual abuse. He couldn't tell the story that would have tied him in a human way to Lola, that indeed could have saved him." See Moya, "Decolonial Love."

“We’re going to make you a girl”: The Pig, the Priest, and the Fat Boy in “No Face”

Critics and reviewers tend to read Yunió either as a progressive heterosexual, a homophobe, or a closeted homosexual, but few read him as the author intended, as a victim of sexual trauma. “Ysrael,” “Drown,” “How to Date a Browngirl, Blackgirl, Whitegirl, or Halfie,” and “No Face” chronicle the story of Yunió’s *fukú americanus*. Scholars note “Ysrael,” the first story in *Drown*, for its focus on third-world poverty, fatherlessness, physical violence, sexual conquest, molestation, masculinity, emasculation, and masking.⁷⁸ The protagonists of “Ysrael” are Yunió and Rafa de las Casas. Ysrael, the title character, is a boy who, as an infant, is disfigured by a pig that eats away his lips and one of his cheeks. To hide the damage and spare the community from the horror of his trauma, Ysrael wears a mask. Ysrael, writes David Cowart, represents the “ugliness,” shame, and “invisibility” of both Caribbean and émigré poverty (199). Ysrael is also the central character of “No Face,” the penultimate story in *Drown*. In this section, I argue that the pig that defaces Ysrael can be read as the reification of Yunió’s rape *fukú* and the ultimate source of the No Face Man figure that haunts Yunió’s dreams in *Oscar Wao*.⁷⁹ Like the herd of swine into which Jesus casts a host of demons,⁸⁰ the

⁷⁸ For a comparison of the pursuit to unmask Ysrael to Rafa’s pursuit of girls, see Paravisini-Gebert 168-169; for a psychological analysis of Rafa’s displaced anger and sexual aggression as attachment disorder and a cry for paternal love, see Perez 106-108, for an exploration of empathy, emasculation, machismo, and the assault on Ysrael as a metaphorical rape, see Riofrio 28-31; for an examination of disfigurement as a trope for poverty and masking as an immigrant coping strategy for managing degradation and alienation, see Cowart 13-14.

⁷⁹ Yunió is haunted by his brutalization of Ysrael well into his adult life. In *Oscar Wao*, a masked figure called No Face Man stalks Yunió in his dreams. Yunió begins

ravenous pig of “Ysrael” becomes a receptacle for the host of perpetrators that sexually disturb, confound, and abuse Yuniór throughout adolescence. The first member on that notorious roster is the man in the clean fedora.

The man in the clean fedora appears in the story “Ysrael,” but to fully comprehend the eroticism and trauma in “Ysrael,” we must first explicate those tropes as they appear in “No Face,” the penultimate story in *Drown*. The central characters in “No Face” are Ysrael, Padre Lou, a rapacious gang of boys, and the retold story and reoccurring nightmare of the man-eating pig. Padre Lou, a Catholic priest, is Ysrael’s benefactor. In what appears to be a daily routine, Padre Lou gives Ysrael café con leche and two-hour long EFL lessons in reading and composition. Each week, Padre Lou takes Ysrael to the bookseller to buy comic books like *Kaliman*, a blue-eyed, fair-skinned Hindu crime fighter whose powers are derived from the teachings and practice of Eastern mysticism.⁸¹ Like Ysrael, Padre Lou is physically impaired; he “has small hands and bad eyes and twice he’s gone to Canada for operations” (*Drown* 154). Later in the story, we learn that Canada is the place Yuniór, with the help of Padre Lou, anticipates traveling to for reconstructive

to have the nightmares about No Face Man after Oscar Wao is killed in the Dominican Republic. Yuniór considers No Face Man to be the spirit of Oscar Wao “or someone who looks him.” No Face Man is a reflection of Yuniór’s guilt of over his abusive treatment of Oscar; he embodies Yuniór’s tíguerismo crisis and his history of sexual trauma. For Yuniór, No Face Man is a floating stain of moral contamination, guilt, and shame.

⁸⁰ Mark 5, KJV.

⁸¹ Kaliman is a super hero produced by a Mexican comic book company.

surgery. Although it is not completely clear,⁸² it seems that Padre Lou's church is a place where Ysrael finds refuge from verbal and physical harassment. However, there is no ambiguity about the streets. For Ysrael, the streets are devoid of sanctuary.

One day, late in the afternoon, a group of boys ambush Ysrael, as he's trying to determine if he has enough money to "buy another johnnycake" (156). The leader of the gang, a fat boy with a unibrow, sits, like a demon, on Ysrael's "chest and breaths flies out at him" (156). The fat boy threatens Ysrael with gang rape. "We're going to make you a girl," he says, and Ysrael "can hear the words echoing through the meat of the fat boy's body" (156). Ysrael manages to free himself before the threat is carried out. He flees to the church and hides there until nighttime. The altercation leaves him with a cut elbow: "He rubs the blood on his shorts, spits on the cut to get the dirt out" (156). When Padre Lou finds Ysrael, he cleans the wound with a proper disinfectant.

Later that night, Ysrael has the reoccurring nightmare about the ravenous pig that defaced him:

On some nights he opens his eyes and the pig has come back. Always huge and pale. Its hooves peg his chest down and he can smell the curdled bananas on its breath. Blunt teeth rip a strip from under his eye and the muscle revealed is delicious, like lechosa. He turns his head to save one side of his face; in some dreams he saves his right

⁸² The scene that describes Ysrael's daily routine ends with a strange dialogue between Ysrael and undetermined interlocutor: "I'm hungry. Where's the bathroom? I come from the Dominican Republic. Don't be scared."

side and in some his left but in the worst ones he cannot turn his head, its mouth is like a pothole and nothing can escape it. When he awakens he's screaming and blood braids down his neck; he's bitten his tongue and it swells and he cannot sleep again until he tells himself to be a man. (158)

Ysrael's defacement by the pig recalls his attempted defilement by the fat boy. The unsettling intimacy of the mouth and breath imagery in the two scenes reminds readers that the pig's hunger for Ysrael's face is symbolic of the gang's lust for Ysrael's manhood.

John Riofrio writes: "The rape, however, also serves as a deeply significant lesson to the other boys, the ones doing the raping. As they lord their collective strength over Ysrael, their oppression of him and their ability to 'make him into a girl' become a concrete reminder, albeit an unconscious one, of their own weakness" (29). Masculinity in the eyes of adolescent boys, argues Riofrio, is intrinsically unstable. It is a status granted to men primarily by other men. This makes masculinity particularly fragile because if it can be granted, then it can always be revoked. If it is a social construction, a thing that is made, then it can always be unmade, particularly through the act of rape (Riofrio 29). If the key components of personhood are dignity, autonomy, and agency, then one way of securing one's manhood lies in the act of stealing those traits from another human being. The explicit threat of rape in "No Face" illuminates the figurative rape scene in "Ysrael," the first story in *Drown*.

The Man in the Clean Fedora: Trauma and Fraternal Silence in "Ysrael"

In "Ysrael," Yuniór is nine years old, his brother Rafa is twelve. The brothers spend the summer in San José de Ocoa, a town in the Dominican countryside, with their uncles, where they catch freshwater shellfish, trap solenodons, and train roosters for cock fights (4). Although he is only twelve, Rafa spends considerable energy pursuing the local girls, who, unlike the city girls in their home in Santo Domingo, reject vaginal intercourse in favor of kissing, fellatio, and anal sex (5). Out of sheer boredom, Rafa and Yuniór decide to go on a quest to unmask Ysrael, who, in the eyes of the local children, is more terrifying "than el Cuco or la Vieja Calusa" (7). The communal opinion about the extent of the damage on Ysrael's face varies. Their uncle thinks that it is not bad, but their aunt, underscoring the profundity of Ysrael's disfigurement, says that if they were to look at his face they "would be sad for the rest of their lives" (9). Although Yuniór and Rafa's aunt tries to foster compassion for Ysrael in her nephews, empathy, argues Riofrio, is antithetical to their idea of masculinity because throughout *Drown* empathy is associated with being feminine, weak, and vulnerable (Riofrio 29). Their aunt's sympathy has the ironic effect of heightening Rafa's prurient interest in the Ysrael. The supposedly stultifying power of Ysrael's face transforms him into a Medusa-figure for Rafa. Ysrael becomes a monster he must face down, a truth he must discover for himself and his community. To become a stone cold tíguere, Rafa feels that he must pull aside the veil and look, unscathed, upon the face of horror.

Lizabeth Paravisni-Gebert writes that "Rafa's pursuit of the disfigured, tormented boy mirrors his pursuit of sexual pleasure from naive young country

girls. Yuniór's reluctance to join in both pursuits leaves him open to charges of being a *pato*, a homosexual-just as Ysrael's mutilation is linked to images of castration" (168). Richard Perez argues that Rafa's pursuit of Ysrael is motivated by attachment disorder, by his displaced anger at being abandoned by his father and neglected by his mother. "The elaborate scars of Ysrael's face," writes Perez, "represent the internal damage that Rafa carries from his father's abandonment. His father is the ruthless pig, a cannibal, leaving his devoured children to meet the world alone" (109). While it might be argued that their father's absence consumes Rafa and Yuniór, comparing that act of abandonment to the pig that ravishes Ysrael is not thematically sustainable. The pig and the fat boy are destructive presences in Ysrael's life. Sr. de Las Casas is a destructive absence. As we shall see below, the symbolic pig in "Ysrael" is not Yuniór's father, but Rafa, Yuniór, and the man in the clean fedora.

To fund their hero quest, Yuniór and Rafa commit a series of small vices. They need to take a bus to get to the area where Ysrael lives. To get the money for the bus fare, Yuniór and Rafa surreptitiously take two empty Coke bottles that their uncle had "hidden in the chicken coop" (10). They redeem the bottles at a store, in which the proprietor, Chicho, warns Yuniór that he "better be giving this money back to" his uncle (10). Money in hand, Yuniór starts to covet the pastelitos, chicharrón, and gum behind the display. Yuniór wants to spend the money on food, but Rafa cautions him that they will need all of it to complete their quest. Rafa threatens to take the money, but Yuniór holds on to it, agreeing not to spend it.

However, when Rafa is busy flagging down a bus, Yuniór buys a pastelito and hides it in his pocket, where it makes a grease stain on his pants. When he and Rafa board the bus, Rafa stays near the front helping fellow passengers get on and off. Yuniór sits next to a man with big teeth, a clean fedora, and ropy muscles. The man sitting next to Yuniór mentions the grease stain and offers to clean it. Yuniór neither accepts nor declines the offer. The man then spits on his own fingers, rubs the stain, and then begins to pinch the tip of Yuniór's pinga. Enraged, Yuniór shoves the man in the clean fedora and calls him a "low down pinga-sucking pato" (12). The man warns him to be quiet. "The man," Yuniór says, "squeezed my bicep, quietly, hard the way my friends would sneak me in church" (12). The stranger's pinch mirrors Rafa's pinching of Yuniór's cheeks, chin, and forehead the night before as they lay in bed contemplating the horrors of Ysraél's face: "My brother kept pinching my face during the night, like I was a mango" (9). Commenting on this scene, Pérez claims, "The textures of the face signify for Rafa the corporeal site of identification where hidden pockets hold traumatic secrets. His urge is not merely to witness the scars but to participate in their creation" (107-108). What Pérez misses here is Rafa's emasculation of Yuniór. Rafa's pinching of Yuniór's face and Yuniór's comparison of his own body to a mango are emasculating, given that mangoes are commonly used as sexual metaphors for women's breasts.

After yelling at the man, Yuniór leaves his seat and joins his brother. Yuniór and Rafa exit the bus without paying, and Yuniór begins to cry. Rafa calls him a pussy, thinking Yuniór cries because they swindled the cobrador. Yuniór stops crying, but he never tells Rafa about what happened on the bus.

Perhaps Yuniór, who is only nine years old, figures that he brought the incident on himself. If he had not decided to go on the morally suspect quest, if he had not stolen his Uncle's Coke bottles, if he had not lied to Chicho, if they had not planned to cheat the cobrador, if he had not purchased the pastelito behind Rafa's back, then he would not have had a grease stain on his pants. If he had not had a grease stain on his pants, then the man would not have offered to clean them. Telling Rafa about the incident threatens to postpone the brothers' quest to consolidate their burgeoning machismo. Confiding in Rafa might jeopardize Yuniór's tenuous relationship with his brother. If Rafa is told of the incident, it is conceivable that he might consider Yuniór's manhood forever suspect if not permanently stained. Yuniór's desire to have his manhood sanctioned and respected by Rafa guarantees his silence about the man in the clean fedora.

The boys go on a hunt for Ysrael just like they trek across the valley of the campo hunting "to see girls that are never there" (4). Rafa makes small talk with Ysrael, but most of it is concerned with seducing Ysrael to take off his mask and reveal his face. Yuniór's conversation with Ysrael is more genuine. They both have fathers in the U.S., love wrestling, and look forward to the leaflets dropped by American troops in August. His efforts at rhetorical seduction having failed, Rafa resorts to brute force. He smashes a bottle over Ysrael's head and knocks him to the ground. After Rafa kicks Ysrael, Yuniór helps roll his body over on its back. Rafa tosses the mask into the grass. Ysrael's "eyes had gone white and the cords were out on his neck," suggesting that he is unconscious and possibly choking or having difficulty breathing (19). Yuniór "jumped back" at the sight of Ysrael's lipless,

cheekless face while “Rafa crouched and using only two of his fingers, turned Ysrael’s head from side to side” (19). If Ysrael’s face represents the face of the traumatized and marginalized Other, then when Yunior recoils he recoils at the face of his own poverty (4), Africanity (5), pusillanimity (9), molestation (12), and participation in the violence against Ysrael.

Mission accomplished, the boys return home, leaving Ysrael alone, brutalized, and possibly dying on the side of the road. As they make their way home, Yunior and Rafa have a conversation about Ysrael’s wellbeing. Yunior hesitantly insists, “Ysrael will be OK.” Rafa says, “Don’t bet on it,” and Yunior replies, “They’re going to fix him” (19). In this terse exchange, Rafa assumes that Yunior is talking about Ysrael’s prospects for reconstructive facial surgery in the U.S. The conversation goes on and Rafa deflates Yunior’s naïve optimism in the hope for medical intervention. This is the conventional reading of this scene. However, I would like to propose an alternate reading that refines Jason Cortés’ observation that “Ysrael” and “No Face” man are the origin stories of the No Face Man figure in *Oscar Wao* (“No Home-Run Hitter”). Suppose we imagine that Rafa is talking about the damage inflicted by the pig, but that Yunior is talking about the damage inflicted by Rafa. Such a miscommunication produces an ingenious ambiguity. Now Yunior’s concern for Ysrael can be read not as a concern about reconstructive surgery in the U.S., but as a concern about whether Ysrael will live to survive their attack.

In either reading, the actions of Rafa and Yunior amount to the symbolic rape and social death of Ysrael. However, the possibility that Ysrael does not mortally survive the encounter heightens the thematic effects achieved by the unique

sequencing of the stories in *Drown*. The sequencing of the stories in *Drown* is both linear and circular. Only the first story, "Ysrael," and the penultimate story, "No Face," are completely set in the Dominican Republic. Yunior becomes older as one reads *Drown* sequentially, as the setting changes from the Dominican Republic to New Jersey. However, the penultimate story, "No Face," breaks this linear progression. Narrated by a third person selective-omniscient narrator, "No Face" returns to the Dominican Republic when the character Ysrael is a boy, the implication being that the story is set in the same year as the opening story "Ysrael." The fact that the penultimate story moves back to the Dominican Republic and back in time to when Yunior is nine years old, leaves open the possibility that the events in "No Face" take place before the events in "Ysrael." The character Ysrael never appears in *Oscar Wao* nor in *This Is How You Lose Her*. One way to account for his absence is that he died at the side of the road where Rafa and Yunior left him alone and brutalized in "Ysrael." If one imagines that this is the case, then it makes Rafa's assertion that Ysrael will never be fixed and Yunior's silence about restoration much more sinister than does the conventional reading.

Unlike the boys in "No Face," Rafa and Yunior successfully devour Ysrael's dignity and autonomy, feeding their own avaricious manhood. "The interweavings of multiple erotic strands in the two stories," writes Paravisni-Gebert, "create a series of motifs which Díaz returns to in all the stories narrated by Yunior; they pair Yunior and Ysrael as mirror images of a sort, as Ysrael carries in the flesh the emotional mutilations Yunior has suffered during his fatherless childhood, which, although not visible to the eyes, remain just as profound" (168). Although she hints

at it, Paravisni-Gebert does not discuss the incident on the bus as being one of Yunior's "emotional mutilations." For Yunior, the price of manhood comes at a high cost of maintaining a double silence, the silence of his violation and the silence of his role as a violator. The mutilating, ineffable fukú that haunts Yunior is not only the pig in the clean fedora, but the pig in himself. The pig, as a symbol of gluttony, reminds one that the fukú is associated with the guilty pleasure of eating food. The pastelito stain on Yunior's pants and his molestation by the man in the clean fedora prefigure Ysrael's purchasing of the johnnycake, his assault by the fat boy, and his attempt to rub out the resulting blood stain on his shorts. Both of these stains recall the origins of the semen-stained sofa in "Drown."

Predation, Doppelgangers, and the Littoral Zone of Tíguerismo in "Drown"

Yunior's molestation in "Ysrael" sets the stage for a second major sexual trauma in *Drown*. That encounter takes place in the title story, "Drown," and it is a trauma perpetrated not by a stranger but by a friend. "Drown" is set in Parlin, New Jersey, seven to eight years after the events in "Ysrael." The central characters are an unnamed narrator, his mother, and his former best friend, Beto, who appears in the story only as a recollection. Significant background characters include the putative Army recruiter and the lonesome girl in the pool. Although the narrator is unnamed, his domestic situation suggests that he is indeed Yunior, and this is how I refer to him from this point on. Yunior, at eighteen, lives in the ghetto with his mother, Virta. His life consists of selling weed to kids and trying to pick up college girls in clubs with his homophobic friends Alex and Danny. Alex and Danny use fake

guns to scare gay men, a practice that Yunior does nothing to actively stop. In “Drown,” Yunior recollects his homosexual encounters with his best friend Beto in August of 1985, when Yunior was sixteen and in the eleventh grade. Thematically, the story deals with friendship, sexual identity, abandonment, betrayal, upward social mobility, intellectualism, sexual predation, and the concept of affirmative consent.

In this section, I focus on Yunior’s *tíguerismo* crisis,⁸³ reading it through the lens of Díaz’s comments about having written Yunior as a victim of sexual trauma (Díaz, “Decolonial Love”). The scholarly reception of “Drown” is uneven on the nature of Yunior’s sexuality. Scholars tend to read Yunior as a closeted homosexual or a homophobic heterosexual. Cowart, speaking of the narrator, says, “Immured in a closet he cannot recognize, the narrator protests too earnestly that he allowed himself to be seduced only two times” (12). As Cowart sees it, Díaz uses the narrator’s closeted homosexuality to symbolize how “ghettoized thinking” can entrap poor émigrés and low-income citizens, how the oppressed participate in their own oppression (13). Raphael Dalleo and Elena Machado Sanchez are not explicit about whether the narrator is heterosexual or homosexual. They argue that the narrator suffers a “crisis of masculinity” (87). They read his diminishment of the homosexual nature of the two encounters as “neurotic,” and equate his participatory silence in the encounters as consent. In their eyes, his lack of affirmative consent is equated with “unspeakable desire” (87-88) rather than unspeakable shock and awe.

⁸³ In Dominican vernacular culture a *tíguere* is the equivalent of a macho stud. *Tíguerismo* is the uniquely Dominican practice and culture of playboy, hyper-masculinity.

Like Cowart, they characterize Beto's behavior not as a transgression but as a "seduction" (88). The word seduction implies that the seduced party finds pleasure, if not also power, in surrendering to the will of the seducer. Danny Mendez describes the first encounter as "the culmination of a much-desired sexual activity between both young men" and Yuniór as the "pursuer" in the second encounter (142). Dorothy Stringer, like Cowart, reads Yuniór as a closeted homosexual who "passes" as straight to survive life in the ghetto. Using the story's images and references to Jesus, she intertextually argues that Yuniór casts himself as the bride of Christ and Beto as a cosmopolitan, Christ figure who baptizes him in the pool (123). Christopher Gonzalez reads Yuniór's encounter as "sexual exploration," describing Yuniór's experience of receiving fellatio from Beto as being lost in "sexual bliss" and claiming that Yuniór and Beto, in addition to their "close friendship," perhaps also share a romantic "love" for each other (*Reading Junot Díaz*). Ylce Irizarry argues that, in the discourse of Caribbean Latino masculinity, Yuniór maintains his heterosexual status because Beto performed the role of the "pasivo" in their sexual encounters ("This Is How You Lose It"). Much of the scholarly analysis discounts the possibility of reading Beto as someone who takes advantage of Yuniór rather than as someone who seduces him. However, Bridget Kevane believes that the "narrator is not gay" and characterizes Beto's behavior as a "transgression" that "destroys the friendship" (5). Kevane and Irizarry come closest to reading Yuniór as Díaz intends him to be read. In this study, I extend the analysis of Irizarry and Kevane by providing a refined close reading of the secondary assaults and predations in "Drown" as well as its intricate falling and submersion metaphors.

Using the concepts of affirmative consent and narrative ethics, my close reading of these literary devices shows that Yunior's "seduction" by Beto should be read as one of the series of sexual traumas that haunts Yunior from *Drown* to *This Is How You Lose Her*.

"Drown" sheds light on the history of Yunior's sexual trauma and the notion of affirmative consent. The first paragraph of the story reads:

My mother tells me Beto's home, waits for me to say something, but I keep watching the TV. Only when she's in bed do I put on my jacket and swing through the neighborhood to see. He's a pato now but two years ago we were friends and he would walk into the apartment without knocking, his heavy voice rousing my mother from the Spanish of her room and drawing me up from the basement, a voice that crackled and made you think of uncles or grandfathers. (91)

Yunior's silence about Beto's return home from college belies how he truly feels about his former friend. After his mother falls asleep, Yunior goes out in search of Beto. Yunior's mother does not know why Yunior and Beto fell apart, but she would like to have Yunior get beyond it, to break the silence between him and his friend. She compares her relationship with her philandering ex-husband to Yunior's relationship with Beto. She says, "You should be more like me and your father . . . I was angry at him, wasn't I? But now we can talk to each other" (95). Although the comparison is meant to make a philosophical point about the demerits of holding on to anger, it implicitly, through dramatic irony, suggests that the relationship between the two boys is more than platonic. It also disrupts Yunior's idea of his

mother as his exemplar of silent suffering. He says, "She's so quiet that most of the time I'm startled to find her in the apartment . . . She has discovered the secret to silence: pouring café without a splash, walking between rooms as if gliding on a cushion of felt, crying without a sound. You have traveled to the East and learned my secret things I've told her. You're like a shadow warrior" (94).⁸⁴

Yunior never finds Beto. He never gets a chance to break the silence about the incidents that ruptured their friendship and left him cursed and abandoned in the ghetto in an infantilized relationship with his mother. Though Beto never makes an appearance in the narrative present of the story, he dominates Yunior's recollections of the near past. When Yunior was sixteen and in the eleventh grade, his friendship with Beto fell apart. Prior to that, they were best friends who got in lots of trouble together. Beto, who is one year older, led Yunior on adventures that involved neighborhood vandalism and shoplifting at Macys. Their relationship was fraternal, mirroring Yunior's relationship with his brother Rafa. Yunior revered Beto for his fearlessness and machismo, but he also admired him for his tenderness. For example, when they are caught shoplifting audio books and *Playboy* magazines from a bookstore, Yunior starts to cry. "Beto," Yunior tells us, "didn't say a word, his face stretched out and gray, his hand squeezing mine, the bones in our fingers pressing together" (99). It is hard to imagine that a tíguere like Rafa would make such a gesture even to his brother.

That there is something queer about Beto's heteronormativity is hinted at a few pages later in the story. For example, Beto has friends who live outside of his

⁸⁴ This is a reference to the Kaliman super hero mentioned in "No Face."

Parlin neighborhood: a weird African American boy in the adjacent Madison Park neighborhood and “two brothers who were into that N.Y. club scene, who spent money on platform shoes and leather backpacks” (102). Three weeks prior to leaving for college,⁸⁵ Beto unequivocally reveals his true sexual identity to Yuniór as the two are watching heterosexual pornography in Beto’s parents’ house. Beto’s father, a pornography addict, owns a trove of tapes, and he and Beto often watch movies together. After coming back from the pool, Beto and Yuniór watch a tape, and an hour into it Beto, without warning or enticement, reaches into Yuniór’s shorts and starts to stroke him:

What the fuck are you doing? I asked, but he didn’t stop. His hand was dry. I kept my eyes on the television, too scared to watch. I came right away, smearing the plastic sofa covers. My legs started shaking and suddenly I wanted out. (104)

Beto’s advance takes Yuniór by surprise, much like the molestation by the man in the clean fedora and like the separate assaults on Ysrael by Rafa and the fat boy, respectively. Beto’s tíguere sexual aggression frightens and confounds Yuniór. There is no sense of meaningful affirmative consent in this scene, no sense of welcomed sexual advances. In the aftermath of the next twenty-four hours, Yuniór snaps at and avoids his parents. He hides in his family’s basement, “terrified” that he “would end up abnormal, a fucking pato” (104). However, by the end of the day he agrees to meet Beto at the pool again, hoping to salvage their friendship because

⁸⁵ Presumably, Beto starts college at Rutgers in September, which means that his encounters with Yuniór take place in August.

the friendship mattered to him “more than anything,” which is to say more than Beto being gay (104).

