Are You Black or Latino? 
Being Afro-Latino in the U.S.

Juan A. Godoy Peñas
Harvard University

Abstract: Ever since the US Census Bureau first collected the number of immigrants of Latino or Hispanic origin residing in the country in 1970, that number has continued to grow. This demographic transformation has brought multiple changes to American society, forcing it to rethink various social aspects, such as social class, immigration or race. Thus, the conflict between the racial systems prevailing in the United States and in Latin America has plunged Latinos of color into deep silence for years. Therefore, this study aims to build, first of all, a framework for discussing the current status of Afro-Latinos in the U.S. Second, it analyzes the construction of a trifold conception of identity that emerges from the fact of residing in the U.S. by examining the work of several African-American writers living in this country. It then attempts to establish some points of contact between Afro-Latinos and the U.S. African-American community. Finally, it suggests new lines of research on the individual and collective impact of Afro-Latinos in the United States of America.

Keywords: Afro-Latinos, Afro-Americans, race, triple identity, United States of America

1 [Editors’ note: This is an English translation, offered by the Observatorio, of the Spanish original submitted by the author. See study 062-06/2020SP.]
1. Introduction

In January 2020, the nominees for one of the Western world’s most prestigious awards, the Oscars, were announced. Following the announcement, the entertainment news magazine, Deadline, mentioned the nomination of two actors of color: the first, black British actress Cynthia Erivo, and the second, Málaga-born actor Antonio Banderas. Vanity Fair corroborated this claim and again labeled Banderas as an actor of color. However, this caused a significant stir in Hispanic networks and on Hispanic media, which have never referred to the Spaniard as a person of color. In response to this scandal, both journals made corrections, though Vanity Fair stated: “While Spaniards are not technically considered people of color, it should be noted.”

2 Months earlier, Barcelona-born singer Rosalía was called Latina, Hispanic, and European during the MTV Music Awards. Beneath these polemics lies the existing problem of different conceptualizations of “race,” as well as the controversial racial classifications that exist in different countries. When the magazine Vanity Fair says that Spaniards are not considered people of color, to what, exactly, is it referring? Is this a direct relationship between nationality and race? Who decides whether or not someone is a person of color? From the perspective of those who identify as people of color? Are “white” people not people of color (white)? Is it simply a matter of skin color? Is it an individual choice or, to the contrary, a social construction?

2 The pronoun ‘it’ refers to Spaniards’ skin color.
In 1970, the U.S. Census Bureau began gathering information on the number of immigrants of Latino or Hispanic origin who were arriving in the country, as well as additional data including their income, level of education, country of origin, etc. At that time, according to the Census, 9.1 million Hispanics lived in the U.S., 4.5% of the national population. Forty-eight years later, in 2018, this figure had reached 18.1%, with 58.9 million Hispanics living in the U.S. (Hernández and Moreno-Fernández, 2018, p. 5). However, despite the obvious growth in the number of residents of Hispanic or Latino origin, this growth does not appear to have ended. Studies suggest that by 2060, the U.S. population will include 111 million Hispanics; that is, 27.5% of the U.S. population (Vespa, Armstrong, y Medina, 2018, p.7). Even so, as Rosana Hernández and Francisco Moreno-Fernández rightly point out, Latino migration to the U.S. has changed drastically in the past several years, both in its composition and distribution across the country. First, the growth rate has decreased from 43.1% between 2000 to 2010 to 16.6% between 2010 to 2017. Second, Latino migration has recently begun occupying new areas in the northeast of the country, whereas it had previously been concentrated in the Southwest (2018, p. 7). Finally, although more migrants continue to arrive from Mexico than from any other country, followed by Puerto Rico, Cuba, and El Salvador, immigration from Mexico has decreased since 2007, while migration from Central America has grown, with Salvadoran migration increasing 19%, Guatemalan migration increasing 31%, and Honduran migration increasing 32% (Cohn, Passel, and González-Barreda, 2017).