Yunior and Beto meet again that night at the pool. When they finish swimming, Beto suggests they return to his house: “He put his hand on my shoulder, my pulse a code under his palm. Let’s go, he said. Unless of course you’re not feeling good. I’m feeling fine, I said” (105). It is not clear if Yunior’s racing pulse is an indication of fear, anticipation, or a mixture of both. Reading the “code” as a sign of anxiety, Beto offers Yunior a chance to say no to coming home with him. Beto’s offer puts Yunior in *zugzwang* relative to his heteronormative sexuality. To admit that he is not feeling well is a sign of pusillanimity, of fear and weakness. To take Beto up on the offer is a sign of homosexual desire. Although there are no tonal tags to indicate how Yunior says, “I’m feeling fine,” one can reasonably imagine that he says it to save face, the face of his mask of his *tíguerismo*. In the absurd logic of *tíguerismo*, repressing his fear of Beto’s homosexuality demonstrates that he is man enough to be, as Irizarry says, an “activo,” the partner who penetrates rather than the one who is penetrated, the “pasivo.” Beto’s offering Yunior a way out might be munificent, but it might also be manipulative. Like Yunior, Beto is fully aware of the absurd logic of *tíguerismo*, and it is probable that he uses it and Yunior’s sense of loyalty to maneuver Yunior into a compromising position. They return to Beto’s house and Beto performs fellatio on Yunior:

We sat in front of his television, in our towels, his hands bracing against my abdomen and thighs. I’ll stop if you want, he said and I didn’t respond. After I was done, he laid his head in my lap. I wasn’t

asleep or awake, but caught somewhere in between, rocked slowly back and forth the way surf holds junk against the shore, rolling it over and over. (105)

Note in this scene that Beto asks whether he should continue, suggesting that he is aware that Yuniór may not be entirely comfortable or complicit in their actions. In the absence of an explicit no, Beto reads Yuniór's silence and submission as consent. The rocking and rolling highlights the sensual pleasure Yuniór receives, but the flotsam metaphor suggests that the homosexual encounter negatively reifies him, turns him into "junk."⁸⁶ The positive sensation of being tenderly cradled by the sea coupled with the negative image of being a piece of junk underscore Yuniór's confusion. Caught between a conception of himself as a tíguere and one of himself as a pato, Yuniór is moved by structures of feeling beyond his control, trapped in a littoral zone of heterosexuality and homosexuality. The reader is left to decide whether heterosexuality is represented by the sea or by the shore. Does heterosexuality offer stability and stasis, or does it threaten to drown and subsume? The answer is delayed until the next metaphor.

Anxious about Beto leaving to go to Rutgers, Yuniór drifts into a reverie about school as the fellatio continues. In the reverie, Yuniór recalls how one of his high school teachers compared him and the majority of his classmates to the disposable rocket boosters of the space shuttle: "I could already see myself losing altitude, fading, the earth spread out beneath me, hard and bright" (106). The

⁸⁶ Note how the use of the verbs rock and roll recall the African American vernacular metaphor for sex, and note also the sexually charged use of the word "junk."

implication is that Yuniór sees Beto as the space shuttle and himself as the disposable, adjunct rocket boosters. Taken together, the flotsam and the depleted rocket boosters function as an extended metaphor, the latter being a phallic conceit that suggests the physical and emotional declination of sexual climax, but also how sexual partners can be casually used and discarded. Since Beto is the one who achieves escape velocity out of the ghetto and into the celestial realm of higher education, the space shuttle metaphor equates homosexuality with cosmopolitan upward mobility and heterosexuality with provincial terrestrialism. In the light of the shuttle metaphor, the ambiguity of the flotsam conceit fades away: the shore signifies heterosexuality and the sea signifies homosexuality. The fellatio scene ends in a panic. Startled by a door slamming in the hallway, Yuniór jumps up, saying, "Fuck this." Beto laughs cavalierly as Yuniór hurriedly puts on his clothes and leaves. United by Beto's sexual exploitation and Yuniór's confusion, the two sex scenes in "Drown" leave Yuniór feeling deflated, degraded, and treated like junk. Stringer tepidly acknowledges that all is not well for Yuniór, but she falls shy of fully condemning Beto: "Beto did nothing violent or coercive in either encounter, and his emotional demand, though intense to the point of blackmail--... --seems no different from that of any other ill-advised seduction. The encounters are not tender or romantic, however, and actually seem to have traumatized the narrator" (120). The first encounter with Beto, if not the second, certainly supports Díaz's claim that Yuniór is to be read as a character that was "raped," "abused," and "molested" ("Decolonial Love"). That this is how Yuniór should be read is even more evident

when one applies close reading to two thematically crucial scenes that are often misread or disregarded in “Drown.”

Scholars and reviewers routinely misinterpret or neglect the significance of sexual predation in the Army recruiter and bikini scenes in “Drown.”⁸⁷ I argue that Díaz uses these scenes to thematically fimbriate Beto’s sexual encounters with Yuniór as predation. The Army recruiter scene occurs in between the flashback of Beto and Yuniór holding hands when they got caught shoplifting and the flashback of Yuniór and Beto’s separate adventures outside of their Parlin neighborhood.⁸⁸ The scene with the Army recruiter is also a flashback, a flashback to Yuniór’s initial encounter with the man: “He was out of uniform, and called me over, jovial, and I thought I was helping some white dude with directions” (100). The Army recruiter is a red-haired, southerner with a prominent drawl. Yuniór casts the recruiter, and by extension the U.S. government, as a predator and himself as prey. He says the recruiter “prowls around our neighborhood” and “I take to the bushes when I see his car on the road” (100). The recruiter tries to lure Yuniór into joining his cause with the promise of a “real career” and bourgeois domesticity: “I have a house, a car, a gun and a wife. Discipline. Loyalty. Can you say you have any of those things? Even one? . . . his ten piggy fingers buried in his carpeted steering wheel” (100). The recruiter also tries to lure Yuniór with the promise of guns, girls, and travel. He shows him his Desert Eagle, a semi-automatic pistol, and flashes “the photos of the

⁸⁷ Dorothy Stringer provides the only in-depth analysis of the Army recruiter scene. She focuses on how the scene reflects the Clinton Administration’s 1993 “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy, how it associates the benefits of citizenship and military service with heteronormative sexual conformity, with passing for straight.

⁸⁸ Yuniór goes to the mall and the Sayreville library and Beto goes to New York city.

skinny Filipino girls sucking dick” (100-101). The fact that Yuniór routinely hides in bushes to avoid the recruiter and that the recruiter attempts to solicit impoverished young men while he is suspiciously out of uniform and off-duty suggests that he is an existential threat rather than a mere nuisance. It is possible that the man is only posing as a recruiter as he drives around out of uniform. Díaz hails the specter of sexual predation by describing the recruiter’s fingers as “piggy” and associating the exploitation of the Filipino girl with the recruiter’s attempt to seduce Yuniór. The recruiter’s porcine fingers phallically conjure the sexually charged images of the fat boy and the pig that attack Ysraél. Yuniór and the Filipino girl embody the history of U.S. imperial dominion of the Philippines and U.S. hegemonic political, financial, and military penetration of the Dominican Republic. In essence, the scene is a pre-*Oscar Wao* representation of *fukú americanus* consuming Filipino and seducing Dominican bodies.

Like the Army recruiter scene, the bikini scene in “Drown” frames Beto’s exploitation of his friendship with Yuniór as predation. The scene occurs in between Beto and Yuniór’s second sexual encounter. The bikini scene takes place at the neighborhood pool, a catalytic site of sexual energy and sexual identity formation in Yuniór’s cosmos. As in “Ysraél” and “No Face,” the bikini scene employs Díaz’s gang of tigers trope. He and Beto watch as “a Skytop crew pull a bikini top from a girl stupid enough to hang out alone When they began to pluck at her arms, she walked away, leaving them to try the top over their flat pecs” (105). The gang’s facetious attempt to wear the bikini top suggests that sexuality can be fluid even among tígueres. By calling the young woman stupid, Yuniór blames her

for her victimization by the gang of boys, but Yuniór's inclusion and sequencing of the scene in his personal narrative also indicts his own naiveté and denial regarding Beto's intentions. Yuniór's judgment of the girl suggests that he knew, or should have known, what he was getting into when he returned to Beto's home for the second time. Yuniór's implicit comparison of himself to the victimized girl in the bikini scene mirrors his earlier implicit comparison of himself to the Filipino girl in the scene with the Army recruiter. This is consistent with Díaz's narrative strategy and ethics for writing female characters, Díaz tells Chrissy Arce: "You haven't noticed my simplistic structure for writing female characters: they're doppelgangers of the male narrator. In other words, they're almost always the male, mirror version of them. But this narrator's masculine privilege gives him a totally different fate" ("Junot Díaz: Writer, Tigre, Ghetto Nerd, College Professor"). The dyadic doppelganger trope in "Drown" suggests that reviewers, scholars, and critics have been too quick to condemn Yuniór as a homophobe and closeted homosexual and too eager to construe Beto's aggression and predation as seduction. What is clear is that Beto belongs on the roster of specters that constitutes Yuniór's own personal fukú.

**"what's eating Yuniór de la Casa": Transgressive Desire and Victorian Shame
in "Miss Lora"**

Beto was not the only neighbor/friend to sexually exploit sixteen-year old Yuniór in the summer of 1985, nor were the Filipino girl and her topless counterpart Yuniór's only female doppelgangers. That status belongs to Miss Lora,

the Ground Zero of what we might call Yuniór's sociogenesis. "Miss Lora," the penultimate story in *This is How You Lose Her*, focuses on Yuniór's two-year, secret affair with Miss Lora, a single, childless, high school teacher who is also his neighbor and his mother's friend. The affair with Miss Lora is a heteronormative teenage boy's sexual fantasy come true. One imagines that it mirrors the pornography that Beto and Yuniór watched. The story describes Yuniór routinely having unprotected vaginal, anal, and oral sex with Miss Lora. As an adult, Yuniór believes that this frequent and unfettered access to Miss Lora's body turned him into a "sucio," like his brother and father, and ruined his ability to have meaningful intimacy with women his own age (Díaz, *This Is How You Lose Her* 161). However, the poignant narration and nostalgic conclusion of the story aestheticizes, if not minimizes, the resulting trauma and highlights the liberating potential of transgressing the borders of Victorian morality.

The story is told from Yuniór's narrative present, in which he is a professor of Composition and Creative Writing at Middlesex Community College in Perth Amboy, NJ.⁸⁹ The principle characters are Yuniór, Miss Lora, Virta, Yuniór's Puerto Rican, high school girlfriend Paloma, and "the mujerón," Yuniór's super sexy girlfriend from his senior year in college at Rutgers. The secondary characters are Rafa, Mr. Everson, and Mr. and Mrs. Del Orbe. The story is divided into fifteen vignettes. The first eleven sketches cover Yuniór's eleventh grade year. The twelfth

⁸⁹ Yuniór acknowledges that he's been a professor for six years in "The Cheater's Guide to Love," the final story in *This Is How You Lose Her*, see 202. The details of where and what he teaches are described in *Oscar Wao* in the section titled "As For Me."

and thirteenth vignettes focus on his senior year in high school, and the final two chart his senior year in college at Rutgers.

The story opens in the contemporary moment, with Yuniór reflecting on events in his life from the summer of 1985. In the 1980s, the threat of a nuclear war between the U.S. and Russia dominated U.S. political discourse and news and entertainment media. Yuniór watches the stream of movies and mini-series about life after global destruction produced at this time. He also reads 1950s nuclear holocaust fiction. His anxiety about post-apocalyptic survival is a constant source of tension in his relationship with Paloma: “She didn’t want to hear about Mutual Assured Destruction, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, We begin bombing in five minutes, SALT II, *The Day After*, *Threads*, *Red Dawn*, *WarGames*, *Gamma World*, any of it. She called you Mr. Depressing” (151). The anxiety is so bad that Yuniór has constant nightmares about bombs falling; he routinely wakes up biting his “tongue in terror, the blood dribbling down [his] chin” (151). “Someone really should have medicated [him],” he says (151). Yuniór’s preoccupation with nuclear annihilation masks the repressed grief he feels over the death of his brother, Rafa, who died the year before of leukemia. Rafa’s blood cancer and the notion of cancer-causing nuclear fallout bring Yuniór face to face with his own mortality, but they also highlight his abandonment by the machos in his life: his father, his brother, and Beto. This triple abandonment triggers a crisis of *tíguerismo*.

Yuniór’s tongue-biting and blood stained chin mirror Ysraél’s response to the recurring nightmare of the man-eating pig in “No Face,” a sexualized nightmare that is triggered by the fat boy’s physical assault and threat of rape. Like Ysraél there is a

sexual dimension to Yunior's nuclear annihilation nightmare. His fear about nuclear holocaust is entangled with his anxiety about pusillanimity and homosexuality, about not being able to live up to his brother and father's model of *tiguerismo*. For Yunior, pusillanimity and homosexuality amount to social death. He seeks to quell his fears of both social and corporeal death through the pursuit of sex with his girlfriend Paloma and his mistress, Miss Lora, doppelgangers for Beto and Yunior, respectively.

Paloma, like Beto in "Drown," views higher education as her only effective ticket out of the ghetto. As an honor student, Paloma hyper-focuses on her college prospects, so much so that she refuses to have sex with Yunior for fear of getting pregnant and scuttling her chances of graduating high school. Yunior calls her the "Only Puerto Rican girl on the earth who wouldn't give up the ass for any reason" (151). Yunior uses jealousy to pry Paloma open. He casually mentions that Miss Lora has been "after" him, a choice of words that makes Miss Lora sound predatory, like the Army recruiter in "Drown" (157). Paloma is outraged by the age disparity and Miss Lora's skinny body: "That old fucking hag? That's *disgusting* That would be like fucking a stick" (157). Yunior's gambit works. Disclosing Miss Lora's interest in him makes Paloma jealous and he is allowed "to touch Paloma's clit with the tip of [his] tongue but that's it" (157). Paloma may be prudish about age disparity, but she is not necessarily prudish about sex. She simply does not want to become the stereotypical easy Puerto Rican girl that Yunior, and perhaps the rest of the world, thinks she is destined to be. She is a pragmatist who does not trust herself or Yunior to not make a "mistake" (151). Paloma may not have time to

coddle Yunior and his doomsday fears, but his “around-the-corner neighbor, Miss Lora” does (152).

Miss Lora is a single, childless Dominican immigrant who teaches at Sayreville High, a school in the town next to Parlin. She was born in La Vega, where Yunior’s mother, Virta, convalesced after the Dominican Civil war in 1965. Miss Lora and Virta bond on the stoop over the stories they share about the homeland. For example, they talk “to death” about one of them having seen the rebel leader Juan Bosch, while living in La Vega (154).

Miss Lora listens to Yunior’s mother, but she also attentively listens to Yunior. She and Yunior bond over their mutual fascination with nuclear holocaust movies and apocalyptic fiction, like *Alas, Babylon* (152). Yunior’s initial attraction to Miss Lora is cerebral. He finds her ability to listen more attractive than the attributes of her body. To Yunior and the gang of boys around him, Miss Lora is physically unappealing: “how skinny she was, no culo, no titties, como un palito” (149). Yunior goes on to say, “even her hair failed to make the grade. She had her eyes, sure, but what she was most famous for in the neighborhood were her muscles chick was just wiry like a motherfucker, every single fiber standing out in outlandish definition. Bitch made Iggy Pop look chub” (154). Miss Lora’s “wiry” muscles call to mind the “ropy” muscles of the man in the clean fedora, suggesting that she is to be read as a predator. The only boy in Yunior’s circle who declares that he would sleep with her is Rafa, but they discredit him because he would “fuck anything” (149). Although she is not pretty and curvy like a *mujerón*, Miss Lora is sexually available, a fact Yunior realizes when she, like Beto, puts her hand on his

shoulder (152). Yunior attributes her touching him to his freakishly huge musculature: “People always touched you. You were used to it. You were an amateur weightlifter, something else you did to keep your mind off the shit in your life . . . all the lifting had turned you into a goddam circus freak. Most of the time it didn’t bother you, the way girls and sometimes guys felt you up. But with Miss Lora you could tell something was different” (152). The focus on people feeling Yunior up calls to mind his aunt in “How to Date a Browngril, Blackgirl, White Girl, or Halfie”: “that tía who likes to squeeze your nuts. (He’s gotten big, she’ll say.)” (143). Unlike his aunt’s, Miss Lora’s touch is special; it prompts Yunior to look into her large eyes, rather than focus on the putative demerits of her mannish body. Yunior and Miss Lora’s contrasting body types call to mind Díaz’s comment about Oscar Wao’s obesity being a response to sexual trauma. Díaz’s comment about Oscar’s obesity invites us to read Yunior and Miss Lora’s freakish musculatures in the same light. Recall that Díaz says that Yunior’s virulent tíguerismo as an adult is a reaction to his sexual trauma as a young person:

Why is Yunior such a dog? Just because? Or is there something deeper? Think about it: isn’t promiscuity another typical reaction to sexual abuse? Compulsive promiscuity is certainly Yunior’s problem. A compulsive promiscuity that is a national masculine ideal in some ways and whose roots I see in the trauma of our raped pasts. Like I said: it’s probably not there at all--too subtle. But the fact of Yunior’s rape certainly helped me design the thematic economy of the book. (“Decolonial Love”)

Yunior, like Oscar Wao, cloaks himself in a protective layer of flesh. Oscar Wao bulks up on fat as a sympathetic response to his mother's sexual trauma. Yunior bulks up on muscle to garner sexual attention from women and as a way to prove and defend his manhood among men. The fact that Yunior's new, Hulkish body also attracts males as well as females exemplifies Díaz's use of cosmic irony.

Díaz's declaration about the origin of Yunior's adult promiscuity supports my argument that Yunior's compulsive weightlifting as a teenager is a defensive reaction to sexually traumatic encounters with the man in the clean fedora, Ysrael, and Beto. Recall that Díaz portrays Beto as being much stronger than Yunior in "Drown"; Beto forcefully holds Yunior underwater when he feels threatened by Yunior's intelligence (94). The fact that Yunior is bulked up in "Miss Lora," but not in "Drown" suggests that the former story is chronologically set after the latter, at least by a few weeks. For example, we already know that both stories are set in the same year. Given that both "Drown" and "Miss Lora" contain significant references to the neighborhood pool, a trope for summertime recreation and leisure activity, it is likely that they also occur within the same month. The summertime pool scenes are narrative devices that allow Díaz to organically call attention to the social issues with which he is concerned: sexuality, body image, and body type.

Yunior's affair with Miss Lora begins out on the stoop in front of his mother. Virta calls Yunior over to say hello to Miss Lora. Sweaty from his daily morning

jog,⁹⁰ he demurs, but his mother insists. To retain Miss Lora's attention, Yuniór begins flirting with her. He flexes his muscles and threatens to curl her. She puts her hands on his waist and jokingly threatens to lift him (155). Virta looks at the two of them suspiciously. She has good reason to be worried. The following vignette flashes back to a scene in which Virta confronts Rafa about his affair with the neighbor Mrs. Del Orbe. The exchange is mostly in Spanish. Rafa attempts to frame the affair as true romance, saying in Spanish, "Ma, Se metio por mis ojos," that Mrs. Del Orbe entered him through his eyes, which is to say he fell in love with her at first sight. Rafa's mother, in a bit of raunchy word play with the verb *merterse*, says Rafa entered Mrs. Del Orbe's ass. His riposte is that he entered her mouth, too (156).⁹¹ Rafa's illicit affair with Mrs. Del Orbe challenges Yuniór's muted virility in the previous scene and fimbriates his subsequent affair with Miss Lora.

Miss Lora is the first female to express a romantic interest in Yuniór. He is flattered and flustered by her attention. Afraid of rejection, and that he might be misreading her signals, he is unsure of how to proceed. He starts to have sexually explosive dreams about her, dreams that comingle his fear of nuclear annihilation with his desire to "put a rabo on Miss Lora" (156): "You have a couple dreams where you are about to touch her but then the bomb blows NYC to kingdom come and you watch the shock wave roll up and then you wake, your tongue clamped firmly between your teeth" (157). When Miss Lora offers Yuniór the chance to come over

⁹⁰ The unnamed narrator in "Drown" also runs in the mornings. This, like the mention of eleventh grade, is further evidence that the narrator in "Drown" is Yuniór.

⁹¹ For a translation and explication of this exchange, see Davis, "se metio por mis ojos."

and show her a movie, he reads it as an unambiguous signal of her sexual ambitions. As in "Drown," movies are used as a pretext for sexual coupling. Two nights later, realizing that he is "his father's son and [his] brother's brother," Yunior taps into his hereditary and cultural *tíguerismo* (158). He goes over to Miss Lora's unannounced. Foregoing small talk, he kisses her in the doorway and they immediately go inside and have sex in the living room. Yunior apologizes for coming inside her, but she does not mind. Afterwards, Yunior notices photographs of other guys from the neighborhood among the pictures of her travels and siblings on her living room walls. Although the guys are guys he knew when he was younger, he says nothing about it. He holds his tongue on the matter. His silence suggests that there is something inappropriate about the pictures. One possibility is that he thinks Miss Lora is more promiscuous than he anticipated, that she is a *sucia* like his father and brother. The other possibility is that the guys may be in or around his age cohort, suggesting that she has a predilection for teenage boys and that those neighborhood boys keep her secret safe. It is easy to imagine that Yunior feels that one day he too will wind up as a trophy on her wall.

As Yunior surveys Miss Lora's apartment, he starts to see her in an unflattering light. Her place is furnished like a "white" person's apartment, partaking in none of the "Caribbean craziness" found in the homes of other Dominican and Caribbean immigrants in the neighborhood (159). Yunior uses the aesthetics of Miss Lora's domestic sphere to mark her as not fully Dominican or Caribbean, to mark her as someone who has assimilated, as someone who has betrayed her ethnicity. In "Fiesta, 1980," "How to Date," and "Drown," Díaz uses

plastic sofa covers, among other things, to articulate the “Caribbean craziness” of immigrant interior domestic spaces.⁹² After his first round of sex with Miss Lora in the living room, Yuniór feels like he might be in love (159). In their second round, Yuniór receives oral sex. As in “Drown,” his mind starts to drift to matters of education. He thinks of his girlfriend Paloma, how she falls asleep on the ride to school and how she helps him study for the SAT (160).

The day after, in the following vignette, Yuniór feels polluted and degraded by his escapade with Miss Lora. He recounts how his father and brother are “sucios,” and says that sleeping with Miss Lora has officially made him a sucio, too (161). Yuniór’s preoccupation with moral contamination masks the threat of disease and pregnancy that are the potential consequences of their unprotected sex. Presumably, Yuniór is ashamed because Miss Lora is an older woman, physically unappealing, sexually careless, and his mother’s friend. However, his self-degradation is not enough to keep him from addictively returning to her bed. She offers Yuniór an out when she expresses concern that he cannot emotionally handle casual sex, a relationship that is “just supposed to be fun” (162). Yuniór’s nightmares about nuclear warfare worsen as the affair progresses and they continue to have unprotected sex. Each morning there is more and more blood in the sink from him biting his tongue (163). Unlike Rafa’s leukemia, the threat of disease and pregnancy run in the foreground of this story, embodied in the pragmatism and restraint of Paloma and the idealism and indulgence of Miss Lora.

⁹² See Díaz, *Drown*, 32, 104, and 147.

As he spends more time with Miss Lora, Yuniór learns that their personal lives share similar traumas. For example, she has an adulterous, deadbeat mother whereas Yuniór has an adulterous, deadbeat father. She had an affair with her high school history teacher whereas Yuniór has an affair with her. She had a relationship with a “black” boyfriend whom she later thought was gay, whereas Yuniór had two homosexual encounters with his friend Beto, who hangs out with the weird “black” kid from Madison Park. Yuniór also notes that Miss Lora sleeps with a mouth guard and covers her eyes with a mask (163-164). The mouth guard suggests that she grinds her teeth and calls to mind how Yuniór bites his tongue when he dreams. Her sleeping mask calls to mind the mask trope in “Ysrael” and *Oscar Wao*. The difference, however, is that her masks hides her eyes rather than her entire face. Symbolically, it suggests that she is willfully blind, that she does not want to see the truth about herself, others, or the world. Yuniór’s attention to Miss Lora’s affair with her high school history teacher invites one to read that relationship as the etiology of her interest in Yuniór and the other neighborhood boys, just as Yuniór’s freakishly huge muscles may be a reaction to his history of sexual trauma and a symptom of trying to achieve the tíguerismo of his dead brother and absent father. Díaz’s focus on the relationships between sexuality, body image, and body type invites one to read Miss Lora’s sexual interest in Yuniór and her freakishly skinny body as an anorexic reaction to her affair with the history teacher and her mother’s adultery and abandonment.

Miss Lora’s interest in Yuniór is not just physical; she tries to help Yuniór develop emotionally and intellectually. Like Paloma, Miss Lora encourages Yuniór

to apply to college, and she attempts to get him to talk about his dead brother. Yuniór refuses to open up about his brother. The repeated image of his bitten tongue represents his reluctance to articulate his grief,⁹³ but it also represents his inability to articulate the taboo nature of the affair and his fear of moral contamination. Like his bitten tongue, Yuniór's affair with Miss Lora can be read as a self-inflicted wound. But it is only a wound to the degree that Yuniór buys into a Victorian paradigm of sexual coupling and morality. Yuniór's wounded tongue portrays him as a victim of *tíguerismo* in the sense that he refuses to talk about his emotions, about the grief for his brother. However, Yuniór's complicity in the affair prevents one from reading of Miss Lora as a morally corrosive Pandora, Eve, or Socrates figure.

The affair goes on into the next year, when Yuniór is a senior in high school. Miss Lora even takes a job teaching at his school. Neither Paloma nor Virta are aware of the affair. At the end of the school year, Miss Lora, in a red dress and red panties, sits and claps with Yuniór's mother at his high school graduation. After the ceremonies, she takes him to Perth Amboy, a nearby town northeast of Parlin, and they celebrate at a Mexican restaurant. Later that same night, Yuniór learns that Paloma has been accepted to the University of Delaware. Over the course of the summer, Paloma and he see each other twice. She leaves for college in August and after "a week on campus" writes him a letter saying that their relationship is over; the header says, "MOVING ON" (168). Yuniór, stuck in the ghetto, gets a job at

⁹³ There are four references to Yuniór biting his tongue during nightmares and one to him using it for oral sex on Paloma. See Díaz, "Miss Lora," 151, 155, 157, and 163.

Raritan River Steel and meets Miss Lora in surrounding towns to surreptitiously continue their affair. Unable to tolerate the public scrutiny of their age disparity, even in towns where they are unknown, Yuniór tells Miss Lora, “You know this ain’t going to last” (169). The relationship eventually ends, but it takes Yuniór until his senior year in college at Rutgers to get over it. He unwisely shares his “Secret” with a girlfriend he calls “the mujerón” (169 and 170, respectively). Outraged by what she perceives to be statutory rape, the mujerón says, “They should arrest that crazy bitch . . . They should arrest her ass today,” despite Yuniór’s tepid, interceding protest that, “It wasn’t like that” (170). On a visit to Yuniór’s home, the mujerón discloses his secret to his mother and proceeds to Miss Lora’s her apartment, hoping to confront her. If Miss Lora is there, she does not open the door.

The story concludes with Miss Lora showing up at Yuniór’s graduation from Rutgers, standing in red a dress, red like the dress she wore to his high school graduation, and red like the blood of his nightmares, the blood of his silence. They do not meet. She eventually moves out of the neighborhood. After the relationship with the mujerón ends, Yuniór searches for Miss Lora online and when he travels back to the Dominican Republic. The search is fruitless. He never finds her; all he has left is the memory he narrates and the picture of the two of them at Sandy Hook beach, smiling with their eyes closed.

The beginning and conclusion of “Drown” are similar to the conclusion of “Miss Lora.” In both cases, Yuniór is portrayed searching for an ex-friend, a friend with whom he had a sexual affair. Both stories share a theme of sexual and moral contamination. In “Drown,” Yuniór is “terrified that [he] would end up abnormal, a

fucking pato" (104). In "Miss Lora," Yunior feels that infidelity and wanton heterosexual contact turns him into a sucio. In his interview with Arce, Díaz implies that Yunior's predilection for serial infidelity is culturally constructed by his masculine socialization:

The Yunior character, his entire humanity, at least his upbringing, is from compassion with his mother; this deep love and compassion for his mother as she's being cheated on and torn apart. By the time Yunior grows up, he's doing exactly what he felt was tearing his mother up, to other women. He had been built. *Drown* is not a book about immigrant experience as much as it's a how-to guide to building a boy. ("Junot Díaz: Writer, Tigre, Ghetto Nerd, College Professor" 45)

As his closest male role models, Yunior's father and brother socially construct Yunior's attitudes about women as companions and sexual partners. Yunior's father would take Yunior along on his "pussy runs"⁹⁴ and Rafa would be "boning girls" while Yunior slept in the next bed ("Miss Lora" 161). Yunior's college girlfriend, "the mujerón," reads Yunior's indiscriminate sex drive as a Dominican male trait, but Virta, Yunior's mother, notes that her ex-husband and sons' carnality is particularly exceptional, even for Dominican men (170).

Díaz's conception of himself as a native informant of hyper-masculinity and his desire to create a pro-feminist fictional universe that simultaneously honors and outstrips Toni Morrison and Alice Walker's representations of hegemonic

⁹⁴ In "Fiesta, 1980," in *Drown*, Ramon Sr. takes Yunior with him as he goes on his extramarital affairs.

masculinity inform the conservative narrative ethics of *Drown*, *Oscar Wao*, and *This Is How You Lose Her*.⁹⁵ In these works, Díaz creates a moral universe that consistently berates and punishes characters who do not conform to Victorian notions of romantic love, carnal desire, and attachment. Díaz's male characters are damned and doomed for rejecting Victorian sexual mores: "They always end up alone, they always end up failing, they always end up not connecting. And the person it hurts is not the women, though the women are hurt in a lot of these relationships, its them" (Díaz, "Junot Díaz: Writer, Tigre, Ghetto Nerd, College Professor" 45). Díaz's moral condemnation might also be said to apply to Yuniór's libertine doppelgänger, Miss Lora, who is single and childless. *Tíguerismo* in Díaz's universe is punished with alienation and shame. Like the pig that consumes Ysrael's face, the *fukú* that consumes Yuniór in "Miss Lora" is guilt: "Part of what's eating Yuniór de la Casa is that he was once a boy who was shattered because his father was cheating on his mom and the way people treated women. And then as an adult he does it gleefully and unknowingly. Part of that is what's eating Yuniór" (Díaz, "Junot Díaz: Writer, Tigre, Ghetto Nerd, College Professor" 45).

On the other hand, Yuniór also suggests that biology, in addition to sociology, has a role in the construction of his sexual identity as a womanizing male. He had hoped that the philandering "gene" had skipped him, but "the blood always shows," he tells Paloma, echoing the "Nature exceeds nurture"/"Nature will out" moral of Aesop's fable "The Cat and Venus." Yuniór's appeal to sociobiological determinism

⁹⁵ See Díaz, "Writer, Tiger," 44-45.

calls to mind recent studies in the field of biological anthropology and neuroscience regarding monogamy, moral behavior, and the gendered brain.

The biological anthropologist Helen Fisher researches the evolutionary history and neurochemical mechanisms of romantic love. Dr. Fisher's books include *Why We Love: The Nature and Chemistry of Romantic Love* (2004) and *Anatomy of Love: A Natural History of Mating, Marriage, and Why We Stray* (1992 & 2016). She summarizes her research in her 2006 TED Talk, "Why We Love, Why We Cheat." Her findings debunk the myth that men are more adulterous or promiscuous than women. She demonstrates that romantic love, carnal desire, and attachment are evolutionary drives that developed for mating and reproduction; they are not personal emotions, vices, or virtues. She claims that humans are capable of having these three drives focused on more than one person at a time. Of the three drives, romantic love is the most powerful, as it makes its subject willing to live, die, or kill for love. Driven by dopamine, romantic love activates the centers in the brain associated with craving and addiction. Romantic love produces intense energy, elation, emotional craving, and sexual possessiveness.⁹⁶ Because romantic love is so powerful, it is universally valorized in world literature, perhaps detrimentally so. Fisher warns, "We are not an animal that was built to be happy, we are an animal that was built to reproduce" (Fisher, "Why We Love, Why We Cheat").

Dr. Paul J. Zak, author of *The Moral Molecule: The Source of Love and Prosperity* (2012), is a DARPA funded neuroeconomist who researches brain

⁹⁶ The dopamine mechanism explains Yuniior's sexual possessiveness and jealous tantrum when he learns that Mr. Everson visited Miss Lora.

chemistry and the empathic effects of oxytocin. He summarizes his research in his July 2011 TED Talk, "The Differences Between Men and Women." His talk explicates the neurobiology that accounts for the differential between men and women's capacity for empathy and moral behavior. It turns out that men have exceptionally high levels of a type of testosterone called dihydrotestosterone (DHT). DHT stimulates fear and aggression and is the molecule that makes men behaviorally distinct from women. An outward sign of DHT is male pattern baldness. Another property of DHT is that it inhibits oxytocin. Both males and females produce oxytocin, a hormone that motivates affiliation and positive social behavior. However, women release more oxytocin than men. Consequently, women are, according to Zak, more generous, compassionate, calm, empathic, and trustworthy than men (Zak, "The Differences Between Men and Women").

Zak's 2010 article, "Why Men Cheat: The Trouble with Tiger" explains the scientific distinctions between social and sexual monogamy: "Studies have shown that about three percent of mammals are *socially monogamous*. This means that males and females cohabitate to jointly raise offspring. Genetic studies have shown that few of these paired animals are *sexually monogamous*. Yet, many of these animals continue to be socially monogamous" (Zak, "Why Men Cheat"). Dr. Zak explains that are three hormones responsible for modulating social and sexual monogamy: oxytocin, arginine vasopressin, and testosterone. Oxytocin promotes pair bonding, arginine vasopressin stimulates males to protect their mates and offspring, and high testosterone attracts females and drives male libido. High testosterone men are motivated to cheat by their physiologies and the abundant

amount of women they attract. Regarding promiscuity in high testosterone males, Dr. Zak concludes, “We can still recognize its negative impact on women and families, but I see no reason to demonize promiscuous men, even if it feels right to do so” (“Why Men Cheat”).

Yunior’s fukú is the shame and post-traumatic stress triggered by his “Secret,” his history of sexual trauma and his promiscuity (169). Dr. Fisher and Dr. Zak’s research demonstrate that nature may have as much to do with Yunior’s promiscuity as nurture. Just as Yunior has to learn how to overcome the misplaced shame and guilt of being a victim of sexual abuse, he also has to learn to overcome the Victorian shame and guilt of being a promiscuous tíguere. Given the profound role of neurochemical mechanisms in shaping gender, society, and morality, it is mistaken to claim, as Cortés does, that Díaz’s empathy-deficient hegemonic males suffer a “complete loss of” or “denial of humanity” (“The (No) Face of Ordinary Evil”). Rafa’s physical violence toward Ysrael and Yunior’s cheating on Paloma are reprehensible, but categorically positioning these adolescent Latino boys outside the veil of humanity is equally inhumane, given that their brains are still developing.

In “Adultery and the Immigrant Narrative,” Natalie J. Friedman encourages us to consider how immigrant extramarital relationships productively challenge patriarchal, state-sponsored notions of the nuclear family, traditional marriage, and monogamy. Immigrant adultery, argues Friedman, can be read as a symbol of personal transformation and self-development. Adultery can reconfigure marriages, but it can also “engender fidelity to new ideas of self-identity” and serve as “a gateway to the formation of a new American identity, one that is inherently

transnational and resists idea of full adaptation or Americanization" (72).

Transnationalism is the keystone of Friedman's argument. The transnational immigrant "has multiple means of connecting to his or her land of origin or to multiple nations at once" (73). Because transnational immigrants can move physically and ideologically back and forth across the borders of the homeland and the host country, they can appreciate and embrace the creative potential and possibilities unleashed in moving back and forth across the borders of patriarchal marital fidelity. "This figurative crossing," writes Friedman, "enables the immigrant to remain tied to a culture of origin while actively engaging in American culture as an American citizen" (74).

Friedman explicates "Negocios" to show how bigamy allows Yuniór's father to "gain legal status" and bring his family to the U.S. (82). Friedman focuses on the relationships between adultery, body type, nostalgia, and national identity in "Fiesta, 1980." In "Fiesta, 1980," Yuniór notes that Virta, his mother, was a flaca in the Dominican Republic, but after three years in the U.S. she gained weight (24). Virta's change in body type, argues Friedman, drives Yuniór's father to have an affair with a Puerto Rican flaca. Friedman writes, "Yuniór interprets his father's adultery as a rejection of his mother's newfound prosperity and changing beauty standards, and a search for a woman who resembles his mother as she was before: thinner, and perhaps by extension, more vulnerable" (81). The Puerto Rican flaca is a psychological proxy. She satisfies Ramon's nostalgia for the Dominican Republic, tíguerismo, and the wife of his youth (Friedman 82). Tíguerismo is the only of those three desiderata that is impervious to the ravages of time; it is an impulse and

practice so it does not age. By importing his tíguerismo from Santo Domingo to Parlin, Roman Sr. salvages his Dominican identity in a U.S. context. Freidman's psychoanalysis of the flaca trope in "Fiesta, 1980" explains its appearance in "Miss Lora." Yuniór is attracted to Miss Lora because she subconsciously reminds him of his father (in that she is skinny like the Puerto Rican mistress), his mother, and his homeland, the Dominican Republic.

The infidelity Yuniór witnessed in "Fiesta, 1980" primed him for his 1985 affair with Miss Lora. Although the affair cripples Yuniór's capacity for empathy, it liberates his capacity for self-transformation.⁹⁷ Like with Beto, sex with Miss Lora is bound up with the idea of cosmopolitanism and higher education as a vehicle for social mobility. Miss Lora activates Yuniór's academic potential, which, in turn, helps him escape, like Beto and Paloma, a future of privation in Parlin. Yuniór's promiscuity is inexorably bound up with his sexual traumas, and quite possibly with his genetics as a high testosterone male. In the light of Fisher, Zak, and Friedman's findings, demonizing Yuniór for his infidelity is as misguided as blaming him for his sexual trauma. Díaz's portrait of tíguerismo in *Drown* inadvertently, if not subversively, illustrates that informed compassion, rather than unenlightened condemnation, is the zafa for the fukú of Yuniór's misplaced shame and guilt.

⁹⁷ Miss Lora's job as a teacher, the photos and stories of her travels, her attendance at Yuniór's high school and college graduation ceremonies, her insistence that he go to college and her offer to pay the admission fees, and her night classes at Montclair and her intent to earn a Ph.D. demonstrate that Miss Lora is a symbolic representative of educational success and ambition.

Part 2: Initiation, Confession, and Traumatic Masculinity in *Down These Mean Streets*

As I mention in Chapter 4, the *Oxford Companion to African American Literature* recognizes Piri Thomas and *DTMS* as part of the African American literary canon (Dudley 728). Recall that in Chapter 4, I discuss how Thomas developed an intense friendship with John Oliver Killens and joined the Harlem Writers Guild. It was in the HWG that Killens first shared early drafts of his novel, *Youngblood*. Thomas credits *Youngblood* as the book that inspired him to become a writer, the book that psychologically saved him when he was serving time in prison for armed robbery and attempted murder. Thomas discusses the seminal link between *Youngblood* and *DTMS* in a 1996 interview with Ilan Stavans. Thomas says a fellow inmate, an African American, let him borrow *Youngblood*. When Thomas finished reading the book he told his friend that it was "dynamite" (Thomas, "Race and Mercy" 350). That was the moment that Thomas "began to write what would one day be known as *Down These Mean Streets*. At that time, it was entitled *Home Sweet Harlem*." (350).

DTMS is a novelized memoir that deals with hypermasculinity and racial identity development in 1930s Spanish Harlem. As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, *DTMS* is one of the works that inspired Junot Díaz to become a writer. *Drown* and *DTMS* share formal and thematic features. Both are autobiographically based; both track the racial and sexual identity development of a young Latino protagonists; and both contain sexual traumas that either strengthen or rupture male friendships. Piri, the protagonist in *DTMS*, is more like Rafa than Yunior. Piri

and the members of his Latino street gang take special pride in sleeping with as many girls as they can. "It was all part of becoming *hombre*," says Piri, "of wanting to have a beard to shave, a driver's license, a draft card, a 'stoneness' which enabled you to go into a bar like a man" (Thomas, *Down These Mean Streets* 15–16). For thirteen-year old Piri, part of belonging to his gang, of proving his manhood, means having the capacity to not "punk out" no matter what the endeavor (56). One of those routine endeavors includes having group sex with gay men, whom the gang putatively intends to rob.

Piri recounts his initiation into the queer dimension of gang life in "If You Ain't Got Heart, You Ain't Got Nada," the sixth chapter of *DTMS*. The title of the chapter speaks to the idea that there is no place for cowardice in gang life no matter what the endeavor. One day on the stoop, the small talk with Piri's newfound gang brothers "turned way out, on faggots and their asses which, swinging from side to side, could make a girl look ridiculous, like she wasn't moving. There were some improbable stories of exploits with faggots" (54). Alfredo, one of the gang leaders, moves the discussion from past exploits to present action. He suggests that they go rob the gay men. When his proposal is met with silence, Alfredo shames the new recruits into participation by suggesting they are not man enough to follow through. Piri is terrified by the prospect of having to penetrate or receive a blow job from a gay man, but his desire to belong to his gang is greater than his fear of contaminating his manhood. Unable to avoid his initiation into this aspect of gang life, Piri employs a dissociative facial expression as the gang proceeds to its destination: "*Put cara palo on, like it don't move you*" (55). *Cara palo* literally means

stick face. It denotes the adoption of a wooden, blank, or neutral expression to conceal one's true emotions. Piri defines it as "deadpan" in the glossary of *DTMS* (339). The ability to summon and maintain a cara palo mask becomes one of the defining characteristics of gang masculinity, or, in Piri's words, being a "stud."

When Piri and his fellow gang members arrive at the destination, Alfredo introduces them to Antonia, Concha, and La Vieja. Antonia and Concha are in their twenties, but La Vieja is "thirty or forty" (56). As the music of jazz guitarist Charlie Christian plays in the background, Piri listens to the conversations going on around him. Antonia reveals how he was molested as a child by what seems like a relative or neighbor, and Concha recounts being raped by four boys (57). As time rolls on, Piri deadens himself with whiskey, smokes two huge joints, and passes out. He is awakened by Concha undoing his pants. Piri describes himself as being paralyzed and speechless as Concha starts to stroke him. Too weak and confused to stop Concha from performing fellatio on him, Piri is both "scared and pleased" by the sensation (61). However, he resists with his inner voice: "*I like broads, I like muchachas, I like girls, I chanted inside me*" (61). Incapacitated by the drugs and alcohol, Piri helplessly watches the orgy around him: "Antonia was blowin' Waneko and Indio at the same time. Alfredo was screwing La Vieaja" (61). After Concha is finished, Piri regains his senses and mobility. He takes another joint and goes to the rooftop to be alone. On the rooftop, Piri recounts that he had not liked what he had done, but that to belong to the gang one has to do whatever it takes "from the bottom of his heart" (62). As he looks over the roofs' edge, he imagines himself dropping bombs on the people below. The scene ends with him taking a

long walk to Central Park, where he imagines a day when he will be rich enough to buy it and make it his own segregated country in which he will erect signs that say, “Only People Like Me Allowed,” “Curb Your People,” and “No Bopping Allowed” (63).

Several of the thematic tropes in “If You Ain’t Got Heart, You Ain’t Got Nada” find their way into the universe of Yuniór de la Casa. First, both Piri and Yuniór share a profound sense of homosocial loyalty, devotion, and fidelity. The most obvious manifestation of this in *DTMS* is Piri’s queer encounter with Concha. Piri, like Yuniór, finds himself in a compromising position in which he has to choose between maintaining his heterosexual identity or losing fraternal camaraderie. Ironically, the gang’s shared homosexual experience confirms Piri’s intrepid masculinity and consolidates the gang’s heteronormative status as *activos*. As shown above, Díaz reverses this trope in *Drown*; homosexuality destabilizes the friendship between Yuniór and Beto primarily because Yuniór is unprepared for the first homosexual encounter and far more familiar and emotionally invested in Beto than Piri is with Concha, who is a complete stranger. Second, the four boys who rape Concha call to mind the gang of boys who threaten to rape Ysrael. Piri’s *cara palo* mask, a figure that is invoked whenever Piri is intimidated or needs to intimidate, antedates Díaz’s mask trope, which is employed in “Ysrael,” “No Face,” and *Oscar Wao*.

Third, the age disparity between Piri and Concha prefigures the age disparity between Yuniór and Miss Lora. Miss Lora, who is referred to as *la vieja*, recalls the character named *La Vieja* in *DTMS*, a character who is seventeen to twenty-seven years older than Piri. Fourth, Piri’s desperate incantation as Concha performs

fellatio on him predicts Díaz's zafa trope: recall how Piri ritually chants that he is attracted to women in order to ward off the fukú of homosexual contamination. Fifth, the conclusions of "Drown" and "If You Ain't Got Heart, You Ain't Got Nada" generate contrasting reactions to the myth of the American Dream of universal and inevitable social mobility. Yuniór's encounters with Beto deplete his sense of personal agency; Yuniór sees himself drowning and falling into a life sentence of ghetto poverty and cultural provincialism. In contrast, Piri's sense of agency is restored after successfully passing his initiation with Concha, restored in the form of a destructive and reactionary revenge fantasy. Thirteen-year-old Piri does not want to escape New York; he wants to bomb it, standardize appropriate zones and times for gang violence, and establish a form of social segregation based on Latino superiority. Sixth, Díaz revives Thomas' bomb motif in "Miss Lora." Yuniór sees himself as the potential victim of bombing rather than as a potential agent of bombing. Piri's oblique anxiety about the genesis of the nuclear war in World War II becomes Yuniór's compulsive anxiety about the potential for a Cold War nuclear holocaust. In both cases, the bomb motif accentuates how U.S. youth conflate conflicts in their domestic lives with U.S. conflicts in the international arena.

The conflation of homosocial camaraderie, sexual trauma, and fraternal silence is also present in Piri's relationship with Brew. As discussed in the third chapter of this study, Piri and Brew join the Merchant Marine in order to visit the South, where Piri can test his theory of Afro-Latino exceptionalism under the yoke of Jim Crow segregation. However, before Piri and Brew go on their quest, Piri learns about the sexual trauma and fear of racial terror that caused Brew to flee the

South in the first place. Piri reveals the origin of Brew's migration story in Chapter 17 "Gonna Find Out What's Shakin'." The scene opens with Piri listening to Brew and Alayce argue about racial pride and whether being a non-English speaking black immigrant in the U.S. is socially better than being, in Alayce's words, "a li'l ole darkie." "It's hard to be just plain black," says Alayce, and "It's harder bein' a black woman" (159). Brew ignores Alayce's feminist critique and rejects her internalized racism. He tells her that she is "supposed to be proud of being a Negro" and says that her fatalism is exactly what the system of racial oppression depends on to perpetuate itself (160). Alayce publically shames Brew by reminding him that his discourse of Negro pride is inconsistent with the emasculating Sambo submissiveness his mother taught him and to which he routinely resorted when he lived in Alabama. Wounded, Brew smacks Alayce, sending her "sliding across the room on her ass" (160). Her accusation of sycophancy prompts Brew to break the silence around the incident that caused him to reject the servile racial etiquette of the South and migrate North from Alabama.

When he "was about sixteen yeahs old," Brew was walking alone down a back road when two white boys stopped him, rubbed his head, asked him if he was "one of them good nigras," and requested to have sex with him (160-61). Brew assumes a cara palo mask as he narrates the story: "He was like one of those statues in Central Park. Only tears running down his cheeks made him real" (161). Alayce is similarly affected as she listens to Brew's confession: "There wasn't any expression on her face. She just kept her eyes on Brew" (161). Brew is able to fend the boys off by kicking the one named John in the testicles and choking the other boy

until he faints. Once the tables are turned, Brew bashes John's teeth out with a rock because John refuses to say, "A black man's better'n a white man" and calls Brew a "goddamn nigger" (162). Brew's victory has a price. Fearing that he will be lynched, Brew's family members immediately drive him across the state line and put him on a train to New York. Brew's confession about his sexual trauma prompts Alayce to reveal the numerous times white boys attempted to rape her "like she was one big free-for-all pussy" and "the one time they finally did" (163). Having both confessed their sexual traumas, Brew and Alayce reconcile, Brew saying, "there ain't nothin' so bad can happen that'll make one ashamed of what they is, if they's proud enough" (163). Piri is so moved by the mutual forgiveness that it alters his initial view of the portrait of Christ hanging on Brew's wall. The dusty portrait shows, in Piri's words, a "paddy"⁹⁸ Christ "kneeling with his hands clasped together and looking up at the sky with a hangdog look" (160). When Piri first entered the apartment, he viewed the picture with suspicion and blew smoke at it, but in the light of Brew and Alayce's redemption, he says, "I dug Christ's picture" (163). The scene ends with Piri asking Brew if he thinks Christ was "prejudiced," to which Brew, in an essentialist line of thinking, replies, "He was white, wasn't he" (163).

There are notable formal and thematic parallels between the Piri/Brew and Yunior/Beto relationships. For example, age disparity is a trope shared by both relationships. Brew is five years older than Piri, and Beto is a year older than Yunior. Brew and Beto are both more worldly than Piri and Yunior, and both abandon their younger best friends. Brew, as we have seen in the third chapter of

⁹⁸ A derogatory term for Caucasians.

this study, abandons Piri in Galveston, TX. Piri has to continue his racial identity formation on his own and master Southern racial etiquette by himself. Yuniór is left in Parlin, NJ to struggle with his destabilized sexual identity. Díaz takes the Christ motif associated with the portrait of Christ in Brew's apartment and revises it in "Drown." Beto wears a cross when he holds Yuniór beneath the water at the pool, an act that calls to mind baptism, as Springer points out in her article (122-123). "Drown" also contains an allusion to the miracle of Jesus walking on water; Díaz uses the metaphor to paint an image of how low the Raritan River can sometimes be (102). Of course, the most important of the shared themes in *Drown* and *DTMS* focus on the fusion of machismo and homosexual desire. Junot Díaz pays homage to *DTMS* by reworking Thomas' tropes of homoerotic desire and homosocial camaraderie in the relationship between Yuniór and Beto. Thomas' homosexual orgy scene predicts Beto and Yuniór and Beto's routine of watching pornography together; the Piri/Concha encounter forecasts the Yuniór/Beto encounters; Piri and Brew's fear of voluntary and forced homosexual emasculation anticipates Yuniór's fear of homosexual contact with Beto, and Piri's fraught fidelity to his gang foresees Yuniór's conflicted loyalty to Beto. These parallelisms, I argue, are hardly coincidental. *DTMS* opened Díaz's mind to "the power of words" and produced the fruitful intertexts in *Drown* and *This Is* (Díaz, "Fiction Is the Poor Man's Cinema: An Interview with Junot Díaz" 900). What Díaz may not have realized is that the themes of camaraderie, homoerotic desire, sexual violation, and racial identity and masculinity formation in *DTMS* were inspired by an African American novel about 1930s racial segregation in the South.

Part 3: Unspeakable Desire and Racial Terror in *Youngblood*

The Piri/Brew relationship has productive, coincidental intertextual correspondences with the Oscar Jefferson/Jim Kilgrow relationship in John Oliver Killen's novel *Youngblood*. *Youngblood* is set in the fictional town of Crossroads, GA. The events in the novel take place between 1900 and 1930, during one of the worst periods of Jim Crow segregation and racial terror in U.S. history. Oscar Jefferson is a secondary character and Jim Kilgrow a tertiary character in *Youngblood*, but they play crucial roles in advancing the plot, developing the characters, and articulating the novel's moral theme and narrative ethics. Oscar is a Caucasian character in the novel who, as an adult, is interested in forming in an interracial labor union with his fellow African American workers. He also is willing to break a cultural taboo and donate his blood to save an African American man's life (460). Oscar's solidarity with African Americans is explained by his interracial, star-crossed backstory.