However, the U.S. Census Bureau takes a “pan-ethnic” view of the Latino community, as Atiya Kai Stokes-Brown points out (2012, p. 2). This view encompasses peoples and/or communities with similar historical or cultural experiences in the U.S. who converge into a single force whose ethnic unity is linked to broader matters involving politics and social movements (García 2005, p. 12). This results in the construction of a group based on a common cultural affiliation that transcends

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3 For tables and greater detail on Hispanic and Latino immigration to the U.S., see the study by Rosana Hernández and Francisco Moreno-Fernández (2018).
geographic borders. As Silvio Torres-Saillant recognizes, this notion of collective identity, which emerges in the U.S. due to Latinos’ political, economic, and cultural “otherness” in contrast with los estadounidenses “conceals the tensions, inequities, and injustices in our midst, contributing to a conceptual ambience that legitimizes the absence of black and Indian faces and voices from Latino fora” (2002, p. 444). In this way, the “pan-ethnic” view of the Hispanic or Latino community conceives of Latinos as an ethnic singularity, relegating other important aspects of identity, such as race, to the category of secondary characteristics. Although the pan-ethnic Latino view has indeed had significant political strength in the U.S. for many years (Stokes-Brown, 2012, p. 2), it is equally true that it has ignored an important portion of the Latino community including, for example, Afro-Latinos, for whom the term “Afro” plays a determining role when it comes to defining their identity and feeling like members of a community.

Therefore, before conducting an in-depth analysis of the data from the U.S. Census Bureau, it is important to clarify what is understood by “race,” and to what the concept of “ethnicity” refers. Although the terms are often used interchangeably, they are not synonyms. Although the word “ethnic” comes from the Greek term ethnos, which approximately means ‘nation,’ this does not refer to a political union, but rather to the union by blood or descendants, as described by Cornell and Hartmann (1998, p. 16). In fact, both researchers assume Richard A. Schermerhorn’s definition of an ethnic group, which states that it is “a collectivity within a larger society having real or putative common ancestry, memories of a shared historical past, and a cultural focus on one or more symbolic elements defined as the epitome of their peoplehood” (Cornell and Hartmann, 1998, p. 19). These symbolic elements referred to by Schermerhorn may include language, religion, or physical characteristics, to name a few. Therefore, the concept of ethnicity is based on kinship, a shared history, and certain symbols typical of a group’s identity. Springboarding from this definition, Cornell and Hartmann delve a bit deeper, distinguishing between “ethnic identity” and “ethnic category” (1998, p. 20). The former depends on the particular affirmations that
a group makes concerning its own ethnicity, while the latter is shaped by the affirmations that one group makes with regard to another. It is important to bear this in mind as we analyze U.S. Census data, which speaks of “ethnic category” rather than “ethnic identity.” In this way, it becomes clearer that it is the U.S. government that imposes an “ethnicity” on citizens, and not the citizens who express their “ethnic identity” freely.

Furthermore, despite some researchers’ years-long efforts to define “race” as a distinctive element of genetic origin, it is a fact that today, most scientists dispute this notion. The term “race,” like “ethnic group,” is not based on a natural element, but on the perception of individuals; it is based, normally, on some shared physical attributes. Thus, Cornell and Hartmann define it as “a human group defined by itself or others as distinct by virtue of perceived common physical characteristics that are held to be inherent” (1998, p. 24). However, determining what attributes construct a “race” and who chooses those attributes entails an imposition by one group upon another, as was the case with the concept of “ethnic category.” Given that race is a social construct based on the assumption of a group of individuals, it can be assumed that racial categories can change with time, as this essay will demonstrate. The people with a role in making such changes is another element worthy of consideration, especially in the case that concerns us here, in that the U.S. government imposes racial categories that may be selected when Latinos complete their Census questionnaire.

Now, if we closely examine the surveys that the U.S. Census Bureau uses to conduct a count of its citizens, we see that it gathers demographic information on Latinos from two different perspectives, though both fall under the heading “Hispanic or Latino” and “Race.” In the first, from the point of view of ethnicity, the individual must select between “Hispanic or Latino (of any race)” and “Not Hispanic or Latino.” Individuals who select the first of these categories must then choose between “Mexican,” “Puerto Rican,” “Cuban,” and “Other Hispanic or Latino.” If they select the second, “Not Hispanic or Latino,” then they must select one of the following five racial
categories: “White alone,” “Black or African American alone,” “American Indian or Alaska Native alone,” “Asian alone,” “Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander Alone,” or a sixth option, “Some other race alone.” Only individuals who have selected “Not Hispanic or Latino” can select “Two or more races.” Therefore, as numerous critics have pointed out, place of origin or ethnicity and race are treated as separate concepts (Stokes-Brown, 2012, p. 2; Golash-Boza and Darity, 2008, pp. 900-901).