As a child, Oscar's best friend was Jim Kilgrow,⁹⁹ an African American boy who lived in the "colored quarters" of Crossroads, aka the "Bottom" (234 & 238).¹⁰⁰ Oscar's family, as "poor white trash," was not much better off than the Kilgrows, who were known for being "sassy" and for their willingness to defend themselves from racial terror with armed resistance (232). John Jefferson, Oscar's father, is a murderous racist who has killed blacks for being "sassy" (236). John detests Oscar's

⁹⁹ Note how the character's name signifies on the concept of Jim Crow.

¹⁰⁰ There are three African American neighborhoods in *Youngblood*. The Bottoms is also known as the Quarters. It is where the poor, African American manual laborers live. The working-class folk live in Pleasant Grove, and the professional and entrepreneurial class work in Monroe Terrace.

friendship with Jim and forbids the two from playing together. Oscar, however, is endeared to Jim, who, like a loving parent, taught him how to swim and hunt (232).

When Oscar was fourteen, he developed a sexual attraction to Jim:

They had been swimming and were lying on the bank letting the sunshine soak into their [naked] bodies [Oscar's] eyes observed the death-like paleness of his body soaked almost colorless by the water, drained of its redness. He was a white man. He turned sideways and his nervous eyes took in Jim's long chocolate-colored body, traveling all over Jim from head to foot, marveling involuntarily at the various shades of darkness in Jim's smooth skin; observing also the secret places where the short black hair was beginning to grow.

(230-231)

Relaxing on the banks of the creek, Oscar and Jim engage in small talk. The conversation unexpectedly turns to the topic of Oscar's racist father, whom Jim calls a "fool": "If sense was dynamite, he wouldn't have enough to blow up his little pecker" (231). Galled at Jim having the audacity to disrespect a white man's intelligence, Oscar feels that he has to put Jim "in his place" (231). Oscar threatens to "kick the shit out of" Jim. Nonplussed, Jim continues to humiliate and intimidate Oscar with his mastery of the dozens: "You raise your foot to kick me, they be calling you Peg Leg Jefferson to the last day you live Break your damn foot off up to your pussy" (231). Unable to bear Jim's continued taunts of "Peg Leg Jefferson," Oscar leaps "upon Jim's long lanky naked body. . . . He was a-straddle Jim's chest bumping Jim's head against the ground. 'You goddamn sassy-ass nigger'" (232). Jim

throws Oscar in the river twice. Jim's dominance arouses Oscar: "He felt strong as a bull as he wrestled with Jim, their hot sweaty naked bodies up against one another" (232). After repeated rounds of throwing Oscar in the creek and wrestling him on the bank, Jim prevails: "Jim had [Oscar] down on the ground now, and they were breathing hard and grasping for breath" (232). The fight scene pantomimes sexual intercourse and Freytag's pyramid. Killens uses the homoerotic fight scene to dramatize his double entendre of the term "nigger lover," a label which young Oscar does not yet embrace (231).

As mentioned above, Oscar's father, John, had prohibited Oscar from hanging out with Jim in the Bottom. That night at dinner, John overhears Oscar telling his mother that he went swimming with Jim. Incensed that Oscar disobeyed him, John takes off his belt, beats Oscar unmercifully, and then turns to shoot him. Oscar flees to the Kilgrew's home. They take him in, nurse his wounds, and feed him. He spends the night sleeping next to Jim on the floor. Oscar can't sleep: "he lay there in the black cool noiseless night on the floor near Little Jim's long lanky body" (236). Jim wakes up and they talk. Oscar tries to express his gratitude. It will be thanks enough, says Jim, if Oscar would refuse to use the word "nigger" and if he would take some prohibitive action when whites got it in their mind to resort to racial terror: "Don't never stand around with your hand in your pocket when they throw a lynching party. In other words, be a human being stead of a no-good ignorant cracker" (237). The conversation foreshadows what is to come.

Time passes and one day Oscar's mother, Martha, is raped by Charlie Wilcox, her husband's boss and the owner of Wilcox Farms, the land on which the

Jefferson's live. Wilcox leaves Martha in the woods where she is discovered by Jim Kilgrew. Jim carries her back to her home and runs away when John tries to attack him. Martha tells John that Jim saved her and that Wilcox was the culprit. John, however, chooses to believe that Jim raped her and he proceeds to develop a posse to go catch and lynch Jim. Martha sends Oscar to warn the Kilgrows (245).

Afterwards, the white men of her community psychologically torture Martha for hours to elicit the false confession that Jim raped her (247-250). Thanks to Martha's intervention, Jim eludes the mob, but his family suffers the retribution of the white posse. The next night, the mob burns their house. As the Kilgrows try to flee the flames, the posse shoots each one of them dead. Sickened at the news, Oscar walks out into the night and leaves Wilcox Farms, turning his back on its people and its values.

Conclusion

The Oscar Jefferson/Jim Kilgrew relationship can be seen as the ancestral intertext of the Piri/Brew relationship. Both friendships are challenged by ethnoracial differences, differences which are articulated in the characters' discussions about lynching and racial subordination. Another point of commonality in these relationships is that the bodies of Jim and Brew are desired by white men for both sexual consumption and corporal punishment,¹⁰¹ bringing us back to Junot Díaz's concept of fukú as a metaphor for the rapaciousness and violence of white

¹⁰¹ For a discussion of miscegenation and sexual desire as consumption in *Youngblood*, see Thompson.

supremacy. These couplings are also linked by the trope of abandonment and the vanishing Other. For example, Jim is the only Kilgrew to survive the massacre that destroys his family. We can imagine that Jim Kilgrew escapes to the North, much like Brew does in *DTMS*. Given Thomas' admiration for the novel *Youngblood* and his intense friendship with John Oliver Killens, it is likely that he wrote Brew as the person Jim Kilgrew became when he fled Georgia. However, we know from Thomas' interview with Dorothee von Huene Greenberg that Brew is a composite character based on up to four of Piri Thomas' actual friends, one being the actual Brew and another being Isaac Nasario, a Puerto Rican who seems to have been a fellow congregant in Thomas' Seven Day Adventist church (Thomas, "Piri Thomas" 83–84). Thomas's choice to mask a Latino as an African American male from the South amounts to a kind of literary minstrelsy when one takes into account the pejorative way in which Brew's Southern/"black" dialect is rendered in the novel as both ethno-regional authenticity and comic relief.

Parallels can also be drawn between *Youngblood*, *Drown*, and *Oscar Wao*. An obvious parallel is the coincidence of Oscar Jefferson and Oscar De León sharing not only the same first name but also the fact that both of their mothers were raped.¹⁰² Oscar's intergenerational rape trauma is linked to his diffidence regarding women and while Oscar Jefferson's is linked to his progressive ideas regarding racial integration and interracial homosexuality. A thematic trace of Oscar Jefferson can also be found in Beto, given that both characters are marked by their sexual desire

¹⁰² I argue that this is a coincidence because my review of literature, particularly Junot Díaz's several interviews, does not yet reveal that he ever read any of Killens' novels or that he was even aware of Killens.

for their male best friends, desires which, in both cases, are associated with swimming and wrestling. In the opening of "Drown," Yuniors reminisces about the good times he and Beto shared at the pool: "We lunged from the boards and swam out of the deep end, wrestling and farting around" (92). Also, both Oscar Jefferson and Beto are more socially mobile than Jim Kilgrew and Yuniors de Las Casas, the friends they leave behind. Oscar's social mobility is a consequence of his whiteness and white privilege while Beto's social mobility is a consequence of his academic prowess.

Incidentally, a parallel can also be drawn between Yuniors and Beto's queer encounters and Evelio Grillo's relationship with Bill Daley in Washington, D.C., given that both involve the intersection of public recreation and the homoerotic. In Chap. 10 "Washington, D.C." of *BCBA*, Grillo describes the exhilarating sense of freedom he experienced by leaving Tampa. There were no segregated buses or libraries and he could swim in the pools and play in the parks and courts managed by the Recreation and Parks Department. In D.C., there were no "fetters"; he was "free to be unambiguously black." Sexual freedom also seems to be one of the benefits of Grillo's emancipatory migration. For example, within the same section that Grillo describes his social freedoms, he also describes how Bill Daley initiated him into the world of classical music and orchestra:

Among the most spectacular events I could attend were the Watergate Concerts presented by the National Symphony Orchestra. I did not know much about classical music, and I had never seen or heard an orchestra in person. Bill Daley, a young man who took a liking to me,

introduced me to this wonderland of great music. Moonlight, water, the Lincoln Memorial lighted so gracefully, the reflecting pool capturing bits of the scene, the endless expanses of freshly mown grass, and the balmy Washington summer nights, all wrapped us in surges of joy. Thrills coursed through me in ceaseless waves as all of my senses absorbed the beauty of so many combined, harmonious elements. I never saw Bill Daley again after I finished high school, but I have never forgotten him or his sensitivity. (ch. 10 Washington, D.C.)

The scene, like the one between Oscar and Jim, is romantically and erotically charged. Grillo offers his encounter with Daley as an example of the many types of freedoms he experiences in D.C. Most significantly, the figurative language that Grillo uses to evaluate the city and its pleasures unambiguously queers his experience with Daley: “for one who had spent the first fifteen years of life in the ghetto in dismal Tampa, Washington was every bit a fairyland!” (ch. 10 Washington, D.C.).

The theme of abandonment runs parallel to the unifying themes of silence, trauma, and enlightenment in *Youngblood*, *Down These Mean Streets*, *Drown*, and *Oscar Wao*. In *Youngblood*, Jim Kilgrew abandons Oscar Jefferson; in *Down These Mean Streets*, Brew abandons Piri; and in *Drown*, Beto abandons Yuniur. In each case, the more racially or sexually adept character abandons the neophyte. These abandoned apprentices maintain silence around their homoerotic traumas and/or desires (Oscar Jefferson, Piri, and Yuniur), but they are also the same characters

who experience the greatest amount of moral transformation and ethical self-awareness. It is in this way that a genealogical fukú of sexual trauma and silence is transformed into a zafa of narrative ethics and progressive racial and sexual politics in *Youngblood*, *Down These Mean Streets*, *Drown*, *Oscar Wao*, and *This Is How You Lose Her*.

CHAPTER 7

SPECTRAL NATIVES AND “the ambiguous mix”: TROPICAL MYSTICISM FIVE PERCENTER THEOSOPHY, AND GENETIC PROFILING IN RAQUEL CEPEDA’S *BIRD OF PARADISE: HOW I BECAME LATINA*

Perhaps he felt something spectral, like we do back home in New York City, throughout the Caribbean, and in South America. Maybe what he saw was the shadow of the *africana* I often dreamt about as a child, or one of my spiritual guides walking with me.

--Raquel Cepeda, *Bird of Paradise*, Chap. 11 Truth, Reconciliation, and Time Machines

Introduction

The journalist, editor, filmmaker, and activist Raquel Cepeda first gained national literary acclaim for her anthology *And It Don't Stop: The Best American Hip-Hop Journalism of the Last 25 Years* (2004). Cepeda followed that literary success with a documentary film--*Bling: A Planet Rock: Blood, Diamonds, and Hip-Hop* (2007). Her most recent publication is *Bird of Paradise: How I Became Latina* (2013),¹⁰³ a hybrid text that is part bildung memoir, cultural history, ethnography, sociological study, speculative narrative, and genealogical suspense tale. Cepeda, an American writer of Dominican descent, is often perceived as racially ambiguous. The mitochondrial DNA evidence on Cepeda's maternal side suggests that her ancient maternal ancestor originated from the region in sub-Saharan Africa currently known as Guinea-Bissau. Cepeda syncretizes this ancient ancestor with *la africana*, one of two spirit guides that has appeared to her since childhood. On

¹⁰³ Subsequently referred to as *BOP*.

Cepeda's paternal side, the DNA evidence suggests that her father's paternal grandfather is likely descended from either the Amazigh (Berbers) of North Africa or "Neolithic farmers who migrated west to Northern Africa from Iraq until they reached Spain" (161). The maternal ancestry of Cepeda's father's paternal grandmother points to Central Africa. However, she has a "direct maternal ancestry that points to pre-Columbian *indios*" of Hispanola (227). Cepeda equates this ancient ancestor with *la india*, the second of the two spirit guides that she believes has watched over her all of her life. In *BOP*, Cepeda's faith in spirit guides and ancestor veneration is comingled with her exposure to the ethnopoetics of the Five-Percent Nation, her reverence for Santería, and her belief in the concepts of kismet and gilgul neshamot.

BOP calls attention to several common tropes in contemporary Afro-Latino bildung narratives: academic socialization, Africana denial and shaming, ethnic ancestry, blanqueamiento, cultural hybridity, intertextuality, leyenda negra, personal sacrifice, magical realism, racial passing/ambiguity, reconciliation, and the politics of affinity, geography, identity, indigeneity, mobility, and representation. However, mysticism, spirituality, Pan-Africanism, music, and genetic genealogy are unique themes and organizing topoi in *BOP*. In particular, *BOP* raises interesting questions about the role of Afroethnicity, latinidad, hip-hop, panethnic nationalism, attachment disorder, and imaginary friends in the psychological development of the Afro-Latino bildungsheld. *BOP* also implores us to explore Cepeda's hegemonic and

subversive employment of self-tropicalization, masculine normativity, positivism, brand identity, and cross-promotional marketing.

In this chapter, I consider the (1) relationship between hip-hop as sorrow songs and Cepeda's ethnoracial apprenticeship, (2) the relationship between Orientalism, the discourse of tropical mysticism, and the mythopoetics of the Five-Percent Nation, and (3) the corporate relationship between Cepeda and Family Tree DNA. Regarding the latter relationship, I consider whether corporate entanglement compromises or tarnishes the moral integrity of the memoir, the company, or both. Exploring African American intertexts and intercultural influences and exchanges in *BOP* helps answer these questions. To date, no scholarly study examines the relationship between hip-hop, ethnoracial identity formation, the discourse of mysticism, and the cultural impact of genetic genealogy in *BOP*. This chapter examines the family dynamics, personal temperaments, social institutions, and cultural movements that contribute to the construction and maintenance of that relationship and reveals new insights about the structural and thematic eclecticism of *BOP*.

Fukú, Ethnogenesis, and the Psychological Development of the Bildungsheld

Raquel Cepeda was born in Harlem in 1973, and transnationally raised in the Inwood neighborhood of Upper Manhattan, the Mission District of San Francisco, and the Parasío neighborhood of Santo Domingo in the Dominican Republic. Her parents, Roció and Eduardo, were Dominican immigrants. Roció, Cepeda's mother, met Eduardo when she was fifteen. Eduardo was twenty-seven at the time and

visiting Santo Domingo, from New York, to perform on a television variety show as *El Cantante Enmascarado*, a masked bolero singer. Eduardo's sister Perla was a friend of Paloma, Roció's older sister. When Paloma learned that Eduardo would be home, she convinced Roció to come with her to Perla's part of the neighborhood in hopes of seeing Eduardo, the local celebrity, in passing. Roció caught more than a peek of Eduardo; she was introduced to him, became smitten, and started a secret relationship: "Theirs was an intense, mostly long-distance affair consisting of stolen moments after gigs in Santo Domingo and letters that definitely would have been plagiarized by Shakespeare himself had the man laid eyes on each scalding word" (ch. 1 "Love, American Style"). The couple soon marries and Roció moves to New York with Eduardo in 1972, when she is fifteen or sixteen years old.

In New York, Roció comes to believe that her pregnancy is marked by a prenatal "omen." The source of the prenatal curse is a "Hindu woman" who embodies the trope of the bad mother and the Orientalist stereotype of the exotically evil and mystical East Indian. A few months before Cepeda is born, Roció witnesses a Hindu couple having a domestic squabble in front of the apartment building across the street. The toddler who is with them is a boy who seems to be about two years old. He is full of tears as the couple argues. It is not clear what the relationship between the man, woman, and child is, but the assumption is that they are a nuclear family. Eduardo asks Roció to come away from their apartment window and ignore the dispute. Roció insists that Eduardo call the police because she feels something bad is going to happen, but he refuses. The fight stops when the Hindu woman disappears with the toddler into the apartment building. The drama,

however, is not over. Roció notices the Hindu man looking up. The woman and the toddler are on the roof of the apartment building. Roció believes that the woman is going to commit suicide, but she witnesses something more horrid instead—maternal filicide:

The Hindu man doesn't yell. Doesn't move. The woman picks up the boy, now silent, over her head and tosses him off the roof.

The boy's father doesn't move.

Roció, a sheltered teenager from Santo Domingo, hasn't witnessed this kind of violence before, not even during the civil war in 1965. She becomes distraught, wailing for the child who has been reduced to pieces of skin, brain tissue, and all kinds of unrecognizable matter splattered on the ground and on his father.

Roció looks at me through her protruding belly. She believes in omens. (ch. 2 "Mean Streets")

Cepeda characterizes this maternal filicide as an "omen," signaling to readers that she believes that cosmic determinism governs and gives meaning and purpose to events in her life. The scene invites readers to interpret the traumatic first seven years of Cepeda's life (and beyond) as a consequence of this prenatal, Orientalist curse.

Starting when she is six months old, Cepeda's parents routinely dispatch her to the Dominican Republic to live with her maternal grandparents, Don Manuel and Doña Dolores, in Paraíso, an upper-class neighborhood in the capital city of Santo Domingo. Cepeda's failure to attach to her parents emanates from her erratic and

transnational caregiving situation. Paraíso becomes the place where Cepeda finds the consistent protection, safety, and security necessary for a healthy child/caregiver bond. In addition, she receives the unique brand of love and affection that only grandparents and extended families can provide. New York becomes a place Cepeda identifies with parental neglect and abuse, a place where she feels “invisible.” New York is a place where Cepeda’s agency is diminished and her identity erased. As a result of the constant transnational shuffle back and forth between Inwood and Paraíso, Cepeda fails to make healthy emotional attachments and nurturing bonds with her biological parents in her first seven years: “I call Roció “Mami,” even though I’m not sure she’s mine or that I’m hers. There’s no real bond. I haven’t spent much time with her or Eduardo. I call him “Papi,” though I don’t remember a single instant between him and Mami that illustrates their connection or where I fit in” (ch. 2 “Mean Streets”). By the time Cepeda is five, Roció and Eduardo divorce, exacerbating the emotional and physical distance between Cepeda and her father. I argue that the erratic caregiving Cepeda experiences during her first seven years result in a classic case of disinhibited attachment disorder that subsequently presents as a series of dysfunctional romantic relationships, dysfunctional relationships which Cepeda attributes to a supernatural fukú rather than to sociological pathology. It is important to critically and clinically define attachment disorder before using it as an analytical lens to further examine the particulars of Cepeda’s childhood and her romantic relationships.

To understand the clinical diagnosis of attachment disorder, one must first understand the basic terms and concepts of attachment theory. According to Vivien

Prior and Danya Glaser, the concept of attachment is “not synonymous with love or affection.”¹⁰⁴ Attachment theory is an evolutionary theory that stresses that attachment is primarily about caregiving, about the attachment figure’s capacity to provide physical and material “safety, security, and protection” to an infant or child. Attachment disorder, it is important to note, emanates from the omission of caregiving or the absence of a consistent caregiver rather than the commission of physical and/or psychological abuse.¹⁰⁵ Generally speaking, attachment disorder

¹⁰⁴ Prior and Glaser’s complete definition is instructive because it contains important nuances and distinctions between attachment as it presents in adult/adult relationships and attachment as it presents in adult/child relationships, nuances that tend to be absent, ill-defined, or distorted in the popular imagination:

“According to attachment theory, an attachment is a bond or tie between an individual and an attachment figure. In adult relationships, people may be mutual and reciprocal attachment figures, but in the relationship between the child and parent, this is not the case. The reason for this clear distinction is inherent in the theory. In attachment theory, an attachment is a tie based on the need for safety, security, and protection. This need is paramount in infancy and childhood, when the developing individual is immature and vulnerable. Thus, infants *instinctively* attach to their carer(s). In this sense, attachment serves the specific biological function of promoting protection, survival and, ultimately, genetic replication. In the relationship between the child and parent, the term ‘attachment’ applies to the infant or child and the term ‘attachment figure’ invariably refers to their primary carer. In the terms of attachment theory, it is incorrect to refer to a parent’s attachment to their child or attachment *between* parents and children.

Attachment, therefore, is *not* synonymous with love or affection; it is not an overall descriptor of the relationship between the parent and child which includes other parent-child interactions such as feeding, stimulation, play or problem solving.

The attachment figure’s equivalent tie to the child is termed the ‘caregiving bond’ (15).

¹⁰⁵ Prior and Glaser write: “While abuse can occur alongside serious neglect or changes of caregiver, abuse on its own would be insufficient to explain attachment disorder. Abuse is associated with a developed, albeit disorganized, attachment. It is therefore safer to assume that it is absence-omission which is implicated as the pre-condition for attachment disorders. This can occur in three caregiving contexts: (1) (some) institutions, (2) repeated changes of primary caregiver and (3) extremely neglectful identifiable primary caregivers who show persistent disregard for the child’s basic attachment needs” (218).

can take two forms: inhibited and disinhibited. The international classification of these two forms of attachment disorder is not uniform. The ICD-10, published by the World Health Organization, recognizes two distinct types of attachment disorder: Disinhibited Attachment Disorder (DAD) and Reactive Attachment Disorder (RAD). The DSM-IV-TR, published by the American Psychiatric Association, singularly classifies and defines attachment disorder as RAD, a condition that may express itself in two distinct modalities: inhibited or disinhibited. The chief symptom of disinhibited attachment disorder includes indiscriminate attachment to strangers. Disinhibited attachment disorder is characterized by excessive friendliness and diffuse familiarity with strangers. Disinhibited children show a lack of selectivity and specificity in choosing attachment figures. Because of their history of missing or variable caregivers and/or caregiving, disinhibited children cling to whoever is available (Prior and Glaser 221). The symptoms of inhibited attachment disorder include social withdrawal and emotional reticence and constriction. These children have “difficulties in emotional self-regulation” and “[t]hey do not seek and accept comfort in times of threat, alarm, or distress” (Prior and Glaser 222). Prior and Glaser stress that inhibited and disinhibited attachment disorder are differential but not oppositional concepts. Therefore, they can coexist within the same child. Furthermore, inhibited attachment disorder is situational while “disinhibited attachment disorder appears to be enduring” (220–221).

Cepeda’s confession of her “less than ideal choices in men,” I argue, is a manifestation of enduring disinhibited attachment disorder (ch. 2 “Running the

Fukú Down”). Starting in their teens, both Cepeda and her mother become entangled in a series of dysfunctional romantic relationships. Cepeda’s failure to attach to Roció, mirrors Roció’s failure to attach to her own mother, Doña Dolores. Cepeda and Roció’s lack of discrimination in men is an indicator of the disinhibited attachment disorder that affected their childhoods. Cepeda, however, ultimately interprets their poor choices to a supernatural, matrilineal fukú that stretches across centuries and possibly back to Africa. Examining the dysfunctional particulars of Cepeda’s childhood after her parents divorce strengthens the case for reading *BOP* through the lens of disinhibited attachment disorder.

After Roció and Eduardo divorce, Roció meets Pascal Baptiste, a Haitian social worker with degrees from Yale and Harvard who is a “dandy” and competitive disco dancer. Pascal becomes the first in a series of abusive and deleterious men with whom Roció chooses to share her life and have children. Roció is twenty-one and Cepeda is five when Pascal enters their lives. Within a year, Pascal moves Roció and Cepeda to San Francisco, where Pascal takes a job at a hospital and opens a small business called The Smokehouse, which sells “tobacco, incense, and San Francisco souvenirs” (ch. 3 “Journey into the Heart of Darkness”). Roció and Pascal entertain themselves by entering disco dance competitions. Not long after moving to San Francisco, they have a baby, Giselle, who is six years younger than Cepeda. San Francisco, however, is no paradise. Cepeda describes the horrific two years she spends with Pascal in Chapter 3 Journey into the Heart of Darkness. Cepeda uses the allusion to Joseph Conrad’s stereotypes of African primitivism and savagery to suggest that Pascal’s savagery is attributable to his “darker skin,” which, in turn,

Cepeda tells us, is read by Dominicans as an exclusive marker of Haitian ethnonationality.

Pascal, a jealous and violent lover, routinely beats Roció. Pascal's domestic abuse is not limited to Roció. In singular incidents, he punishes Cepeda by denying her food and by swinging her around by her ankles and punching her in the stomach. Cepeda also witnesses Pascal's brother Jean physically degrade a naked and battered woman by forcing her face into a pool of his own urine. Pascal and Jean's abuse lead seven-year-old Cepeda to accept the racist and reductive Dominican belief that Haitians are "more evil" because of their "darker skin" (ch. 3 "Journey into the Heart of Darkness"). During one of Roció's beatings, Cepeda hides in the bathroom and prays to *la india*: "I first saw her, a tall handsome woman with long black hair, sitting at the edge of my bed weeks before we left Seaman Avenue. She told me she belonged to me and promised to appear whenever I was scared or in danger" (ch. 3 "Journey into the Heart of Darkness").

Cepeda uses this scene to introduce readers to the concept of spirit guides, the spectral natives whom she believes watch over her in times of physical and emotional adversity. Notice that the initial appearance of *la india* coincides with one of the first major emotional crises in Cepeda's life—her parents' divorce and her mother's decision to relocate to the West Coast with Pascal. The Seaman Avenue reference is an allusion to Inwood, Cepeda's original home in Upper Manhattan. The reference to Inwood represents Cepeda's impending sense of dislocation and displacement. Notice that *la india* does not appear to Cepeda in a dream, she appears to Cepeda while Cepeda is fully conscious. This suggests that *la india* is akin

to a childhood imaginary friend. According to the ISSD Task Force on Children and Adolescents, having a childhood imaginary friend can be one of the many symptomatic responses of children who manifest “impaired parent-child attachment patterns,” patterns that originate from a history of parental neglect; however, the taskforce is careful to point out that “[t]here is no consensus yet on the exact etiological pathway for the development of dissociative symptomatology” (123). Cepeda’s spirit guide, *la india*, would not be considered pathological, according to the task force, because Cepeda does not blame the imagined friend for her own behavior and choices. In short, *la india* is a coping-mechanism that helps Cepeda psychologically deal with the caregiving deficits in her environment. The spectral native *la india* becomes an idealized surrogate mother, she compensates for the parental short-comings of Roció and serves as a thematic counterpart to the “evil” East Indian mother whose filicide cursed Cepeda in utero. The East Indian woman mythopoetically evokes images of the Hindu goddess Kali, the divine mother-figure associated with, among many things, death and destruction. Cepeda dialogically brings the Orientalist trope of the exotic and mystical East Indian into the contact zones of the U.S. trope of the noble savage and the Caribbean trope of the vanished Indian (i.e. the Taínos, Caribs, and Arawaks). By doing so, Cepeda taps into an ongoing contentious debate about Taino extinction and survival.

As L. Antonio Curet rightly points out in his historical review of the Taíno extinction/survival debate, the contemporary Taíno revival movement is an expression of cultural nationalism rather than political nationalism, however, some Neo-Taino groups have territorial aspirations that are consistent with the concept of

political nationalism (212 and 214). The indigenous identity movement, notes Haslip-Viera, began in the 1840s during the Cuban and Puerto Rican independence movements. Pro-independence advocates used the concept of indigenous heritage to politically and racially distinguish themselves from “the Spanish authorities and their creole loyalists” (“The Taíno Identity Movement Among Caribbean Latinas/Os in the United States” 418). Curet concurs that nationalists appropriated the discourse and imagery of indigeneity as symbols of their independence movements: “Indians came to be viewed as the first Puerto Ricans that resisted Spanish empire or as victims of the abuses and brutality of colonization” (210). Dominican nationalists adopted this racialist strategy in their efforts to separate themselves from Haiti (“The Taíno Identity Movement Among Caribbean Latinas/Os in the United States” 418).

Similarly, political and socioeconomic forces motivate the contemporary Taíno identity movement which “originated during the period of radical politics and cultural awakening that emerged at the end of the 1960s” (“The Taíno Identity Movement Among Caribbean Latinas/Os in the United States” 418). The economic and social subordination of many Latinos, particularly during the period between the 1960s to the 1990s, drove many of them to form or join “various political, religious, and cultural organizations in an often desperate attempt to preserve whatever status or dignity they had in US society” (“The Taíno Identity Movement Among Caribbean Latinas/Os in the United States” 417). Many of these cultural organizations were Neo-Taíno groups.

Haslip-Viera scoffs at the “trifling amount” of Taíno mtDNA that “a significant proportion of Caribbean Latinas/os” probably have. He fears that romanticized Taíno over-identification constitutes a form of African and European denial: “As most of us know, historical evidence has shown that Caribbean Latinas/os are mostly of African and European origin” (“The Taíno Identity Movement Among Caribbean Latinas/Os in the United States” 419). He is particularly concerned about the “black denial” aspect: “Historically, the Taíno and the indigenous have been used in the Spanish-speaking Caribbean to marginalize or denigrate Africans and their cultural contributions” (“Amerindian mtDNA Does Not Matter” 232–233). The hypo-descent exaggeration of Taíno ancestry also reifies the trope of the noble savage because it “identifies Amerindians as a kind of desirable ‘model minority’ because of their alleged closeness or sensitivity to the land, the environment, and preferred cultural and social values” (“The Taíno Identity Movement Among Caribbean Latinas/Os in the United States” 419). Christina González, however, believes that the ecological facet of the noble savage trope can be positively exploited for the benefit of Hispanic Caribbean nations and peoples. She addresses this, and other aspects of the Taino identity movement.

In her article “A Piece not the Puzzle,” González explores the intersection of Latino identity formation and genetic genealogy, surveying the benefits and limitations of the science and the sociology that informs it. Firstly, González notes that the confluence of the Taino identity movement and genetic genealogy has had a large and rapid social impact on the U.S. Census. Between 2000 and 2010, the number of Puerto Ricans who self-identified as either wholly or partly Native

American increased by almost 50% (14). She goes on to say, genetic genealogy may undermine the claim of Taino identity of some Latinos: “For one, tests oriented around mtDNA or Y-chromosome lines can only account for less than 1-2% of a person’s entire genetic lineage. Thus, a Puerto Rican who identifies as being of *indio* or Taíno descent may still not exhibit “Taíno DNA” in a mtDNA or Y-chromosome test, even though s/he might possess DNA derived from an *indio*/Taíno ancestor” (15). Secondly, González points out that genetic testing does not guarantee biogeographical certainty. For example, the haplogroups from which Caribbean “Taino DNA” is surmised “are also found in other populations throughout the world, albeit in smaller numbers” (16). This reveals an important, but overlooked factor in the application of genetic genealogy: genetic concepts and categories must first be ethno-racialized before one uses them to define and classify “racial markers in our genomes” (González 16).

In other words, empirically derived genetic data does not empirically reveal race. Rather, the non-empirical social construct of race influences the terms, methods, and interpretations of genetic testing. González even thinks that the “decolonizing and (re-)indigenization politics” of the Taino identity movement have the potential to inspire Puerto Rican islanders to become more socio-economically and socio-ecologically self-reliant, minimizing, if not breaking, their dependency on the U.S., industrialization, and global markets (González 16). The image of the Taino as an icon for socio-ecological stewardship is another manifestation of the noble savage trope. Like the nationalists of the nineteenth-century, González calls for the appropriation of Taino identity in the service of political nationalism. Given the

dynamic presence of the Taino identity movement among Latinos in the U.S., it is not surprising that one finds such a robust expression of Taino survival in Cepeda's memoir.

Cepeda's juxtaposition of *la india* against the Hindu woman contributes to the promotion of the Taino as a noble savage, a desirable model minority. The result of the juxtaposition is that the Indians of the Caribbean and the Americas become normative and normalized Others relative to East Indians. Native Americans' portrayal as subjugated noble savages and their putative extermination in the Caribbean basin makes them "good Indians," good in the sense that they conveniently disappear for the advancement of modernity (i.e. the ethnogenesis of *latinidad* and *americanidad*). They are also good in the sense that they magically reappear as needed for the succor of their miscegenated descendants. In the mythos of Cepeda's personal life, New World Indians (i.e. good Indians) are countertroped against East Indians (i.e. bad Indians). Cepeda interpolates the Hindu filicide as a prenatal *fukú*, a *fukú* that can only be dialectically remedied by the *zafa* of *la india*.

When Cepeda is seven, Roció extricates herself from the toxic two-year relationship with Pascal. She takes her children and moves back to Santo Domingo with her parents. Don Manuel realizes that Roció is not emotionally stable enough to raise both of her young daughters. He asks Eduardo, Cepeda's father, to take custody of Cepeda and bring her back to New York. As Cepeda describes it, her grandfather believed that her life in New York would be better because Eduardo had enhanced his economic standing and social prospects by marrying an older, Euro-

American woman. Roció's final words to Cepeda in *Parasío* function as both a derogatory and a metaphysical curse:

“Go to hell. I hope you die and go to hell with your father, she says. “I never want to see you again.”

It's April 1981. I'm almost eight.

(ch. 3 “Journey to the Heart of Darkness”)

Roció cursing her seven-year-old daughter in this way supports Cepeda's general characterization of her as an archetypal “bad mother” figure. Cepeda reinforces this trope throughout her memoir. Cepeda is keen on itemizing Roció's flaws as a parent and a human being. For example, Cepeda repeatedly ridicules and mocks Roció's tendency to take on the accents of the many men that she (Roció) dates/marries and the regions in which she lives. Roció and Cepeda become estranged for more than fifteen years prior to Cepeda's decision to interview her for *BOP*. Writing the memoir forces Cepeda to track down her mother in order to conduct the DNA research. However, we must put this recovery impulse into context. Cepeda is pregnant with her first child as she writes *BOP*. The prospect of becoming a parent can often spur one to reconnect with estranged parents in order to recover one's ancestral history. One feels an obligation to pass on the history to one's progeny. Cepeda successfully recovers the information she needs from Roció, but unfortunately, Roció's collaboration in Cepeda's project does not lead to any renewed bonds or lasting connections.

Recall that the bad mother trope also structures and animates the *bildung* narratives of Evelio Grillo, Carlos Moore, and Veronica Chambers. As in these

memoirs, the manifestation of the trope in Cepeda's life reveals the longitudinal effects of race, poverty, stress, grief, immaturity, and *tíguero* on Afro-Latino mothers, fathers, and children. Cepeda has a sense of these maledictions as large-scale, historically-determined social and cultural forces. However, Cepeda tends to interpret these social blights as a supernatural force, as a *fukú* that specifically and exceptionally targets her and her family.

As outlined in the previous chapter of this study, Junot Díaz uses *fukú* as a metaphor for the rape of the New World, racial slavery, white supremacy, and their on-going legacies in our contemporary moment. Cepeda, however, earnestly believes that a literal *fukú* is responsible for the poor choices that the women in her family historically make in their romantic and conjugal lives. For example, Chapter 14 is titled "Running the *Fukú* Down." The epigraph for the chapter reads: "Being a mother is an attitude, not a biological relation." Cepeda takes the epigraph from Robert A. Heinlein's 1958 young adult, sci-fi novel *Have Space Suit—Will Travel*. The epigraph supports Cepeda's idealized view about mothering and motherhood, and the chapter is indeed about mother figures and mother-daughter relationships.

In Chapter 14, Cepeda reveals what she believes to be the ethnogenetic identity of *la africana*, her other spiritual guide, the one that only appears to her in her dreams and who never reveals her face. Cepeda alternately refers to *la africana* as "our Supreme Matriarch" and "our First Mother":

I will never meet this woman Rocío and I descend from in this world, but I've already encountered her in my dreams. She is *la africana*, who in different scenarios has jumped in to save me like a guardian

angel. She is the same *africana* whose face I've never seen but whose body—thick legs, a tall frame, and large healing breasts, sometimes dressed like a pauper and other times in elegant long multicolored ruffled dresses—I've known since I was a little girl. (ch. 14).

Cepeda's L3d haplogroup indicates that *la africana* was sub-Saharan African from Guinea-Bissau, but the DNA results cannot determine how *la africana's* descendants specifically arrived in the Americas. That is left up to Cepeda's active but historically grounded imagination. Was *la africana* a Christianized Black ladino brought to the New World from Spain and enslaved in Santo Domingo? "Perhaps L3d, *la africana*, was one of them," conjectures Cepeda. "Or she may have migrated to the island from present-day Haiti" (ch. 14). Regarding the matrilineal curse, Cepeda says, "I imagine the woman we descend from is someone who had a fukú put on her by a jilted lover, a jealous woman or a diviner to whom she may not have paid a debt. I can see it clearly, how this curse between mothers and their firstborn daughters may have started with her. I broke that maldición by breaking away from my own mother and unloading the baggage I would have otherwise inherited" (ch. 14). For Cepeda, the fukú could have occurred at any number of places and times in the early modern era: "in a marketplace in pre-colonial Guinea-Bissau," or "during the Portuguese invasion" of Guinea-Bissau, or "on a cobblestone street in the colonial district of Santo Domingo" (ch. 14). In a recurring dream, Cepeda hears the voice of the "archaic hater" who cursed *la africana*: "From this day on, the women in your family, living and not yet born, will break from one another in total repulsion" (ch. 14).

Cepeda manages to break the curse when she becomes a mother. In the spring of 1996, when she is twenty-three years old and working as a music publicist, Cepeda discovers that she is pregnant. When she gives birth to her first child, her daughter Djali, she is in an emotionally dysfunctional relationship with the Djali's father, Monk, and suffering from postpartum depression. Eduardo helps extricate Cepeda and Djali from that situation, allowing Cepeda to consciously focus on being the nurturing and present mother and father she never had. However, because she had been estranged from her mother, the fukú still has its grip on Cepeda when she is doing the genetic DNA testing for and writing the draft of *BOP*. The fukú is finally broken when Cepeda reaches out to Roció to interview her for the memoir. Cepeda flies down to Orlando to deliver the news of their West African ancestry to her mother. She wonders if Roció will “live up to the hyped-up stereotype that all of us Dominicans, here and on the island, vehemently reject and deny, deny, deny . . . our Blackness” (ch. 15).

Here Cepeda refers to the concept of “black denial” among Dominicans in the U.S. and in the Dominican Republic. Frances Robles brought the topic into the popular imagination with his 2007 *Miami Herald* article “Black Denial.” The deck of Robles’ article reads, “Nearly all Dominican women straighten their hair, which experts say is a direct result of a historical learned rejection of all things black” (Robles). The concept of Dominican black denial resurfaced in the public imagination again in 2011 with the debut of Henry Louis Gates Jr.’s PBS documentary *Black in Latin America* (Gates et al.). More recently, Marc Lamont Hill moderated an informative Huffington Post Live talk show on the subject in 2014

(Hill). The scholar Ginetta E. B. Candelario provides an instructive definition of Dominican black denial. Candelario argues that “Dominicans’ apparent denial of their own blackness, their strong antipathy toward Haitians, their inclination to identify themselves as *Indios*, and their peculiar racial terminology . . . is a strategic embracing of Hispanicity as a means of negotiating the historically triangulated geopolitics of race created by US-Dominican-Haitian relations . . . Dominican Hispanicity allowed for both nationalist differentiation from and White supremacist alliances with the United States” (345–346). Torres-Saillant writes that Dominicans, relative to Americans, have an “elastic” concept of race that accounts for their failure to employ “black affirmation” as a sociocultural and political tool.¹⁰⁶ In the U.S., the racial category “black” can connote U.S. nationality, Pan-African identity, or both. In other words, “black,” in the U.S., depending on the user, context, and audience, can function as a national racial category or as an Afroethnic category of panethnicity. However, because of the U.S. racial logic of hypo-descent, both modalities of “black”

¹⁰⁶ Torres-Saillant says, “Black Dominicans do not see blackness as the central component of their identity but tend to privilege their nationality instead, which implies participation in a culture, a language community, and the sharing of a lived experience. Consistent with the racially mixed ancestry of the population, the ethnic vocabulary of Dominicans is rich in words describing gradations of skin color. A scholar looking at the city of Santiago de los Caballeros alone arrived at an elaborate classification of 21 terms used by the people there to denote racial traits (Gúzman 37-40). Generally devoid of the language of racial polarity current in the United States, Dominicans have little familiarity with a discourse of black affirmation. Nothing in their history indicates to the masses of the Dominican people that their precarious material conditions or the overall indignities they suffer constitute a strictly racial form of oppression. As a result, they have not developed a discourse of black affirmation among their strategies of social resistance. This, no doubt, bewilders observers coming from societies like the United States where race tends to outweigh all other elements of human identity” (“Tribulations of Blackness” 1090).

assume that racial mixture is an intrinsic aspect of “black identity.” The category “black,” therefore, is always already a signifier of racial mixture. The commiserate term for racial mixture in the Dominican Republic is *indio*. This is why so many Dominicans with unambiguous Afroethnic somatic features identify as various types of *indio*. For Dominicans the category “black” is highly associated with Haitian nationality and African American nationality. Dominicans recognize racial mixture and heterogeneity in themselves, as part of their socially constructed national character, but they tend not to extend the presumption of racial plurality to groups beyond their literal and ethnocultural borders, argue Candelario and Torres-Saillant.

Latino and black denial play a crucial role in the rift that emotionally separates Cepeda from her father when she is a teenager. As mentioned above, when Eduardo remarried he married a Euro-American woman and passed for “white” himself. Blanquemento is the act of passing to improve one’s social condition and the status of one’s progeny. Eduardo actually believed, based on family lore, that he was of Ashkenazi Jewish descent. Roció’ also believed that she was not solely descended from Hispanic, African, and indigenous stock. Her family’s ancestral lore claimed that they were part Indochinese, descendants of a Vietnamese immigrant. Like the troping of the Hindu mother, this is another example of Orientalism. The DNA evidence suggests that both Eduardo and Roció’s oral histories are flawed. In addition, Cepeda’s employment of the spectral natives *la india* and *la africana* frames both Eduardo and Roció’s family legends as examples of “black denial” and indigenous dis-identification.

Roció, contrary to Cepeda's expectations, does not cringe at the revelation of her Senegambian ancestral heritage. Roció accepts *la africana*. During their tense conversation, Roció admits that she made mistakes when she was a mother. She tells Cepeda that parents always make mistakes with their first child, and implies that her mistakes were compounded by the fact that she was young, immature, and dealing with stresses of being a newly married Dominican immigrant in the U.S. Cepeda, Roció, and Michelle discuss the concept of matrilineal fukú in their family. Roció reveals that she and her mother, Doña Dolores, never got along, that she felt like she was adopted, and Cepeda reveals the recurring dream she has, presumably the one about *la africana*. Shocked, Roció admits to having dreams about a similar figure, but she thought that the recurring dream was "some *brujería*" that Pascal had put on her. Roció apologizes for the abuse Cepeda experienced and witnessed when they lived in San Francisco with Pascal. Roció tells Cepeda that she always wanted to be a writer and world traveler. Cepeda says it is not too late for Roció to pursue those passions, she only looks older than she is. The observation prompts laughter and the laughter prompts inexplicable tears. Roció tries to move their relationship forward: "So, Raquel, what can we do to make things right from now on? Or are we going to live in the past? . . . So what is your verdict?" Cepeda says the verdict is still out. Instead of telling the truth--that she has no interest in staying connected with her mother--she says, "I have no hatred for you or resentment." The reunion does not end with any grand reconciliation, but it does run down the fukú. Cepeda concludes the visit saying, "Roció and her kids and I aren't close. And so life must go on, like it has before, but with more understanding" (ch. 14).

The mother-daughter rapprochement in Chapter 14 contains a tenuous yet palpable sense of closure, forgiveness, and healing. The chapter's focus on *fukús* and spirit guides is indicative of the "magical realism" trend in *bildung* narratives of Dominican-American and Dominican immigrant writers who came of age in the 1980s. Examples include Angie Cruz's debut novel *Soledad* (2002) and Junot Díaz's debut novel *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007). Cepeda's invocation of the orishas, the Yoruba deities of santería, represents mysticism and magical realism in *BOP*. For example, Cepeda mentions Chango twice and Ellegua three times.¹⁰⁷ In her interview concerning her documentary *Bling*, Cepeda wears a bracelet of alternating green and yellow beads on her left wrist, signifying that she is under the protection of Orúnla, the orisha of divination, destiny, and wisdom (De La Torre 46–53; Wedel 86; Fernández Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert 47–48).

The orishas Cepeda mentions and whom protect her are not indigenous to the regions of Cepeda's ancestral origins, Guinea-Bissau and Central Africa. The orishas are Nigerian deities, but they speak to the legacy of and vibrant regard for African ancestry in the Hispanic Caribbean. At least for Cepeda, repeated references to *la africana* and the orishas repudiate charges of Dominican "black denial" and demonstrate a sense of Caribbean "black pride." Similarly, repeated references to the supernatural presence of *la india* invokes the contemporary Taíno identity movement. This rehabilitation of "magical realism" tropicalizes the Hispanic

¹⁰⁷ Cepeda mentions Ellegua five times if one includes the Christian saints with which he is syncretized: the Niño de Antocha and the archangel St. Michael slaying the Dragon. Among these African deities, she also references the *Virgen de la Altagracia*, the patron saint of the Dominican Republic.

Caribbean practice of traditional African religions and the Taíno identity movement. Frances Aparicio and Susana Chavez-Silverman coined the concept tropicalism: “To *tropicalize* means to trope, to imbue a particular space, geography, group, or nation with a set of traits, images, and values” (8). Tropicalism is the New World equivalent of Orientalism. Furthermore, it is inherently dialogic. When performed by the dominant society, tropicalization tends to be hegemonic. That is, it creates and sustains negative “stereotypes of Latino/as as aliens, peasants, criminals, terrorists, or an ‘exotic’ constituency” (Allatson 234–235). Tropicalization tends to construct *latinidad* “via an imagery of sexuality, passion, and ‘spice’ that renders Latinos as an objectified and exoticized foreign ‘Other’” (Caminero-Santangelo, “Latinidad” 21). When performed by Latinos, tropicalization can be either hegemonic or radical. By radical, Aparicio and Chavez-Silverman mean that it can be used to combat hegemonic tropicalizations and to construct new identities and ways of being Latino. Instructive is Darrel Enck-Wazner’s observation: “Tropicalization accents agency” (352).

Cepeda’s tropicalizations, *la india* and *la Africana*, function radically as accents of her personal agency. The spirit guides represent Cepeda’s drive to preserve her dignity, self-esteem, and self-reliance. They manifest Cepeda’s will to survive and endure in the face of adversity and chance. However, Cepeda implies that the spirits sometimes fail to come to one’s aid. For example, Cepeda says that the African gods that kept *la Africana* “from succumbing on her journey to the New World, regardless of whether or not she acknowledged them, were fickle and sometimes irrational” (ch. 14 “Running Down the Fukú”). The god’s caprice and

indifference exposes a kernel of suspicion in Cepeda's faith in mysticism. This hint of rational skepticism, is cut from the same cloth as Cepeda's selective faith in scientific positivism. Throughout *BOP*, Cepeda consistently says genetic genealogy "confirms" instincts, spiritual convictions, and supernatural experiences regarding the constitution of one's ethnoracial ancestry. Cepeda's reliance on positivism, her synthesis of "logos" (i.e. positivism) and "mythos" (i.e. the metaphysical), invited my analysis of the *la india* apparition and the *la africana* recurring dream as rational and natural ramifications of attachment disorder. In addition, Cepeda's selective positivism allows her to tropicalize *la africana* and *la india* in ways that refute the accusations of Dominican "black denial" and Dominican preoccupations with an indigenous "fantasy heritage."¹⁰⁸

However, Cepeda's tropicalization also functions hegemonically. The spirit guides, separate and apart from Cepeda's personal experience, possess exotic currency in the literary market place. Cepeda, and Latino author's like her, do not exist in a vacuum. They are aware that tropicalism sells books and generates critical critiques of the sort that you are reading at this very moment, which, in turn, can generate more sales for the primary text in and outside of the academy. Cepeda's website and her promotional appearances reflect her keen efforts to popularize and monetize her memoir. The *BOP* webpage, for example, contains links that maximize the memoir's accessibility for academics and the general public. On the *BOP* webpage, there are five links that facilitate deep and prolonged engagement with

¹⁰⁸ For an insightful article on the intersection of latinidad and fantasy heritage, see Fregoso.

the memoir: *Synopsis*, *Excerpt*, *For Book Clubs*, *For Educators*, and *Book Me*. The *Synopsis* link contains a summary as well as several blurbs from high profile writers. The *Excerpt* link contains the first seven pages of Chapter 1 Love, American Style and the first five pages of Chapter 11 Truth, Reconciliation, and Time Machines. These are the first chapters of Part I and Part II, respectively. The *Book Club* link contains twenty-one thoughtful discussion questions. The *For Educators* link contains the “Official *BOP* Curriculum,” a twenty-two page document that contains six lessons and two appendices. The final link, *Book Me*, is for booking Cepeda to speak at events, institutions, and schools and universities. There is nothing unethical about using these tools to promote books sales. However, one is less certain about the ethics of Cepeda using *BOP* to exclusively promote the products of Family Tree DNA.

Cepeda’s memoir, while laudable for its literary, cultural, and sociological merit, goes beyond general advocacy of commercial genetic genealogy testing. *BOP* exclusively promotes a single company: Family Tree DNA. For example, the end matter of *BOP* contains eight unique sections. Six out of eight of those sections, either exclusively or in part, promote Family Tree DNA. The Postscript focuses on a program called Life is Precious, a Bronx-based Latina suicide prevention initiative. Cepeda uses the girls in the program to develop a documentary about using genetic profile results to boost self-esteem, to ethnically “enhance who they are, maybe confirm something they felt intrinsically” (Cepeda 273). Presumably, these tests are free. There is no mention about who will own the girls’ data and how it will be used. One girl asks if someone outside of the program can be tested, Cepeda tells her that

such a person would have to do it independently, meaning he/she would have to privately pay for the testing. By giving the girls a free genetic test, Cepeda generates interest in and creates a demand for genetic profiling in the Latino communities of the Bronx. The other five sections of the end matter either mention Family Tree DNA by name, reproduce its literature and graphics, and/or promote its services. These sections include the Acknowledgement, Ancestral DNA Testing: Now It's Your Turn, Frequently Asked Questions, DNA Test Kit Instructions, and a Family Tree DNA Discount Coupon. The end matter, in conjunction with Part II of the memoir (i.e. the genetic detective story), transforms *BOP* into a book length advertisement for Family Tree DNA.

The problem with Cepeda promoting a single company is obvious--she does not provide readers/consumers with a rubric for comparing and evaluating competing services. She does not reveal her criteria for choosing one genetic profiling company over another. For example, Cepeda does not discuss whether she considered other services before settling on Family Tree DNA. And if she did consider others, she does not explain why she rejected them. Nor does she reveal whether she or her publisher have financial agreements with Family Tree DNA. Genetic genealogy testing is not an exact science, and its bioethical standards are still under development. Furthermore, genetic genealogy is an unregulated industry that seems to have no standard set of rules about who owns the rights to a customer's genetic data and how that data will be stored and/or used. As a social justice advocate, the least Cepeda can do is raise awareness in her community about the bioethical controversies surrounding genetic profiling, especially since *BOP's*

audience includes ethnic communities that can least afford to spend the little leisure income they have on an imperfect and developing science.

Spectral Natives, Five Percenter Science, and the “ambiguous mix” of Raquel Cepeda’s Dominican-Americanidad

And today, my spiritual self still identifies with the *mythos*, the transcendent qualities found in Jewish Kabbalah, Sufi Islam, Indigenous and West African mysticism and religion. My rational self is drawn by the potential of ancestral DNA testing—the *logos*—to work in tandem with the incorporeal to help us make sense of our whole selves.