**Table 1.** ACS Demographic and Housing Estimates. (U.S. Census Bureau 2017.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HISPANIC OR LATINO AND RACE</th>
<th>Total population</th>
<th>Hispanic or Latino (of any ra...</th>
<th>White alone</th>
<th>Black or African American an...</th>
<th>American Indian and Alaska...</th>
<th>Asian alone</th>
<th>Native Hawaiian and Other...</th>
<th>Some other race alone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total population</td>
<td>325,719,178</td>
<td>325,719,178 (X)</td>
<td>18.1%</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexican</td>
<td>36,648,018</td>
<td>+/- 93,695</td>
<td>+/- 93,695</td>
<td>+/- 47,935</td>
<td>+/- 40,628</td>
<td>+/- 40,628</td>
<td>+/- 96,763</td>
<td>+/- 96,763</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puerto Rican</td>
<td>5,588,664</td>
<td>+/- 47,935</td>
<td>+/- 47,935</td>
<td>+/- 40,628</td>
<td>+/- 40,628</td>
<td>+/- 40,628</td>
<td>+/- 96,763</td>
<td>+/- 96,763</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cuban</td>
<td>2,315,863</td>
<td>+/- 40,628</td>
<td>+/- 40,628</td>
<td>+/- 40,628</td>
<td>+/- 40,628</td>
<td>+/- 40,628</td>
<td>+/- 96,763</td>
<td>+/- 96,763</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Hispanic or Latino</td>
<td>14,273,599</td>
<td>+/- 96,763</td>
<td>+/- 96,763</td>
<td>+/- 96,763</td>
<td>+/- 96,763</td>
<td>+/- 96,763</td>
<td>+/- 96,763</td>
<td>+/- 96,763</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Hispanic or Latino</td>
<td>266,873,044</td>
<td>+/- 10,193</td>
<td>+/- 10,193</td>
<td>+/- 25,021</td>
<td>+/- 25,021</td>
<td>+/- 25,021</td>
<td>+/- 96,763</td>
<td>+/- 96,763</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White alone</td>
<td>197,285,202</td>
<td>+/- 25,021</td>
<td>+/- 25,021</td>
<td>+/- 25,021</td>
<td>+/- 25,021</td>
<td>+/- 25,021</td>
<td>+/- 96,763</td>
<td>+/- 96,763</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian and Alaska</td>
<td>2,145,162</td>
<td>+/- 20,808</td>
<td>+/- 20,808</td>
<td>+/- 20,808</td>
<td>+/- 20,808</td>
<td>+/- 20,808</td>
<td>+/- 96,763</td>
<td>+/- 96,763</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian alone</td>
<td>17,999,846</td>
<td>+/- 36,667</td>
<td>+/- 36,667</td>
<td>+/- 36,667</td>
<td>+/- 36,667</td>
<td>+/- 36,667</td>
<td>+/- 96,763</td>
<td>+/- 96,763</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Hawaiian and Other</td>
<td>546,778</td>
<td>+/- 14,210</td>
<td>+/- 14,210</td>
<td>+/- 14,210</td>
<td>+/- 14,210</td>
<td>+/- 14,210</td>
<td>+/- 96,763</td>
<td>+/- 96,763</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some other race alone</td>
<td>833,698</td>
<td>+/- 29,253</td>
<td>+/- 29,253</td>
<td>+/- 29,253</td>
<td>+/- 29,253</td>
<td>+/- 29,253</td>
<td>+/- 96,763</td>
<td>+/- 96,763</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the U.S. Census Bureau’s other survey, citizens can also select between the categories “Not Hispanic or Latino” and “Hispanic or Latino.” However, if they select the latter, they must indicate, as people who were not Hispanic or Latino had to select in the earlier survey, one of the five racial categories described above. In this case, however, they have not one, but two additional options: “Some other race alone” and the subgroup “Two or more races.”