--Raquel Cepeda, *Bird of Paradise*, Chap. 11 Truth, Reconciliation, and Time Machines

In this section, I explore how the Afroethnic Impulse manifests itself in in the African American intertexts and intercultural influences and exchanges in *BOP*. I specifically focus on the links between ancestral pride, hip-hop, and the spiritualism of the Nation of Gods and Earth. I explore how these feelings, ideologies, genres, and cultural movements contribute to the development of Cepeda’s cosmopolitan discourse of eclecticism, that is, her faith in the emancipatory power of cultural, social, and genetic mixing.

We have seen, in the first section, how the Afroethnic Impulse in *BOP* expresses itself in Cepeda’s belief in the spirit guide *la africana*, her Yoruba faith, and her use of genetic profiling to confront Dominican “black denial.” Cepeda embraces “black” pride by embracing the African influences in Dominican culture and genetic ancestry. As an adult, Cepeda identifies as a Pan-Africanist. She makes this claim in a filmed interview about the production of her documentary *Bling*. In

the interview, Cepedas says she included Tego Calderón, a Puerto Rican reggaeton performer, in *Bling* because he, like her, is a “Pan-Africanist who really embraced that side of their Latino heritage. Because, you know, growing up we’re not taught to embrace that; we’re taught to repel that. So I thought at as a Latina, as a Dominican, he would be a good representative for that, for the people I want to speak to in my community” (Scion AV). As a child and young adult in the U.S., it was not easy for Cepeda to cultivate and sustain Afroethnic pride and Pan-Africanist sensibilities. Cepeda’s father, Catholic school education, and mainstream culture each encourage Cepeda to dis-identify with Africa and Africanity. As mentioned in the previous section, Eduardo, Cepeda’s father, passes for white during Cepeda’s childhood. Eduardo’s wife, Alice, is a blonde woman of Swedish heritage, and Eduardo considers himself to be Jewish. Like his anglophone neighbors, Eduardo is angry at the growing influx of “Dominicans and other Spanish-speaking people flooding” his predominantly Euro-American neighborhood. Eduardo’s self-loathing is so pronounced that he says to Alice, “They chu’d *take* all of dose Dominicans and *kill* ‘em” (ch. 4 Uptown ’81, emphasis in the original).

Recall that Cepeda had come to live with Eduardo and Alice because Rocio, Cepeda’s mother, was not capable of effectively raising both Cepeda and Giselle. Cepeda’s move from Pariso in Dominican Republic back to New York functions as both an ascent and a captivity narrative. “Uptown ’81,” the title of the fourth chapter, aptly captures the ascent theme. 1981 is the year Cepeda returns from the Dominican Republic to live in New York; the fourth chapter recounts what life is like for Cepeda between the ages of eight and eleven, between the years 1981 and 1984.

Like the post-Emancipation, African American dystopian ascent narrative, (e.g. Paul Laurence Dunbar's 1901 novel *Sport of the Gods*), Cepeda ascends into a life of degradation and brutality rather than out of one. Eduardo, Cepeda's biological father, is more physically abusive to her than her Haitian stepfather, Papito, ever was in San Francisco. Eduardo's abuse is not only more savage it is also more routine. In New York, Eduardo insists that Cepeda learn tennis, as well as play classical piano. Eduardo serves as Cepeda's tennis coach and she becomes so good that she receives a sponsorship from Reebok. However, when Cepeda fails to perform well on the courts, Eduardo becomes savage, working out his anger at and resentment of his ex-wife on his daughter Cepeda, whom he believes will become a "ga'bage" welfare Dominican, like her mother. Eduardo's physical abuse takes several forms. Eduardo shakes Cepeda, punches her with his fists, throws her into walls, and hits her with objects like shoes, ball hoppers, and wooden chairs; he also locks her out of the house for hours at a time during the day and once overnight (ch. 4 Uptown '81 and ch. 8 God Bodies and Indios). Eduardo even threatens to throw Cepeda out of their apartment window for failing to perform her piano lessons correctly. Whether Eduardo is conscious of it or not, his threat thematically channels the Hindu filicide he failed to prevent when his daughter was in utero. Cepeda's narrative frames Eduardo's threat to kill her as a manifestation of the fukú that originally damned her through *la africana*. Instead of throwing Cepeda out of the window, Eduardo punches her in the back of the neck with his fists, calls her a "ga'bage" Dominican, and puts a fukú on her:

“I hope one day you cry tears of blood,” he says, his eyes bulging out of his sockets. “I hate you.” (ch. 4 Uptown '81)

Life with her father, feels like life in captivity, like life in prison. “I turn nine, ten, and eleven,” says Cepeda, “with each unchanging day and night running into one another so fluidly, it feels like I’m doing *hard time* rather than living life” (ch. 4 Uptown '81, emphasis mine). Life is bleak, but Cepeda finds hope and encouragement in the sorrow songs of the Northern inner city--hip-hop. As she lies in her room nursing the blows to her neck and back, DJ Red Alert plays “The Message” on the radio. “The Message,” by Grandmaster Melle Mel and Duke Bootee, is considered the first rap song that made political and social commentary commercially viable (Light, *The Vibe History of Hip Hop* 29–30 and 49; Rose, *Black Noise* 55). “The Message” describes the physical violence, psychological degradation, and free-floating anxiety generated by the social blight in the inner city Afroethnic and Latino communities of New York (Rose, *The Hip Hop Wars* 40–42). The final vignette in the ballad focuses on the blighted life of an inner city child, a boy in particular. Cepeda finds special solace in lines 3-4 of the boy’s story: “God is smiling on you but he's frowning too / Because only God knows what you'll go through.” Cepeda compares the enchanting sound of Melle Mel’s voice to a “*brujo*,” and she intimately identifies with the social commentary of “The Message”: “The lyrics feel like they were written for me, almost like a sound track to the movie of my life so far. The music delivers me from the suffocating darkness in here, from Papi’s fists and Alice’s indifference” (ch. 4 Uptown '81). The belief in God, the *brujo* metaphor, and the word “deliverance,” which calls to mind the Babylonian captivity

of the Jews as referenced in the spiritual “Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel,” combine to demonstrate Cepeda’s belief in divine intervention, if not cosmic determinism. For Cepeda, hip-hop functions like the sorrow songs functioned for enslaved African Americans. The lyrics of “The Message” acknowledge the tragedy and historicity of Cepeda’s situation, but the line she fixates on encourages endurance and self-reliance in the face of God’s inability or unwillingness to intervene in human affairs. Although she sees her abjection and alienation reflected in the sermonic rhetoric of “The Message,” she also sees collective empathy. Cepeda finds the strength to endure because she takes comfort and refuge in the fact that she is not alone, in the fact that her righteous indignation is collectively experienced and affirmed by members of her community. As she says, Grandmaster Melle Mel understands what it means to feel like one “will never be good enough or rich enough” to fit into mainstream America.

Like the Negro spirituals that provided solace to enslaved African Americans in the antebellum U.S., hip-hop becomes a refuge for Cepeda. Hip-hop is a natural fit for Cepeda, given that both she and the genre were born in New York in 1973. History reveals that DJ Kool Herc, a Jamaican American, gave birth to hip-hop on August 11, 1973 at 1520 Sedgwick Ave. in the Bronx. The occasion was at his sister’s back-to-school party. Hip-hop originated as a dance-oriented genre of music. DJ Kool Herc innovated the practice of extending the instrumental portion of popular songs in order to provide partygoers extended time to dance. Over time, the role of the DJ and MC grew more prominent and hip-hop audiences increasingly focused on the technical performance of the DJ and discursive virtuosity of the MC

(Rose, *Black Noise* 54; Miyakawa 1). Although hip-hop music and culture developed out of the mix of Afroethnic peoples in New York (i.e. Anglophone Afro-Caribbeans, African Americans, and Hispanophone Caribbeans), it rapidly became the music of U.S. youth culture during the 1980s when Cepeda was a pre-teen.

Cepeda first becomes enamored with hip-hop through its visual culture—graffiti. The adults in Cepeda’s neighborhood and on the media see graffiti as vandalism and as an instigator of gang violence. Young Cepeda sees graffiti as public art, as decorative murals. More important, Cepeda counters the racialized perception of graffiti as a specifically Afroethnic/Latino practice:

I didn’t realize it until I saw on TV that there are a lot of white boys getting up, too. Papi ignores me when I ask him if he wants to see all of them rounded up and killed now that white boys, maybe even Jewish ones, are painting the trains. (Cepeda ch. 4 Uptown ’81)

Hip-hop makes it to the big screen in several productions as Cepeda comes of age. Hip-hop movies of the 1980s include: *Wild Style* (1982), *Beat Street* (1984), *Breakin’* (1984), *Breakspeare* (1984), and *Krush Groove* (1985). Cepeda concludes her fourth chapter with an anecdote about the birthday present for her eleventh birthday—her father takes her to see *Beat Street*. Eduardo sleeps through most of the movie, Cepeda breaks into tears when the character Ramon, a graffiti artist dies. The movie ends and Grandmaster Melle Mel and the Furious Five come on stage at the theater and perform “Beat Street Breakdown,” a socially conscious rap that valorizes graffiti as art, denounces urban blight; calls for the end to poverty and injustice in the inner city and Africa; disparages religious violence between Christians, Muslims,

and Jews; scorns “superiority complexes”; chides military tyrants and politicians like “Hitler and Caesar, Custer and Reagan, Napoleon, Castro, Mussolini and Begin, Ghengis Khan and the Shah of Iran”; and presciently compares slavery to computer technology. The *Beat Street* birthday present is significant because it shows a moment of tenderness between her and her father; it is one of the few pleasant memories in Cepeda’s memoir. Melle Mel is not the only rapper Cepeda mentions in *BOP*. Other hip hop figures include Russell Simmons, Immortal Technique, LL Cool J, DJ Van, Chilly D, MC Lyte, Run DMC, Boogie Down Productions, Queen Latifah, Brand Nubian, De La Soul, NWA, Public Enemy (and their song “Don’t Believe the Hype”), and Bobby Brown (and his song “Roni”). Many of these groups and individuals express black nationalist and Pan-Africanist ideologies.

Chapter 5 An Awakening and Chapter 8 God Bodies and *Indios* explore the relationship between religion, spirituality, ethnoracial identity formation, and the development of political consciousness. In this chapter, Cepeda recounts how racial abjection, patriarchal Christianity, Eurocentric cultural pedagogy, and black nationalist hip-hop and literature engendered her Pan-Africanism. Cepeda covers four years in this chapter—1984 to 1988. The chapter opens when she is eleven years old and references her piano and tennis lessons. These hobbies exacerbate the class tension between Cepeda and her less well-off Latino friends. These so-called friends believe Cepeda feels that she is socially superior to them because she is light-skinned, lives in a desirable neighborhood, and has a white stepmother. Cepeda’s Latino friends call her a “wannabe white girl” while “white kids” call her a “spic bitch” and “nigga spic.” Although Cepeda takes pride in her tennis and classical

piano accomplishments, she does not see herself as “white” and her personal interests reflect that. In her free time, Cepeda learns break dance moves (e.g. the worm) and nurses dreams of becoming a writer for Rakim, Roxanne Shanté, Sha-Rock, and MC Lyte, unambiguously Afroethnic rappers (ch. 5 An Awakening). Eduardo chides Cepeda for wanting to be a b-girl, saying to Alice that Cepeda wants “to be so Black.” Alice, however, stresses that break-dancing is a multiracial youth culture phenomenon. Alice, tends not to come to Cepeda’s defense physically, but more often than not she comes to it on the popular culture front.

Chapter 8 also explores how others racially categorize Cepeda and how she racially categorizes herself. In Chapter 8, Cepeda recalls her first day at college at a university in Pittsburgh, a university she refuses to name. Jane Mintz, a helpful sophomore, strikes up a conversation with Cepeda, a conversation that articulates the varied and competing ethnoracial identities and categories that Cepeda’s friends and family members foist on her based on her embodiment and avocations. Mintz asks if Cepeda is biracial. Before answering, Cepeda retreats into the following reflection:

At home, Papi said I wanted to be Black because I love hip-hop, and a low-class Dominican because I like graffiti and b-boys. The kids at St. Thaddeus said I wanted to be white because I played tennis and lived with Alice. Casimiro said I needed to recognize and embrace my native *indios* and *africanos* in order to strengthen my spiritual guides, whom he likened to my intuition. Caridad told me I had a vibe of a Black and white gringa. And Blackie said I could be from anywhere.

But I like being Dominican, sort of, especially one born in Harlem who likes to wear socks in the winter. (ch. 8 God Bodies and *Indios*, emphasis in the original)

The “wannabe white girl” accusation by Cepeda’s Latino friends recalls the colorism that plagues the African American community and the dilemma expressed in the African American literary/cultural trope of the tragic mulatta. The product of an Afroethnic and Euroethnic miscegenation, the tragic mulatta is a liminal figure who is often socially shunned and despised by both African Americans and Euro-Americans because she desires, above all else, to be accepted as “white.” Cepeda, of course, is not a tragic mulatta in this sense because she super-identifies with her Afroethnic heritage and expressive culture. Cepeda is a tragic mulatta in the sense that whites and Latinos reject her. White kids bar Cepeda from whiteness because of her somatic latinidad; Latino kids bar Cepeda from latinidad because of her white looks, white father, white stepmother, and white avocations, but they also bar her from latinidad because of her “blackness.” For example, Cepeda’s Latina friends Susana and Socorro perceive hip-hop to be a distinctly “black” (i.e. non-Hispanophone) cultural domain. Susana, who is half Italian and half Latino, cannot understand why Cepeda likes “all that Black shit.” Not realizing that she is in a value-based argument, Cepeda responds rationally and factually, saying, “What do you mean ‘Black shit. Hip-hop is *our* shit, too.” The exchange continues, Susana arguing that “freestyle,” the electronic dance music that originated in the early 1980s in Harlem and the Bronx, is Latino-identified music:

“Na, freestyle is our shit,” she says.

“Shannon is Black, so is Joyce Sims. What the fuck are you talking about, sis? That half-Italian blood is making you loopy.”

“You just hate anything white, don’t you?” (ch. 5 An Awakening).

Shannon and Joyce Sims are African American freestyle artists. Cepeda, like Alice, points out that there are no racial barriers to expressive culture. Cepeda cannot win the cultural arguments with her Latina friends because, depending on whichever is expedient, they rebuke her either for her “whiteness” or her “blackness.”¹⁰⁹

The incident that colors the awakening of Cepeda’s Pan-African consciousness is the 1984 shooting of four Afroethnic teens by Bernhard Goetz, the “Subway Vigilante.” When Goetz refused to give Barry Allen, Darrell Cabey, Troy Canty, and James Ramseur the five dollars they demanded of him, he shot the boys with his revolver and fled New York. Goetz turned himself in to the police eight days later. New York hailed Goetz as a hero, writes Cepeda. Even Black and Latino coalitional organizations like the Guardian Angels supported Goetz financially and in the courtroom (Leo; Anderson). The celebration of the shootings shocks eleven-year-old Cepeda out of her pre-teen solipsism and materialism. It forces her to mature and it galvanizes her and her age cohorts to build hip-hop based coalitions that affirm their humanity and their right to exist with and in dignity: “Bernhard Goetz has convinced me that everybody in the city, not just Papi, feels that Black and Latino kids are no better than subway tunnel rats. Around our way, the resentment

¹⁰⁹ See the venomous exchange about Latino colorism that Cepeda has with her friend Caridad, who is Cuban and Puerto Rican.

we feel encourages kids who may not have otherwise fucked with each other to form alliances. Hip-hop, this thing we love that loves us back, is our lingua franca” (ch. 5 An Awakening). Like the lesson Cepeda learns from her father’s wish to exterminate Dominicans, the lesson Cepeda learns from the Bernhard Goetz acquittal is that “black” and Latino lives do not matter, that they are disposable.

School is another arena in which Cepeda finds the humanity, culture, and histories of Afroethnic and indigenous people devalued, disaffirmed, and maligned. Cepeda attends St. Thaddeus, a Catholic primary school. Just as she does with her home life, Cepeda describes her school life in terms of imprisonment: “The closer I am to finishing my *bid* at St. Thaddeus, the more I feel like I’m living in a pressure cooker fueled by hate. I hate Papi. He hates me. I hate my teachers. They hate me. I hate Mami. She has long since forgotten I exist” (ch. 5 An Awakening, emphasis mine). Cepeda hates St. Thaddeus because its Eurocentric pedagogy distorts, omits, and suppresses the truths of history. For example, Cepeda bristles at the Eurocentric portrayals of Thanksgiving, Columbus, and Christian missionaries, and she is often expelled from her classroom for challenging those narratives because they minimize the experience of indigenous genocide and racial slavery: “I hear words like ‘primitive,’ ‘savage,’ and ‘extinct’ used interchangeably to describe almost everyone we learn about who isn’t of European descent or a sellout. The ‘savages’ our teachers talk about usually look like most of my classmates and me” (ch. 5 An Awakening). Cepeda returns to this theme in Chapter 11 Truth, Reconciliation, and Time Machines. She writes:

What we learn at school can't possibly foster a sense of pride in our heritage and the parts of ourselves that aren't visibly European. If Latino-Americans accept what we're taught about our history as truth, then the indigenous peoples of the Americas were godless primitives given salvation by the grace of missionaries and their other European benefactors. And if we believe what we're taught about African history in elementary and high school every February, then we have to buy a version of the story that omits the complex and rich narrative of the transatlantic slavery experience. The truth is usually left for us to hunt and gather independently, if we are so inclined. (ch. 11)

In her review of *BOP* in the journal *Language Arts*, Erin Miller says that Cepeda's memoir has "clear implications for the importance of culturally relevant pedagogy and counter-narratives in school to foster positive identities" Cepeda calls out the crime of perpetuating white racial superiority in cultural and school contexts while sharing a narrative of the resilience and resistance of Dominican people insights from her memoir are critical for literacy educators to understand how innovative curricular are to be designed to foster positive identity development for young Latinas" (117–118). Like Miller, I agree that Cepeda's memoir can help ensure that contemporary young people, and Latino and Afroethnic young people in particular, do not continue to receive a miseducation that erodes their sense of self and dignity.

Cepeda's rejection of Eurocentric pedagogy is linked to her suspicion that the Judeo-Christian God may not exist because, unlike *la india* and *la africana*, God never

visits Cepeda. For example, before coming to live with her father, the spirits would visit Cepeda. She recounts how *la africana* would save her from a recurring nightmare involving Woody Woodpecker. In the nightmare, Woody Woodpecker pecks holes in Cepeda's face:

When I feel like I can't survive another peck, a very tall *africana* with tight curly hair, dressed like a Spanish *dama*, sweeps me to safety by shooing the bird away with one hand and hiding me under her huge skirt with the other. When Woody flies away, she holds me tightly against her tetas. The *dama*'s cleavage holds magic that heals the wounds on my face.

I never dream of being saved by any of the blond men portrayed on the stained-glass windows at St. Thaddeus. Those gods, I'm convinced, don't know the language of the people begging for their divine intervention. (ch. 5 An Awakening)

Cepeda does give Christianity, its saints, and its male God a chance. She prays to her school's namesake, St. Thaddeus, "the patron saint of desperate and lost causes" but "he never answers [her] pleas for help" (ch. 5 An Awakening). The conception of God as male; the Catholic Church's involvement in the conquest of the New World "savages," and the failure of God and St. Thaddeus to intervene in her life all conspire to push Cepeda away from the Judeo-Christian tradition and into the bosoms of her spectral natives, the spiritual ancestors that mirror her gender, her embodiment, and her ethnicities.

At the same time that Cepeda moves away from Christianity and the Eurocentric narrative of the development of the New World, she moves toward black nationalism and the spiritual, cultural, and scientific ideology of the Nation of Gods and Earths. For example in 1986, during her eighth grade year, Cepeda, at school, just happens to “come across a discarded copy of *The Autobiography of Malcolm X: As Told by Alex Haley*.” When she encounters the book, Cepeda is unfamiliar with Malcolm X and his historical significance. She decides to read the book not because of its content, but “because of the fine redheaded man gracing the book’s cover” (ch. 5 An Awakening). Cepeda does not provide further commentary on the impact the book had on her, but in 1988 she reveals how the fiery black nationalist, Nation of Islam-influenced gospel of Chuck D and Public Enemy ignites and enlivens her. She speaks specifically of Chuck D’s performance on the album *It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back*. Cepeda feels that Chuck D, like Melle Mel, is in direct dialogue with her. Public Enemy’s sermon-like rhetoric “speaks to [her] “anxiety,” to her sense of frustration and disempowerment. It psychologically and politically emancipates Cepeda and counters the religious “gospel of obedience” taught to her at St. Thaddeus:

I feel free to express myself, using their seething vocabulary and attitude to articulate what I’m feeling. Something about the music and lyrics speaks to my anxiety. It compels me to question everything I’m being taught at the Catholic high school I’m attending in Yonkers.

Public Enemy’s message makes more sense to me than the gospel of obedience and servitude I learn at school. It’s like Chuck D is

directly speaking to me. “The enemy could be their friend,
guardian...” (ch. 5 An Awakening)

From its debut in 1987 to its disbandment in 1994, Public Enemy addressed a number of social ills that plagued African American communities: AIDS, alcohol and drug abuse, high incarceration rates, poverty, structural racism, and violent crime (Light, “Public Enemy” 165–175). Sometimes the band addressed these issues laudably and sometimes objectionably. Public Enemy’s backup dancers fuse the militarized sartorial aesthetics of the Black Panther Party and with those of the Fruit of Islam, and their dance choreography incorporates the movements of military marching drills. Public Enemy’s songs reflect the group’s black nationalist politics and its affiliation with Louis Farrakhan’s Nation of Islam. According to musicologist Felicia M. Miyakawa, Public Enemy popularized the Nation of Islam for young Americans in the late 1980s and early 1990s. All of the members of Public Enemy, writes Miyakawa, were “faithful to the Nation of Islam” (21). If the socially conservative moralism of the Nation of Islam, like the socially conservative moralism of Catholicism, was not appealing to Cepeda, Public Enemy’s NOI-influenced black nationalism and Pan-Africanism certainly was appealing to her.

During the same year that Cepeda becomes enraptured with the NOI-influenced black nationalist discourse of Public Enemy, Cepeda takes to drinking forty-ounce bottles of Olde English malt liquor with her uptown Latina friends, Caridad and Lupe. In conversations about colorism with Caridad and Lupe, there is evidence of Cepeda’s growing panethnic/Pan-African consciousness, a consciousness based on the U.S. logic of hypo-descent and common oppression

theory. For example, she calls Caridad an “African queen.” Caridad, a Cuban-Puerto Rican who is darker than Cepeda, perceives the “African queen” compliment as a racial slur and/or ethnic demotion. She thinks that Cepeda maliciously uses “African queen” as a euphemism to racialize her as a “nigga.” As a result, Caridad threatens to beat Cepeda if she says it again. Cepeda tries to counter the divisive colorism that plagues their friendship by saying, “We’re all still women of color regardless of our complexions.” Evidence of Cepeda’s Pan-Africanism also exists in the transcultural solidarity and panethnic rhetoric of kinship she expresses in high school. She addresses every Black or Latino girl as “sister.” In her conversation with Caridad and Lupe, thirteen-year-old Cepeda says to Lupe, “You have knowledge of self.” The phrase, “knowledge of self,” like the “African queen” epithet, is a common trope among the Five Percent Nation (FPN), a splinter sect of the NOI that calls its male members Suns or Gods and its female members Earths, Moons, or Queens (Swedenburg; Allen Jr. 166). Consequently, the FPN is also known as the Nation of Gods and Earths (NGE).

Much of the hip-hop that Cepeda favors is influenced by FPN theosophy. In his essay “Making the Strong Survive: The Contours and Contradictions of Message Rap,” Earnest Allen Jr. classifies FPN hip-hop as a type of “message rap” (aka political or conscious rap), the type of rap that “address[es] existing catastrophic social problems facing African Americans” (Allen Jr., “Making the Strong Survive” 160). The message rap of the 1980s and early 1990s was a subset of rap that “exert[ed] a powerful political and artistic influence on its youthful listeners as well as on rap artists in general,” argues Allen. The limitation of message rap as a tool for social

change is that its politics “remain largely the captive of intersubjective approaches to social relations and social structure—a ‘politics of recognition’” (Allen Jr., “Making the Strong Survive” 161). As Allen sees it, FPN hip-hop is one of three “interrelated” modalities of message rap. Those three modalities include the message rap of Islamic nationalists, Afrocentric cultural-political nationalists, and gansta rappers. Among the Islamic nationalists, Allen includes “Pete Rock and C. L. Smooth, Lakim Shabazz, Poor Righteous Teachers, Eric B. and Rakim, Brand Nubian, and many others” (Allen Jr., “Making the Strong Survive” 162). Brand Nubian is particularly important to the development of Cepeda’s Pan-Africanism. Allen’s Islamic nationalist are groups and individuals who belong to the FPN, and though the FPN is a splinter sect of the NOI, its members do not consider themselves to be Muslim, so calling them Islamic nationalists becomes a bit tricky, as a deeper investigation of their genealogy and theosophy reveals below.

Although she does not name them, Miyakawa says the FPN belongs to a lineage of black nationalist social trends and spiritual movements that stretch back to the 1800s. However, the twentieth century spiritual, ideological, and organizational ancestry of the FPN includes Noble Drew Ali’s Moorish Science Temple, Marcus Garvey’s UNIA, and Master Fard Muhammad’s Nation of Islam (Miyakawa 9). Clarence Edward Smith founded the FPN in 1964 in Harlem, after breaking away from the NOI because of a disagreement with the teachings of Elijah Muhammad. In the NOI, Smith was known as Clarence 13X, and he was a congregant of Malcolm X’s Temple No. 7. Unlike Elijah Muhammad, Clarence 13X took to heart the NOI doctrine that all Afroethnic men are gods, divine beings. “To

affirm the godliness of all black men,” writes Allen, “without qualification was to relativize divine authority, denying to any one individual the prerogative of spiritual command on earth. Inimical to the centralized leadership of Mr. Muhammad and his ministers, such thoughts would have hardly curried favor in the NOI upper circles” (Allen Jr., “Making the Strong Survive” 165). The NOI leadership excommunicated Clarence 13X for his heresy. Clarence 13X rebranded himself Father Allah and founded the FPN. Father Allah taught that Afroethnic people are not only the original humans, but that they are also divine because of their originality and melaninity.