Table 2: Hispanic or Latino Origin by Race. (U.S. Census Bureau 2017.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Estimate</th>
<th>Margin of Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total:</strong></td>
<td>325,719,178</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Net Hispanic or Latino:</strong></td>
<td>266,873,044</td>
<td>+/-10,193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic or Latino:</td>
<td>58,846,134</td>
<td>+/-10,193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White alone</td>
<td>38,222,255</td>
<td>+/-129,528</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or African American alone</td>
<td>1,263,898</td>
<td>+/-30,842</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian and Alaska Native alone</td>
<td>58,116</td>
<td>+/-25,927</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian alone</td>
<td>215,492</td>
<td>+/-11,841</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Island</td>
<td>61,441</td>
<td>+/-5,971</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some other race alone</td>
<td>15,719,942</td>
<td>+/-116,920</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or more races:</td>
<td>2,782,906</td>
<td>+/-52,159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two races including Some other race</td>
<td>1,288,966</td>
<td>+/-51,146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two races excluding Some other race...</td>
<td>1,493,934</td>
<td>+/-34,721</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ultimately, the pan-ethnic view of the Latino community and the approach of the U.S. Census Bureau have hindered the possibility of carrying out precise studies on the number of Afro-Latinos and Asian Latinos, among other groups in the U.S. This, in turn, complicates the process of identifying and analyzing the roles that these identity groups currently play in U.S. society. In 2016, for example, a representative questionnaire of nationality in the U.S. asked members of the Latino population for the first time if they considered themselves Afro-Latinos. According to the results, 24% of Hispanics in the U.S. identify as Afro-Latino. These results further suggest that it is more likely for Latinos of color with Caribbean roots to identify as Afro-Latino (or as Afro-Caribbean) than their counterparts born in places such as Colombia, Venezuela, or Argentina (34% vs. 22%). As for their place of residence, Afro-Latinos are concentrated mainly (65%) on the East Coast and in the South. It is also common for those who identify as Afro-Latinos to have been born outside the U.S. (72%); only 24% have a university education, and they are more likely to belong to low-income families.

(López and González-Barrera, 2016). Finally, it is noteworthy that, when asked directly about their race, only 18% of Afro-Latinos identify their race as black. In fact, 39% identify themselves as white alone or white with some other race; 24% stated that their race was “Hispanic,” and only 9% identified as mixed-race (López and González-Barrera, 2016).

In view of this situation, this study has several goals. First, it aims to establish a framework for discussing the current status of Afro-Latinos in the U.S. To that end, it will examine racial classifications in both the U.S. and Latin America to reveal the identity “void” faced by many such individuals who do not fit within the prevailing racial classification in the U.S. Second, it will analyze the construction of a trifold conception of identity that emerges from the fact of residing in the U.S. by examining the work of several African American writers living in the U.S. It will then attempt to establish points of contact between Afro-Latinos and the U.S. African-American community on both a demographic and a cultural level. Finally, it suggests new lines of research on the individual and collective impact of Afro-Latinos in the U.S.

2. Afro-Latino invisibility in the U.S.

In 2003, John R. Logan conducted a study on the racial identification of Latinos in the U.S., taking information gathered by the U.S. Census Bureau (Public Use Microdata Samples) into account. He considered three specific moments in history: 1980, 1990, and 2000. Throughout his study, he alludes to three racial groups: the first, which he calls “Hispanic Hispanics,” is made up of those who did not feel identified by the terms “white, black, or Asian” and who identified as “Latino, Hispanic” or another, similar term; the Census refers to these individuals as “some other race.” Second, he discusses Black Hispanics, who, in 2000, accounted for nearly one million permanent residents in the U.S.; this group consisted mainly of Dominicans and Puerto Ricans, though a quarter were also black Mexicans. According to the Census, this group
identified as black alone or in combination with another race. Logan notes that there is some possible overlap between these individuals and those identified as “Hispanic Hispanics,” as 120,000 of the latter also identified as black. Finally, Logan discusses white Hispanics, of whom 96% identified as white; and the remaining 4% formed part of a sector that identified as neither “other race” nor “black” (2003). At that time, Logan had already perceived an increase in what he called “Hispanic Hispanics” as a social trend that was emerging from the void that existed between Hispanics of a given race and the non-Hispanic white majority. A year later, Bonilla-Silva claimed that U.S. racial categorization had evolved, as the bi-racial system that had existed until that point had become a more complex tri-racial classification that resembled those in Latin America and the Caribbean (2004, p. 932). Thus, he identified three racial groups: “whites,” “honorary whites,” and “collective blacks.” He further highlighted that the gradation of color played an increasingly prominent role in social stratification, which made it possible to find blacks, Latinos, and Asians in any of the three of his proposed racial categories (2004, p. 941).