As a splinter sect of the NOI, the FPN uses the NOI’s Student Enrollment catechism. The first three questions of the Student Enrollment lesson deal with the divine ontology of the “Asiatic Black Man,” the degraded etiology of the “Colored Man,” and the population of the “Asiatic Black Man” in North America:

1: Who is the Original Man?

A: The original man is the Asiatic Black Man, Owner, Maker, cream of the planet Earth, God of the Universe and Father of Civilization.

2. Who is the Colored Man?

A: The Colored man is the so-called white man or caucasian [sic], Yacobs [sic] grafted devil, the skunk of the planet Earth.

3. What is the total population of the Original [Nation] in the Wilderness of North America, and all over the planet Earth?

A: The population of the Original Nation in the Wilderness of North America is a little over 17,000,000 lost-founders, plus 2,000,000 Indians making a total of 19,000,000 and all over the planet Earth 4,400,000,000.

(Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Nation of Islam: Part 1 of 3* 72–73)

Notice that people of Amerindian descent are included in the NOI's concepts of "Original Man," "Original Nation," and "Asiatic Black Man." The concept of the "Asiatic Black Man" comes from the NOI's Lesson No. 1 catechism. In this lesson Fard explicitly teaches that so-called Africans are in fact Asians:

6. Why does the devil call our people Africans?

Answer: To make our people of North America believe that the people on that continent are the only people they have and are all savage. He bought a trading post in the Jungle of that continent, the original people live on this continent and they are the ones who strayed away from civilization and are living a jungle life. The original people call this continent Asia, but the devils call it Africa, to try to divide them. He wants us to think we are all different.

(Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Nation of Islam: Part 2 of 3* 73)

In his essay "'The Asiatic Black Man': An African American Orientalism?," Nathaniel Deutsch writes that Wallace D. Fard, the founder of the NOI, taught that African Americans were "the original black nation of Asia, the Tribe of Shabazz" (Deutsch 196). Fard's successor, Elijah Muhammad, preached panethnic solidarity between

Afroethnics and Asians in the early 1940s, during World War II. Elijah Muhammad was particularly concerned with African American and Japanese solidarity:

On August 16, he [Elijah Muhammad] announced: “The Japanese are brothers of the black man,” and on August 30, he stated: “The Asiatic race is made up of all dark-skinned people, including the Japanese and the Asiatic black man. Therefore, members of the Asiatic race must stick together. The Japanese will win the war because the white man cannot successfully oppose the Asiatics.” (Deutsch 194)

Deutsch traces African American, Chinese, and East Indian reverence for Japan to the Japanese victory in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905. That victory stoked racial pride and gave non-European peoples hope that they could fend off European forces and aggression. In the Midwest, during the 1930s and 1940s, Asian immigrants like Muhammad A. Kahn and Satokata Takahashi promoted African American and Japanese solidarity; the latter was particularly close to Elijah Muhammad (Deutsch 195). The Russo-Japanese War and the pro-Japanese cultural movements are two of the factors that explain how the idea of the Asiatic Black Man became central to the NOI mythos. The mythos of the Asiatic Black Man, however, preceded the creation of the NOI.

Deutsch reveals that the concept of the “Asiatic Black Man” originates with Noble Drew Ali’s Moorish Science Temple of America (MSTA), the first mass Islamic cultural movement in the U.S. Deutsch notes that Noble Drew Ali “was born Timothy Drew in North Carolina in 1886” and was inspired to start his own religion after working in the circus with a “Hindu fakir” (196). Ali concocted his religion

from the mysticism of “white Theosophical and Masonic authors,” writes Deutsch. *The Circle Seven Koran*, the MSTA holy book, pilfers nearly half of its sacred text, nineteen chapters, “from a 1907 book *The Aquarian Gospel of Jesus Christ*, written by Levi H. Dowling (1844-1911)” (Deutsch 201). Noble Drew Ali founded MSTA in 1913 in Newark, New Jersey, one year before Marcus Garvey founded UNIA in Jamaica in 1914 and seventeen years before Wallace D. Fard, founded the NOI in Detroit in 1930. The Noble Drew Ali taught that the “Asiatic Black Man” is “a pan-Asiatic group of peoples which includes Egyptians, Arabians, Japanese, Chinese, Indians, the inhabitants of South and Central America, Turks, and Persians” (Deutsch 196). According to MSTA teachings, mythical Atlantis was also part of the ancient Moroccan empire of the Asiatic Black Man (Deutsch 196; Miyakawa 11). The MSTA discourse of pan-Asian identity envisions Africa as a geographical extension of Asia, if not Afro-Eurasia. Presumably, the concept also includes the indigenous peoples of Oceania. The NOI’s use of the “Asiatic Black Man” construct is a result of its ancestral/structural relationship to the MSTA.

Miyakawa suggests that the NOI started as a splinter faction of MSTA. After Noble Drew Ali “died under rather mysterious circumstances” in 1929, writes Miyakawa, the MSTA split into two groups, “one led by Sheik Timothy Givins El and another by Wali D. Fard (also known as Wali Farad, W. D. Fard, and Wali Fard Muhammad)” (12). The MSTA and NOI pan-Asian identity scheme, if not a unabashed form of African denial and self-loathing, counterbalances the internalized discourse of African inferiority, savagery, and primitivism that was prevalent in the African American community at the time MSTA and NOI were

founded. Whether this type of romantic Orientalism, as Deutsch calls it, is culturally hegemonic is open to debate.

Like its MSTA predecessor, the NOI uses the romantic Orientalist discourse of Asian panethnicity to unify its members. The inclusion of East Asians in the “Asiatic Black Man” racial identity rubric is consistent with the FPN interpretation of the NOI Student Enrollment lessons. According to Yusuf Nuruddin, one FPN adherent claims that “the Chinese and Japanese, all these are original people. They got [i.e. There are] three shades of the black man: black, brown, and yellow. After that it’s grafted. That’s why we’re the most powerful people in the universe, and, on the planet earth” (126). In today’s parlance, the “Asiatic Black Man” would be the so-called “people of color.”

The FPN belief in the divinity of Afroethnic people is also promulgated in the doctrines they devised, rather than the ones they inherited and reinterpreted. The defunct NGE website contains webpages that illuminate their teachings and their mission. One webpage is called “What We Teach” and the other is called “What We Will Achieve.” The first webpage contains the following nine points:

1. That black people are the original people of the planet earth.
2. That black people are the mothers and fathers of civilization.
3. That the science of Supreme Mathematics is the key to understanding man's relationship to the universe.
4. Islam is a natural way of life, not a religion.
5. That education should be fashioned to enable us to be self sufficient as a people.

6. That each one should teach one according to their knowledge.
7. That the blackman is god and his proper name is ALLAH. Arm, Leg, Leg, Arm, Head.
8. That our children are our link to the future and they must be nurtured, respected, loved, protected and educated.
9. That the unified black family is the vital building block of the nation.
(“The Nation of Gods and Earths”)

The “What We Will Achieve” webpage contains the following:

1. National Consciousness [sic]: National Consciousness [sic] is the consciousness of our origin in this world, which is divine. As a nation of people we are the first in existence and all other peoples derived from us. National Consciousness is the awareness of the unique history and culture of Black people and the unequalled contributions we have made to world civilization, by being the fathers and mothers of civilization. National Consciousness is the awareness that we are all one people regardless to our geographical origins and that we must work and struggle as one if we are to liberate ourselves from the domination of outside forces and bring into existence a Universal Government of Love, Peace and Happiness for all the people of the planet.
2. Community Control: Community Control of the educational, economic, political, media and health institutions on our community. Our demand for Community Control flows naturally out of our science of life, which teaches that we are the Supreme Being in person and the sole controllers of our

own destiny; thus we must have same control on the collective level that we strive to attain on the individual level. It is prerequisite to our survival that we take control of the life sustaining goods and services that every community needs in order to maintain and advance itself and advance civilization. Only when we have achieved complete Community Control will we be able to prove to the world the greatness and majesty of our Divine Culture, which is Freedom.

3. Peace. Peace is the absence of confusion (chaos) and the absence of confusion is Order. Law and Order is the very foundation upon which our Science of Life rest [sic]. Supreme Mathematics is the Law and Order of the Universe, this is the Science of Islam, which is Peace. Peace is Supreme Understanding between people for the benefit of the whole. We will achieve Peace, in ourselves, in our communities, in our nation and in the world. This is our ultimate goal.

PEACE

(“The Nation of Gods and Earths”)

The NOI Student Enrollment Lessons, “What We Teach,” and “What We Will Achieve,” reveal the discourse of racial supremacy and cultural nationalism at the core of FPN theosophy and hip-hop.

Unlike the NOI, the FPN considers itself to be a cultural nationalist movement rather than a religion. As demonstrated above, the FPN has a standardized

catechism, but it has no organizational hierarchy, titular leader, or supernatural deity. The FPN recognizes no deity because its members believe themselves to be gods. As a god, each member designs and follows his or her own moral code (Miyakawa 30–31). Because FPN members are gods, they are free to practice FPN principles as they see fit. Miyakawa describes FPN theosophy as “an idiosyncratic mix of black nationalist rhetoric, Kemetic (ancient Egyptian) symbolism, Gnosticism, Masonic mysticism, and esoteric numerology” (23). FPN adherents consider their principles and practices to be a “scientific” philosophy of life and living. FPN members refer to their belief system as a “science,” their adepts as “Scientists,” their process of interpretive analysis as “science-out,” and the oral dissemination of their teachings as “dropping Science” (Nuruddin 123 and 112). The FPN inherited this discourse of science from the NOI.

In “Religious Heterodoxy and Nationalist Tradition: The Continuing Evolution of the Nation of Islam,” Allen, Jr. provides the historical context behind the discourse of science in the NOI’s original theology (i.e. under Fard and Elijah Muhammad).¹¹⁰ In wake of the Industrial Revolution, argues Allen, the material advances and innovations of empirical science posed an ideological challenge to the Judeo-Christian belief in a deity and supernatural entities, actors, actions, and agency. Protestant religious denominations in the U.S. reacted to the Age of Science in various ways, one of which was by embracing or coopting the discourse of science. “No one wishes,” writes Allen Jr., “to appear unscientific in a scientific age

¹¹⁰ Allen Jr. also covers this topic in his article “Identity and Destiny: The Formative Views of the Moorish Science Temple and the Nation of Islam.”

(as the very names of 'Christian Science' and 'Moorish Science' attest), and the Nation of Islam theology bore the imprint of these unsettling trends as well. In the name of science Fard denied the existence of spirit, be it manifested as life in the hereafter or in more exalted form of what he called the 'mystery God' of Christianity" ("Religious Heterodoxy" 9). Fard's atheism, divine humanism, and disbelief in the afterlife gutted the palliative appeal of organized theistic religion; however, Fard recuperated that appeal by "attributing to science the mystical qualities which he had formerly ascribed to the God of Christianity, thereby allowing the supernatural to resurrect itself in numerological garb" (Allen Jr., "Religious Heterodoxy" 9).

By redefining divinity as humanity, Fard brought the spiritual and the supernatural into the purview of the scientific or, more aptly, the pseudoscientific. Using Fard's discourse of science, Elijah Muhammad popularized the NOI's mystifying mythos in *Message to the Blackman in America* (1965). In the chapter called "The Making of Devil," Elijah Muhammad conflates the concepts of sacred, historical, and scientific discourse by claiming that every 25,000 years twenty-four "scientists" write a "history" or "Scripture" for the original people (i.e. the Asiatic Black Man), just as they did when they wrote the Bible and Qur-an.¹¹¹ This

¹¹¹ "We, the original nation of earth, says Allah, the Maker of everything--sun, moon and stars and the race called white race --are the writers of the Bible and Qur-an.

We make such history once every 25,000 years. When such history is written, it is done by twenty-four of our scientists. One acts as Judge or God for the others and twenty-three actually do the work of getting up the future of the nation, and all is put into one book and at intervals where such and such part or portion will come to pass, that people will be given that part of the book through one among that

representative example of the discourse of science in the NOI mythos reveals the origins of the FPN's fetish with science as a word, process, and mystical/spiritual practice. For example, the FPN calls its practice of numerology the Science of Supreme Mathematics and the Supreme Alphabet. The FPN preoccupation with numerology, writes Miyakawa, "finds a precedent in an ancient Muslim interest in cosmology and numerology"; these precedents include "the spiritual science Huruf-i-jay-Hurufa-Ab-jay, an Arabic science of interpreting mystical meanings from each letter of the Arabic alphabet" (29). The FPN uses numerology to "scientifically" demonstrate and reveal racial matters, spiritual concepts, and sociopolitical conditions that they believe to be true. FPN "science," objectively speaking, is best described as a racist brand of esoteric or theosophical humanism.

Cepeda indirectly reveals her familiarity with FPN theosophy when she asks if Lupe also has "knowledge of self." The telling phrase refers to the NOI catechism known as Lesson No. 2. This lesson contains forty questions, and it "teaches a naturalist theory of the universe which denies the idea of life after death as well as

people from one of the Twelve (twelve major scientists) as it is then called a Scripture which actually means script of writing from something original or book.

There is a significance to the number 24 Scientists and the 25,000 years. The number twenty-four Scientists used is in accordance with the hours in our day and the measurement of the circumference of our planet around the Equator and in the region of our Poles, Arctic and Antarctic Oceans.

Our planet is not exactly 25,000 miles in circumference, it is 24,896 and we, according to astronomy, don't have a full 24-hour day but near that-23 hours, 56 minutes and 46 seconds. The change made in our planet's rotation at the Poles is about one minute a year and takes 25,000 years to bring about a complete change in the region of the Poles. The actual Poles are inclined $23\frac{1}{2}$ degrees to the plane of its orbit. The original black nation used 23 scientists to write the future of that nation for the next 25,000 years, and the 24th is the Judge or the one God, Allah. Allah taught me that, once upon a time they made history to last for 35,000 years" (108).

the existence of a 'mystery god.' The only resurrection possible is a revival from 'mental death' (ignorance and superstition). Those who believe in a mystery god are mentally dead. The only 'god' is man himself" (Nuruddin 116). These NOI lessons are the cornerstone of FPN theosophy. Lost-Found Lesson No. 2, written by Fard in 1934, divides people into three categories based on their level of historical awareness and sociopolitical righteousness (Allen Jr., "Making the Strong Survive" 166). These three categories are (1) the 85%, (2) the 10% and (3) the 5%. The definition of each category is defined in the answers to questions fourteen, fifteen, and sixteen of the Lost-Found Lesson No. 2. Combined, these three sets of questions and answers explain the origin of the name Five Percenters:

14. Question: Who is the 85%

Answer: The uncivilized people, poison animal eaters, slaves from mental death and power. People who do not know the living god or their origin in this world and they worship that they know not what, and who are easily led in the wrong direction but hard to lead into the right direction.

15. Question: Who is the 10%

Answer: The rich, the slave makers of the poor, who teach the poor lies to believe that the almighty true and living god is a spook and cannot be seen with the physical eye. Otherwise known as the bloodsucker of the poor.

16. Question: Who is the 5% on this poor earth?

Answer: They are the poor, righteous teachers who do not believe in the teaching of the 10% and are all wise and know who the living god is and

teach that the living god is the Son of Man, the supreme being, the black man of Asia; and teach freedom, justice and equality to all human families of the planet earth, otherwise known as civilized people, also is Moslem and Moslem sons. (Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Nation of Islam: Part 2 of 3*).

Michael Muhammad Knight, in his book *The Five Percenters: Islam, Hip-hop, and the Gods of New York*, explains what the category Five Percenter originally meant in NOI theology: “In its standard interpretation, the five percent would have been the Nation of Islam, while the eighty-five percent was made up of black Christians that had been exploited by the ten percent, the religious establishments” (ch. 3 Clarence and Malcolm). Allen writes that the Five Percenters (i.e. the NGE) interpret “their organizational name in creatively ambiguous ways,” sometimes describing themselves as “Muslims who smoke and drink,” 85 Percenters as “cattle,” and 10 Percenters as “Uncle Toms” (“Making the Strong Survive” 167). Nurrudin rightly contends that the “term *Ten Percenter* is applied by the Five Percenters in reference to either whites or blacks. Hence ‘rich slave-makers of the poor’ or ‘bloodsucker of the poor’ are those who would be called ‘white imperialists and neo-colonialist black bourgeoisie’ in a more developed nationalist ideology” (Nuruddin 122). However, the unambiguous racial particularity and essentialism in the answer to question sixteen exposes the FPN to the charge of black supremacy and racial exclusion.

Knight, a Salafi Muslim and a Five Percent of Irish descent, claims that the charge of FPN racial exclusion is erroneous, but the charge of black supremacy, though accurate, requires more nuance. “There have been numerous white Five

Percenter throughout the community's history," Knight argues. Though racially essentialist, the FPN/NOI myth that the "white man" is a genetically engineered devil is predominantly a moralistic rhetorical device, a metaphor for white hegemony and black fallibility (i.e. Yacub, the mad scientist genetically engineered the "white man" through six hundred years of selective breeding, was an "Asiatic Black Man"). The FPN "white devil" construct, notes Knight, is less about essentialist racial pseudoscience and more about the historical reality of Euroethnic social, political, legal, cultural, financial, and military hegemony, in short, "white privilege" (Knight, "What I Learned from the Five Percenters"). Knight, in his unique parlance, argues that the FPN provides "white" members with the tools, the self-knowledge, to transcend Eurocentric hegemonic thinking and praxis.¹¹²

For members of the FPN, questions and answers 14-16 of the Lesson No. 2 demonstrate that "knowledge of self" is the awareness that there is no deity, no afterlife, and that humans are divine. Nuruddin reads the FPN concept of human divinity through the lens of "self-actualization and transpersonal self-realization." Nuruddin explains that "once a man has mined his own hidden talents or achieved mastery of his own inner powers, he is a God in the sense of being a Creator of his own destiny . . . A Five Percenter is . . . someone who has just begun to study the

¹¹² "A Five Percenter elder told me that if I rejected white supremacy and strove for righteousness, I could not be called a devil; though he believed in the Five Percenter doctrine of white devils, he would not hold that against me as an individual. The answer was not for white people to instantly stop being white, as Malcolm had claimed that Islam would do for them, but to directly confront their whiteness and everything that whiteness does in the world. To be white in America means that I have been groomed to be a devil. The Five Percenters allowed me a space in which I could confess that and work to transcend it" (Knight, "What I Learned from the Five Percenters").

knowledge but has not yet applied it. A God is one who has applied this self-transformative knowledge” (117).

What does Cepeda find appealing about FPN’s esoteric racialist scheme? How does it help her interpret and navigate her life? And what is its relationship to her spiritualism, ancestor veneration, and faith in the science of genetic genealogy.

The FPN “knowledge of self” theosophy plays a significant role in the development of Cepeda’s ethnoracial and political consciousness during her teenage years. During her senior year of high school and her first two years of college, FPN ideology impacts her social and romantic life, so it is not surprising that Cepeda recounts the history of the Nation of Gods and Earths in Chapter 8 *God Bodies and Indios*. In the summer of 1989, the summer of Cepeda’s eleventh grade year, her boyfriend Angel moves to Philadelphia to go to college at Temple University, where he becomes a Five Percenter and changes his name to Infinite Reality. When he visits home, Angel and Cepeda discuss the FPN message in the music of Brand Nubian, making specific references to the album *One for All* and the songs “Wake Up” and “Slow Down.” Angel even chides Cepeda for wearing tight clothing, for not behaving like an Earth and dressing more modestly. Angel speaks of Euroethnics as a race of devils and preaches that God is not a disembodied supreme being but a force that exists “right here in all of us.” Regarding ethnoracial identity formation, Angel uses FPN theosophy to dis-identify with the European aspect of his Hispanic colonial heritage. He views the “white man” as a global oppressor, and laments the fact that Dominicans identify with their European colonizers more than they do their African and Amerindian ancestors: “Look, even in the D.R., the Taíno and Carib

Indians and the Original Asiatic Black man had to contend with those white devil Spaniards. And now look at how we embrace the Spaniard and call ourselves Spanish and white, even when most of us obviously are not" (ch. 8 God Bodies and Indios).

Angel and Cepeda maintain a tenuous long-distance relationship. Cepeda enters twelfth grade feeling that high school, like her primary school St. Thaddeus, is a prison that purposely miseducates Latino youth: "Teachers like mine, who force-feed us more misinformation about our history than we can process, further ingrain the idea that white friends and hardcore mainstream assimilation will bring us a step closer to realizing our parents' sueños" (ch. 8). Although Cepeda resents the pressure the school puts on her to assimilate, she does not realize that she and other U.S. born Latinos apply the same assimilative pressure to island-born Dominicans. Cepeda notes that Dominican-American teens disparage their immigrant counterparts by calling them campesinos and plátanos. They berate the way the immigrant teens behave and dress. The immigrants yell instead of speak, says Cepeda, and they wear sneakers without socks even during the winter. Focusing on hair, one of Cepeda's favorite ethnoracial tropes, Cepeda recalls that the Dominican immigrant guys wear Jheri curls and the immigrant girls press their hair so severely that it smells "as if they're on fire" (ch. 8). Despite the differences between Cepeda and her immigrant compatriots, the Pan-African ideology in FPN hip-hop compels Cepeda to reach out. Cepeda hopes to use FPN ideology to bridge the cultural gap between the immigrant Dominicans and U.S. born Dominican-American kids at her high school. Cepeda's missionary zeal suggests that she believes Dominicans

immigrants are part of the 85%, that their concepts of ethnoracial identity and ethnic solidarity are either illegitimate or nonexistent. It is not clear, even in the above scene from tenth grade with Caridad and Lupe, if Cepeda is an actual member of the FPN or just a fellow traveller. Cepeda's "knowledge of self" seems to come primarily from listening to the music of Brand Nubian and attending their concerts. Lord Jamar, one of the members of Brand Nubian, has a friend that dates one Cepeda's tennis friends.

Regardless of whether Cepeda was a "card-carrying member" of the FPN, she regards its philosophy as an effective cultural tool to unify immigrant and U.S. born Dominican teens at her high school. In a scene in Chapter 8 *God Bodies and Indios*, a scene that mirrors the one between Cepeda and Caridad, Cepeda has a conversation about her mission with a Latina friend who is Puerto Rican and "Black American." The friend thinks that Cepeda's crusade is a lost cause. She says, "Plus, you're blacker than me, *beeyatch*, and they [immigrant Dominicans] don't like that shit." Presumably, the friend means that Cepeda is culturally blacker than she is, not somatically blacker, which is to say that Cepeda identifies with the black nationalist and Pan-Africanist traditions of African American political thought and expressive culture. Dauntless, Cepeda says to her Latina friend, "Maybe I can talk to them about knowledge of self. You know, like 'a supreme mind will take you out of your paralysis'?" The friend suggests that Cepeda is deluded if she thinks that quoting Lord Jamar, from the song "All for One," will be appealing to immigrant Dominican teens. Cepeda tries to ingratiate herself among the immigrant clique, but she soon gives up her crusade. "Besides," she laments, "the *campesinos* don't even notice

when I stop hanging out with them.” The FPN moralism and racial solidarity, as at least as practiced by Angel, is not robust enough to bridge the gap between him and Cepeda. She is “devastated” when he moves in with an Earth in Philadelphia, but once she goes to college, she moves on, developing a relationship with a young man named Chris, who claims he is “part Blackfoot Indian, part soul-broth’a” (ch. 8 God Bodies and Indios).

Cepeda’s investment in the FPN “knowledge of self” rubric helps us understand how she implicitly uses it to interpret her relationships, decolonial consciousness, belief in fukú and spectral natives, and her faith in the revolutionary power of hip-hop and genetic profiling. For example, Cepeda’s father, even though he appears to be an atheist, still belongs to the 85 Percent because he chooses to pass as white and he routinely speaks about immigrant Dominicans as “garbage,” as a people who should be exterminated. Such self-loathing, in Cepeda’s eyes, constitutes mental slavery to Eurocentric thinking and a capitulation to the discourse of white supremacy. For Cepeda, immigrant Dominicans, especially those who alter their natural hair and/or deny their panethnic kinship with other people of African descent, also belong to the 85 Percent because they are “deaf, dumb, and blind” to the efficacy of pragmatic nationalism.

Cepeda consistently tropes her parochial grade school and public high school teachers as part of the 10 Percent. These teachers miseducate the youth because they distort, diminish, suppress, or omit the history of brutalization in the European conquest of the New World. These teachers refuse to honestly talk about the genocide of the Amerindians, the enslavement of the Africans, and the ongoing

pathologies of white supremacy in the maintenance of the New World and the global pigmentocracy.

In Cepeda's life, the five percent, the people with various types of sociopolitical and supernatural "knowledge of self," include Angel, Maria, Casimiro, Five Percenter hip-hop artists, her father, herself, and Bennett Greenspan of Family Tree DNA. Recall that Angel is Maria's son and Casimiro is Maria's common law husband. Maria and Casimiro's home is a haven for Cepeda. Maria and Casimiro become Cepeda's surrogate parents: "More than being Angel's secret girlfriend, I become his mother Maria's de facto daughter. And her man, Casimiro, becomes, by default or kismet, a father figure" (ch. 7 Ave Maria, Morena). The relationship with Angel, Maria, and Casimiro is crucial to the development of Cepeda's racialized spiritualism, which expresses itself both through Santería and the ethnopoetics of FPN theosophy. In this sense, each member of Cepeda's surrogate household has decolonial "knowledge of self."