In 2008, Golash-Baza and Darity also carried out a study to determine the racial identification that Latinos would make in the future. To do so, they used two databases (the 1989 Latino National Political Survey and the Pew Hispanic Center/Kaiser Family Foundation 2002 National Survey of Latinos). After conducting their research, the results agreed with those of Bonilla-Silva: they stated that in the future, Latinos would be most likely to identify themselves outside the binary black/white system, considering themselves “some other race” (2004, p. 929). However, both critics specified that it was quite difficult to discern the route that Latinos would take in terms of a future racial identification, given that, as we have seen, the experiences of Hispanics living in the U.S. have a profound impact in terms of categorizing themselves

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6 The category “whites” includes: “Whites, new whites (Russians, Albanians, etc.), assimilated white Latinos, some multiracials, assimilated (urban) native Americans, a few Asian-origin people”; “honorary whites” includes: “Light-skinned Latinos, Japanese Americans, Korean Americans, Asian Indians, Chinese Americans, Middle Eastern Americans, most multiracials, Filipino Americans”; and “collective blacks” include: “Vietnamese Americans, Hmong Americans, Laotian Americans, dark-skinned Latinos, Blacks, New West Indian and African immigrants, reservation-bound Native Americans” (Bonilla-Silva, 2004, p. 933).
as members of a given race. Skin color is, in fact, of enormous importance in such experiences and in social interactions, which Golash-Baza and Darity have termed “racialized assimilation” (2008, p. 930).

Seventeen years later, however, the data reflect significant changes (see Table 3). Some 64.95% of the Hispanic population living in the U.S. identified as white, while only 2.14% racially self-identified as black. Furthermore, 26.71% seemed not to identify with any of the proposed racial categories and identified as “another race.” Finally, 4.72% identified as two or more races.

Table 3: Racial classification of Latinos according to 2017 data from the U.S. Census Bureau. (U.S. Census Bureau 2017.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hispanic or Latino:</th>
<th>58,846,134</th>
<th>100%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White alone</td>
<td>38,222,255</td>
<td>64.95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or African American alone</td>
<td>1,263,898</td>
<td>2.14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian or Alaska Native alone</td>
<td>581,116</td>
<td>0.98%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian alone</td>
<td>215,482</td>
<td>0.36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander alone</td>
<td>61,441</td>
<td>0.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some other race alone</td>
<td>15,719,042</td>
<td>26.71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or more races</td>
<td>2,782,900</td>
<td>4.72%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If we consider the three racial categories presented by John R. Logan and compare the data from 2000 with those of 2017, we see that a striking “whitening” process took place during the first two decades of the 21st century (see Table 4). In 2020, 47.4% of Hispanics identified with another race apart from the options white, black, and other proposed by the Census Bureau, while in 2017, only 31.41% identified with such a designation. This leads us to wonder how the remaining 15.99% that no longer view themselves as “Hispanic Hispanics” identify. It is worth noting that this number of citizens has begun identifying as Hispanic whites, who, in 2017, accounted for 66.69% of Latino immigrants to the U.S. Of this group, 64.95% identified as white alone, while the remaining 1.74% included Asians and Native Americans. This whitening process is even more striking if we consider the data from 1980 and 1990 that John R. Logan also provided in his article, which revealed a drop in the number of Hispanic immigrants to the U.S. who considered themselves white alone (63.7% in 1980, 53.9% in 1990, and 49.0% in 2000). Not only has the number of Hispanics who consider themselves members of another race decreased, but so has the number of Hispanics who identify as black.

Table 4: Comparison between data provided by John R. Logan with 2017 data gathered by the U.S. Census Bureau (presented in Table 1) adapted to Logan’s racial classification.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hispanic or Latino:</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic Hispanics</td>
<td>47.4%</td>
<td>31.41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Hispanics</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>2.14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Hispanics</td>
<td>49.9%</td>
<td>66.39%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These data seem to be more consistent with the study conducted by Yancey, who opted for the possible expansion of the “white” racial category. Yancey argues that the definition of who is white is not static and that some individuals who did not identify as white at that time may do so in the future, as their children and grandchildren
integrate into the dominant culture (2003, p. 3). Furthermore, several earlier studies demonstrate that Latinos recognize the advantages of identifying as white (Darity, Dietrich, and Hamilton, 2005; Rodríguez, 2000).