Angel has orthodox "knowledge of self" because of his membership in the FPN, but Casimiro, an "uneducated raven-complected *campesino*," has a supernatural "knowledge of self" because he practices Santería and possesses the ability to see the indigenous and African spectral natives that walk with Cepeda. Even though Maria eventually maligns Casimiro's Santería as "that *brujería mierda*," she also claims access to supernatural powers. Maria encourages the people in her orbit to heed her dreams, which she believes are prescient. Cepeda also believes in the premonitory power of her own dreams, even in the ones in which the spectral natives do not appear. For example, when Cepeda has a dream that she and Chris

are gunned down in a drive-by shooting, she decides to leave Pittsburgh and go back home to New York. Since Chris's friend stated she had already unofficially dropped out of college, Cepeda had nothing to lose by interpreting her dream as a cautionary omen (ch. 8 God Bodies and Indios).

Years later, when Cepeda repairs her relationship with her father, she learns what she believes is the source of her premonitory powers as well as her ability to sense her personal spirit guides as well as to attract or experience the spirits of the dead in general.¹¹³ Cepeda's father tells her that he was born with a caul, "*una corona*." Cepeda explains the supernatural significance of the caul:

Many caul bearers, spanning centuries and cultures the world over, are believed to be born clairvoyant and to possess other preternatural abilities. Dad believes his caul may be the reason why he was born with "too much vision," resulting in the capacity to see clearly at night. His night vision triggered terrible migraines that only an operation corrected years later. (Cepeda ch. 12 Things Come Together)

Her father reveals three examples of his childhood supernatural powers. First, he dreamed that neighbors would be killed in a car accident. He warned them, but they ignored him and died. Second, he wandered into a wake and revealed to the congregants that the little girl in the coffin was not dead. They took her out and she woke up several hours later. Third, he believes the Yoruba demigod Babalu revealed himself to him as the floating apparition of a "middle-aged peasant"

¹¹³ Cepeda interprets the inexplicable cold spot above the headboard of the bed in her college dormitory room as a ghost, a protective ghost, but one that is not *la india* and *la africana*.

accompanied by “a pair of gigantic black dogs with immaculate fur” (Cepeda ch. 12 Things Come Together). Although Eduardo shares his preternatural stories with Cepeda, she does not reveal to him that she believes she has the same abilities. Eduardo also reveals the history of his abusive childhood in New York. Like Cepeda, Eduardo had been sent from the Dominican Republic to live in New York with his biological father and the father’s second wife. The stepmother did not get along with Eduardo and she made Ismael, Eduardo’s father, permanently throw young Eduardo out of the house, a practice that Eduardo, as an adult, mirrored by locking Cepeda out of his house for hours at a time. Learning about her father’s childhood abuse humanizes him for Cepeda. She is able to forgive him for the abuse he heaped on her. She asks if being a caul bearer helped him survive being homeless on the mean streets of New York for two years. Eduardo says, “*Something* was on my side, with me.” To herself, Cepeda says, “Yes. I *overstand* where Dad is coming from” (Cepeda ch. 12 Things Come Together). Cepeda uses the word “*overstand*” not in its traditional sense (i.e. guard, intimidate, endure, or to sail past a mark), but as sarcastic wordplay for general understanding, as FPN parlance for deep understanding, or as both.¹¹⁴

In addition to the preternatural representations of “knowledge of self,” there are the musical representations of “knowledge of self” in the message rap that Cepeda idolizes and references in *BOP*. Miyakawa writes that conscious rappers “voiced the woes of social inequality and racism” by taking on “black nationalism,

¹¹⁴ For the two definitions of “overstand,” see the OED (“Overstand, v.1”; “Overstand, v.2”).

Pan-Africanism, Islamic doctrine, education, political empowerment, and other social causes as their themes” (2). Miyakawa goes on to say that a number of late 1980s and early 1990s conscious rappers were commercially successful and linked to Islam: “Public Enemy, Brand Nubian, Poor Righteous Teachers, X-Clan, the Jungle Brothers, Queen Latifah, KRS-One, Nas, Busta Rhymes, and the Wu-Tang Clan, had at least nominal ties to Islamic doctrine” (2). In her memoir, Cepeda references several of these same groups--Public Enemy, Queen Latifah, Brand Nubian. She also includes reference to the conscious rap group De La Soul and the FPN rapper Immortal Technique. As demonstrated above, Brand Nubian is the primary source of young Cepeda’s FPN theosophy. Because they believe in their own divinity, “God hop” is the appellation Fiver Percenters apply to their unique brand of hip-hop. The racialized divine humanism of God-hop reinforces the politics of resistance in Cepeda’s decolonial spiritualism.

Like Casimiro, Bennet Greenspan and his company Family Tree DNA posits an esoteric “knowledge of self” that is beyond Cepeda’s complete comprehension yet it is a practice in which she has complete faith. Greenspan is Cepeda’s genetic and genealogical guru. In FPN terms, Cepeda uses genetic profiling to “show and prove” that the conventional divide between scientific and sacred discourse is artificial (i.e. socially constructed). Like W. D. Fard uses numerology, theosophy, and mythology to spiritualize his atheistic brand of Islam, Cepeda uses Greenspan’s genetic genealogy to enhance her reverence for Santería’s Afrosyncretism, confirm her conviction in premonitory dreams, ghosts, and spectral natives, and upgrade her faith in the mystic concepts of kismet, gigul neshamot, and tikkun.

Kismet, meaning destiny or fate, is an early 19th century word of Turkish and Arabic origins. Cepeda uses it three times in *BOP*. In Chapter 1 Love, American Style, she uses it to describe her mother's perception of meeting her husband, Eduardo. She uses it in Chapter 7 Ave Maria to describe how Casimiro became her surrogate father. In Chapter 18 Becoming Latina, the final chapter, Cepeda uses kismet to describe her exceptional role in Dominican history and culture. The invocation of kismet in the final chapter is non-trivial, given that it occurs in concert with an unexpected pregnancy and the mystical concepts of *gigul neshamot* and *tikkun*.

Chapter 18 Becoming Latina is set in 2012 when Djali, Cepeda's first child, is fifteen and one year after Cepeda had a miscarriage. In this final chapter, Cepeda discovers four insights about herself and her culture. One, her maternal "grandfather's direct paternal ancestry is either English or Irish. Two, her father's direct maternal ancestry points to Central Africa. Three, Dominicans, according to Jorge Estevez, a leading Taíno identity movement advocate, can claim to be linguistic, spiritual, or cultural Taínos even if they do not have any indigenous DNA. Cepeda describes Estevez as "dropping science" like a Five Percenter rapper when he promiscuously mixes history, genetics, physiognomy, and personal anecdotes to dissuade listeners of the myth of Taíno extinction. Here, again, we see Cepeda, a hip-hop expert, using Five Percenter theosophy as an interpretive lens for ethnoracial identity formation. The fourth thing Cepeda discovers in this chapter is that she is in the second trimester of a pregnancy and she did not even know she was pregnant. A santero friend predicted the pregnancy months before, saying, "Some of our

spiritual guides are from our previous incarnations and family *eguns*, or ancestors, are supposed to incarnate within the same family. It just may happen for you.” With little or no reservation, Cepeda accepts the santero’s claim that a person’s soul chooses to be conceived, to be incarnated. “I wonder,” says Cepeda, “who this little person who chose me as a vessel is. I hope he or she won’t be as disappointed as I was with my choice in parents. My pregnancy makes me rethink the Kabbalistic concept of *gilgul neshamot*, or the cycling of souls, a term Bennett introduced me to earlier this year.” It is true that Bennett, a believer in evolution and metaphysics, introduced Cepeda to the term, but he himself is skeptical about it as a valid philosophical concept or an objective empirical force.

Cepeda seeks out a Rabbi Rav DovBer Pinson, “head of the Kabbalistic IYYUN Center for Jewish Spirituality in Brooklyn” to explain the concept of *gilgul neshamot* to her. Cepeda brings Jewish mysticism into the contact zone of Five Percenter theosophy and God Hop by troping Pinson as “the Rakim of *gilgul neshmot*,” Rakim being Rakim Allah of the 1980s NGE rap duo Eric B. and Rakim. In a midnight phone conversation, Pinson explains the relationship between *gilgul neshmot* and *tikkun*. *Gilgul neshmot* “means every life we live is a new manifestation of a new reality. A new spiritual constitution arises and a very particular genetic code. The body that we possess throughout life is a direct reflection of our soul, which means our spiritual type,” says Pinson. Pinson describes *tikkun* as “our perfection.” In other words, *tikkun* is the achievement of one’s spiritual purpose for a specific life cycle. This is conceptually akin to Nuruddin’s interpretation of the Five Percenter concept of divinity as self-actualization and self-realization.

Like the santero who ‘predicted’ Cepeda’s pregnancy, Pinson tells Cepeda that Kabbalistic mysticism believes that souls choose “to enter into a particular set of parents, family, and environment. We can even come back in clans where our children may have been our parents in a past life, and our parents, our siblings. Even our friends and close associates can reincarnate in subsequent lives to work something out.” Cepeda comes away from the conversation believing that all the joy and pain in her life is the result of her “kismet.” It was her destiny to have been born Dominican, Pinson tells her, because she has something special, something exceptional to contribute to that culture.

Cepeda’s belief that a soul chooses its corporeal destiny, chooses when and where it will enter history and the material world, bears some critique. Was it the collective kismet, the collective decision, of Indigenous Americans to be conquered by Europeans? Was it the collective decision of enslaved Africans to be enslaved? Did the pre-incarnated souls of Cepeda’s teachers collectively decide to miseducate her? Did the souls of Euroethnic New Yorkers collectively decide to enter the world in order to devalue the lives and well-being of their fellow Latino and Afroethnic citizens in the Reagan era? It is hard to imagine that a pre-incarnated soul would choose to enter the world as an object of abuse, a casualty of a fukú, a victim of history. Or, conversely, that such a soul would choose to be a coconspirator in the creation of worldly misery and suffering. The unstated assumption is that we are talking about mentally, morally, and ethically healthy souls, if it is logical to even talk about souls in the first place or in these ways. The belief in the agency and goodness of the pre-incarnated soul is seductively self-serving. One rarely

questions the moral validity or critiques the logical consistency of such a belief when it favors one's immediate goals or promotes one's special role in the universe. We must be on guard against this kind of exceptionalism because it can be divisive, if not deadly, when it animates nationalist ideologies, institutions, and movements. The racialist catechism of the FPN and Trujillo's authoritarian regime are perfect examples of the deadly consequences.

Conclusion

To conclude, like Santería, clairvoyant dreams, spectral natives, ancestor veneration, and kismet, FPN theosophy plays a crucial role in the adolescent social construction of Cepeda's spiritual identity, so crucial that it carries over into her adult life. The pseudo-scientific, racially essentialist discourse in FPN theosophy particularly conditioned Cepeda to develop a personal philosophy of the supernatural as a scientifically, if not psychologically, explainable phenomenon. As demonstrated in the first section of this chapter, Cepeda's logos and mythos dialectic manifests itself in her claim that genetic profiling "confirms" the ethnicity of her spirit guides, her spectral natives. For the convinced, Cepeda's "ambiguous mix" of the social, the sacred, the supernatural, and the scientific is comforting and validating, but skeptics Cepeda's spiritualization of genetic profiling might seem like just another theosophical hustle, a hustle that reinforces, complicates, and challenges existing ethnoracial hierarchies, logics, and ways of being and identification.

CONCLUSION

While many Afroethnic immigrants of the fourth Great Migration hail directly from Africa, many also come from Latin America and the Hispanophone Caribbean Basin. Increasingly, the Afro-Latinos of the fourth Great Migration are reshaping contemporary African American identity and culture, requiring scholars to redefine conventional notions of African American and Latino literature and identity in the twenty-first century. Scholars in Latino Studies note the African American cultural influences and exchanges that inform contemporary Latino and Afro-Latino literary production, but they tend to explore these intersections in a relatively small set of canonical texts and rarely through an African American literary and cultural studies framework. African Americanists acknowledge the contributions of Afro-Latinos like Arthur A. Schomburg, Nicolás Guillén, and Eric Walrond¹¹⁵ to the development of the New Negro Renaissance, but they often overlook the contributions of Afro-Latinos to “The Contemporary Period” of African American literature.

Until now, there has been little sustained critical attention to the way African American culture and history influence representations of migration, symbolic geography, pragmatic nationalism, and pan-African identity formation in contemporary Afro-Latino *bildung* narratives. This study is part of a wave of recent scholarship that seeks to bridge the disciplinary biases in Latino and African American Studies.

¹¹⁵ Walrond immigrated to Panama from Barbados when he was nine years old and left Panama for the U.S. when he was sixteen.

As a nation, we increase our chances of improving civic engagement, social cohesion, and intercultural solidarity by better understanding the relationship between post-Civil Rights U.S. immigration policies, Latino migration and transnationalism, and African American transculturations in contemporary Afro-Latino literature and culture. This study, *The Afroethnic Impulse and Renewal*, is designed to demonstrate how Afro-Latinos use African American narrative strategies, cultural tropes, and ethnoracial apprenticeships to open the borders between canons and write themselves into the archive of U.S. literary history in ways that require us to expand and redefine conventional notions of African American literature and identity.

From the early twentieth century to the era of the fourth Great Migration, Afro-Latino immigrants, post-immigrants, and intranational migrants have significantly challenged the boundaries of African American literature and culture. Since the mid-1990s, the boom in Latino literature in the U.S. has generated questions about whether literature by Afro-Latino writers constitutes a distinct and significant canon. During the first decade of the twenty-first century, questions arose about whether the term Afro-Latino defines an effective category of ethnoracial identification. Over the same two periods, the questions of who is African American and what constitutes African American literature have been ongoing sources of popular debate in the African American community and of critical inquiry in the academy. While some scholars question the notion of what it means to be African American, many of the authors in the Afro-Latino boom, authors like Evelio Grillo, Veronica Chambers, and Junot Díaz, acknowledge the profound aesthetic and

political influence of traditional conceptions of African American literature and culture on their development as writers and activists. Afro-Latino bildung narratives are a rich source for comparative analysis of African American and Latino literary production because they deal with the pragmatic pleasures and pains of being racialized as “black” in the U.S.

The contemporary Afro-Latino writers in my study share deep intercultural and often politically radical continuities with the African American experience. As I have shown, their bildung narratives function well as case studies for theorizing the contemporary aesthetic in African American literature as the Afroethnic Impulse and the contemporary literary moment as the Afroethnic Renewal, and moment in which the meaning of African American literature and identity is simultaneously being consolidated, expanded, and contested by a variety of Afroethnic communities.

The seven chapters in this study can be grouped into three broad categories: (1) political identity formation, (2) literary ancestries, apprenticeships, and genealogies of influence, and (3) post-Civil Rights coming-of-age narratives. The first, second, and fourth chapters examine the relationship between political and ethnoracial identity formation. In particular, these chapters explore the roles that Popular Front, Civil Rights, Socialist, and Black Power political activism and ethnic nationalism played in the lives of Jesús Colón, Evelio Grillo, and Carlos Moore. The first chapter interprets Colón’s expression of pragmatic black nationalism as a precursor of that same principle in the Nuyorican and Black Arts movements of the 1960s and 1970s. The second chapter, on Evelio Grillo, provides a counterbalance

to the perception of African American radicalism as being a uniquely New York, inner-city phenomenon, which is what we see in Colón and Carlos Moore's memoirs. The fourth chapter brings a true immigrant perspective to the Afroethnic Renewal, given that Moore immigrated to the U.S. from Cuba as a teenager. Moore's account of his childhood in Cuba and his adolescence in New York underscores the profundity of the relationship between U.S. cultural imperialism, Cuban immigration, Afroethnic radicalism, and pragmatic pan-African acculturation.

The third and sixth chapters examine shared literary ancestries, apprenticeships, and genealogies of influence in the works of Piri Thomas and Junot Díaz. Thomas' literary apprenticeship under John Oliver Killens and the Harlem Writers Guild opens the third chapter, which goes on to reveal insights about symbolic geography, indigeneity, and "black cowardice" and infantilization jokes in the development of pragmatic Afroethnic nationalism in Thomas' conception of himself as a Afro-Latino. The sixth chapter uses Junot Díaz's *fukú americanus* trope and his literary ancestor, Piri Thomas, to link the transgressive desires, silences, and traumas in *Drown* and *This Is How You Lose Her* to those in *Down These Mean Streets*, *Youngblood*, and even *Black Cuban*, *Black American*.

The fifth, sixth, and seventh chapters focus on the Afro-Latino bildung narratives of writers born after 1965. The fifth chapter, on Veronica Chambers, considers the links between education, upward social mobility, transethnic acculturation, and the consumerism of Generation X. As in Chambers' memoir, the relationship between upward social mobility and education is a primary concern for Junot Díaz's protagonist Yuniors. The sixth chapter pays attention to the social

mobility metaphors and student/teacher relationships in Díaz's short stories "Drown" and "Miss Lora." The seventh chapter considers how *latinidad*, Pan-Africanism, hip-hop, Five Percenter theosophy, and genetic profiling shape Raquel Cepeda's recollection of her adolescent development. This chapter notes Cepeda's insistence on how culturally insensitive school curricula impacted her self-perception and self-esteem.

Focusing on the understudied transcultural literary genealogies of well and lesser-known Cuban, Panamanian, Dominican, and Puerto Rican memoir writers of African descent yields unprecedented results. There are five thematic clusters in my findings: (1) the link between Afroethnic identity formation and Popular Front coalitions and aesthetics, (2) the class and ideological distinctions between Northern and Southern experiences of Afrolatinidad, (3) the bad mother trope as a common feature of the Afro-Latino *bildung* memoir, (4) the impact of culturally relevant school curricula on the development of the Afro-Latino *bildungsheld*, and (5) the intricate connections between indigeneity, Orientalism, and Afrolatinidad in the U.S. The impact of my research expands the conventional U.S. understanding of the ways in which race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, music, religion, language, and literature enrich and complicate aesthetic, political, and sociocultural solidarities between Afro-Latinos and African Americans from the 1920s to the contemporary moment. My findings also provide a framework for forecasting the sway of a post-embargo influx of Afro-Cuban immigration on U.S. politics and culture.

The scope of this study covers a wide range and depth of Afro-Latino bildung narratives, but there are a number of Afro-Latino texts, poems, short stories, plays, and songs which deserve as much attention as I have devoted to the bildung narratives I selected. My future research on Afro-Latino literature and culture will include short and long-form personal narratives like interviews, personal essays, and jeremiads. For example, the substantial archive of Junot Díaz's interviews is ripe for exploration as are the personal essays of Veronica Chambers, Yvette Modestin, Vielka Cecilia Hoy, Cecilia Rodriguez Milanes, and Nelly Rosario. I will also investigate figures like Juan Williams, author of the jeremiad *Enough: The Phony Leaders, Dead-End Movements, and Culture of Failure That Are Undermining Black America--and What We Can Do About It* (2006). In these texts, I will explore heroic emulation by analyzing how the history of African American political and cultural resistance to assimilation inspires these Latino and Latina writers to hold on to the distinctive elements and traditions of their culture. These writers often pay homage to the African American cultural heroes, social movements, political organizations, and artistic works that gave them the courage to express the distinctiveness of their experiences as Afro-Latinos and Latinas in the U.S. The adversities that African Americans have collectively faced inspire these Afro-Latino and Afro-Latina writers to give voice to their own personal traumas and decolonial politics.

Afro-Latino poetry is another area ripe for exploration under the theory of the Afroethnic Renewal. African American music, singers, dialect, and vernacular idioms are central motifs in *Bluestown Mockingbird Mambo* (1989) by Sandra Maria Esteves, *Where a Nickel Costs a Dime* (1996) by Willie Perdomo, and *Up Jump the*

Boogie: Poems (2010) by John Murillo. These poets explicitly reference the blues, doo wop, R&B, and hip hop. They often use the fusion of African American and Latino foodways to illustrate cultural syncretism and affinity. Masking, social protest, and anti-assimilation are recurrent tropes that connect these poets, who also address the intersections of race and gender when writing about heroic masculinity and female solidarity in the fight against patriarchy within Afro-Latino and African American communities.

Significant intercultural exchanges and influences exist between urban bachata, Soul, R&B, and hip hop in the songs of artists like Leslie Grace, Karlos Rosé, Geoffrey "Prince" Royce Rojas, and Romeo Santos, among others. Several successful, Spanish-language urban bachatas are covers of African American hits from the Civil Rights/Black Power era. These hits include "Be My Baby," "Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow," "Stand By Me," and "I'll be There." Although there may be formal similarities that make Civil Rights/Black Power era ballads structurally translatable into bachatas, it seems that there are cultural reasons that account for why these performers turn to Soul and R&B. Appropriating the Soul/R&B sound and aesthetic is one way to demonstrate the performer's mastery of and fluency in Americanness, a mastery and fluency that is often extended to the performer's ethnic group by association and extrapolation. It may be that a certain strain of bourgeois morality and social conservatism in cross-over bachata, U.S. Dominican culture, and/or the target Hispanophone audiences in the hemisphere account for the attraction to Civil Rights/Black Power era ballads. Contemporary examples of Romeo Santos's neo-soul "duets" with Usher ("Promise") and Drake ("Odio") are counter-examples of

this type of respectability politics. The crossover success of Pitbull, a Cuban American rapper from Florida can be traced back to his association with and tutelage under Lil' Jon, an African America Crunk rapper and record producer from the South. Pitbull's hit "The Anthem," featuring Lil' Jon and its remix "Defense," featuring the Afro-Trinidadian soca artist Machel Montano is an interesting example of Afrofusion that needs critical examination. As I move forward with my research, I will consider the solidarities that form between African Americans and Latinos when geopolitical events concerning U.S.-Caribbean relations spur musical dialogues. For example, Beyoncé and Jay-Z's 2013 trip to Cuba typifies what I mean. The infamous trip inspired political backlash on the internet and on television news/talk shows. Jay-Z responded to the backlash by writing the song "Open Letter." Pitbull added a few lines to a remix of "Open Letter" to demonstrate political solidarity with Jay-Z and by extension the concept of normalizing relationships with Cuba.

By positioning Jay-Z and Beyoncé's trip in the continuum of post-1959 African American travel to Cuba, from Joe Louis to Barack Obama, I will set the stage for a discussion of the implications of a potential post-Castro, post-embargo wave of Afro-Cuban immigration. The cultural impact that a new wave of Afro-Cuban immigrants may have on African American and U.S. Latino music, literature, and culture could be profound. My on-going analysis of the Jay-Z and Beyoncé trip is a prelude for my second book project, *Cuba and Cubans in the African American Cultural Imagination: From Martin R. Delany to Barack H. Obama*, a book project that I anticipate starting in 2018. This book will explore how and why African American

creative writers, journalists, activists, scholars, diplomats, and cultural icons have engaged with Cuba and how that engagement shaped their lives, careers, and African American literary and social movements from 1859 to the end of the Obama presidency. The focus on immigration closes the thematic loop between this dissertation and the second project by returning to the opening concept of the fourth Great Migration and how it gave rise to the Afroethnic Impulse and Renewal.

The chief contribution of this current study to U.S. Literature is the concept of the Afroethnic Renewal. As should be conceptually clear by now, the Afroethnic Renewal and its attendant aesthetic are not exclusive to African Americans and Afro-Latinos. Anglophone U.S. writers who are either foreign-born Africans or have at least one parent who is or was an African national fall under the aegis of the Afroethnic Renewal. These writers, to name a few examples, include Barack Obama, Philippe Wamba, Victor LaValle, Farai Chideya, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, NoViolet Bulawayo, and Yaa Gyasi. The writings of U.S. Afro-Trinidadians Rosa Guy, Horace E. "Steve" Carter Jr., and Elizabeth Nunez are ripe for recovery and rehabilitation under the Afroethnic Renewal. The Cave Canem poets, Callaloo Fellows, Hurston/Wright Award Winners, and VONA workshop participants certainly include writers who would also fit the period and the aesthetic. There is ample territory to cover in the Afroethnic Renewal and much of it remains underdeveloped and unexplored.

To conclude, *The Afroethnic Impulse and Renewal: African American Transculturations in Afro-Latino Bildung Narratives, 1961 to 2013* reveals new literary histories and intercultural influences between African Americans and Afro-

Latinos. This study builds interdisciplinary bridges between African American and Latino Studies and contributes new insights about Afroethnic transculturation in the burgeoning field of Afro-Latino Studies. My research expands and clarifies the meaning and discourse of Afroethnic identity in the U.S. and lays a foundation for cultural affinities and political alliances between African Americans and the Afro-Latinos of the fourth Great Migration.

The inclusivity and expansiveness of the Afroethnic Renewal does not pose a threat to African American literature because African American literature and culture have always been transnational and transcultural. Arthur A. Schomburg, Claude McKay, Marcus Garvey, Stokely Carmichael, Junot Díaz, Audre Lorde, Paule Marshall, Jamaica Kincaid, and Edwidge Danticat are examples of Afroethnic immigrants and post-immigrants who substantively shaped African American history, culture, and literature. If anything, the Afroethnic Renewal offers African American Studies opportunities to be even more relevant than it has been since its inception. The Afroethnic Renewal suggests that the use of African American cultural models and modalities by writers, artists, actors, intellectuals, and musical performers of Afro-Latino descent has the potential to be leveraged to construct mutually beneficial institutional collaborations, liberatory pedagogies, and political coalitions.

The history of transcultural influences between Afro-Latinos and African Americans may be the catalyst needed to spark innovative strategies of social justice, strategies that seek to divest abstract ethnosomatic categories (i.e. "black," "white," "brown," and *mestizaje*) of their biological, metaphysical, and

transhistorical power, allowing the adoption of the more inclusive and pragmatic concept of Afroethnicity. In the near future, more and more U.S. municipalities and cities will be populated and governed by post-immigrant Afro-descendants from the Caribbean, the Americas, Africa, Europe, and Asia. As this happens, African Americans will need some form of common ground on which to build sustainable economic, social, and political solidarities in the twenty-first century. The Afroethnic Renewal provides the cultural rationale needed to build bridges across potentially divisive streams of immigration, cultural difference, and social heterogeneity. African American Studies is uniquely equipped and positioned to articulate and engineer that vision using the concepts of the Afroethnic Impulse and Renewal.

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