Although it is difficult to identify the reasons that prompted a “renaissance” of the whitening process in the past few years, it is useful to reflect on what factors may have influenced this phenomenon. Furthermore, it is also worth recalling that whitening within Latino culture is not a new phenomenon, but rather, as Mark Sawyer points out, a process that has been taking place since the birth of Latin American nations (2005, p. 272). Successive attempts to create “white” nations are linked to the idea that racial mixing would eliminate the negative influence of indigenous people and blacks. Thus, it is not surprising that a whitening process occurs among Hispanics after they reach the U.S., since, additionally, there is the African-American population to consider, which occupies the lowest echelon of the social hierarchy (2005, p. 272).

What is surprising, however, is the twist that takes place between 2000 and 2017, in which Latino whitening in the U.S. increases, though decline had been constant in the latter decades of the 20th century.

First, it is important to consider diverging conceptualizations of the term race. For this study, I am interested in the line of research that argues that racial identity is in constant flux, as it is the product of the negotiation between the individual and society (Cornell and Hartmann, 1998; Nagel, 1994). Joana Nagel asserts that race is not simply a historical legacy of immigration and conquest, but an element that is constantly being redefined and reconstructed through a dialogue that involves external and internal process and opinions, as well as the self-identification of the individual and the racial designation of the other members of the community (1994, p. 154). Furthermore, by understanding race as a social construct in a continual process of transformation, the status of Latinos in the U.S., especially of Afro-Latinos, and the way they identify racially becomes even more complex, as they are affected not only by how race is shaped in their country of origin—and to be sure, the diversity of Latinos’
countries of origin must also be considered—but also by the conceptualization of race in the U.S. More importantly, they are affected by the possible clash of these two views. Therefore, as Atiya Kai Stokes-Brown notes, “the manner in which Latinos racially self-identify is not only a product of individual preferences and choice, but of the social and political construction of the concept of race and racial boundaries in the U.S.” (2012, p. 3). Furthermore, Rodríguez points out that, given Latinos’ origin from countries where racial barriers are not so rigid, they often identify with more than one race (2000, p. 16).

Upon arriving in the U.S., Latinos, and especially Latinos with a mixed racial background, regardless of how this translates with regard to skin color, face a culture shock brought about by the prevailing racial paradigm in the U.S., which is based on white vs. black. Many Latinos, especially those from countries with a large number of racially mixed citizens, are accustomed to broader racial conceptualizations: “many Latin American and Caribbean countries have a ternary model of race relations that acknowledges intermediary populations of multiracial individuals” (Stokes-Brown, 2012, p. 4). For example, Jorge Duany, in a study on the racial representation of Puerto Ricans in both Puerto Rico and the U.S., states that at least 19 different categories are used to refer to various skin colors in Puerto Rico (2005, p. 173). This multiplicity of categories is why Duany states that “popular racial taxonomies in Puerto Rico cannot be easily reduced to the white/black antithesis prevalent in the United States” (2005, p. 174). Furthermore, he states that, in contrast to the racial division into two branches, white and black, in the U.S., Puerto Ricans group people into three categories: black, white, and moreno, according to skin pigmentation and other

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8 The opposition between black and white in the U.S. does not seem to be so rigid, as several researchers who have studied the social differences between people of color with different levels of pigmentation have demonstrated. For example, Keith and Herring carried out a 1991 study with information from 1970 and 1980, in which they demonstrated that “skin tone and other contemporaneous factors were more strongly related to stratification outcomes than were such background characteristics as parental socioeconomic status” (1991, p. 777). More recently, Ellis P. Monk Jr. also noted that “skin tone stratification among black Americans persists into the 21st century” as, after studying information collected by the National Survey of American Life (2001-2003), he could see that “skin tone is significantly associated with black Americans’ educational attainment, household income, occupational status, and even the skin tone and educational attainment of their spouses” (2014, p. 1313).
physical traits, such as facial characteristics or hair type, rather than merely origin (2005, p. 174). In the Dominican Republic, where, according to Silvio Torres-Saillant and Ramona Hernández, nearly 90% of the population identifies as black or of mixed black and white background, Dominicans seem to be willing to claim their blackness when they reach the U.S., as they are aware that, in many instances, the U.S. population does not distinguish between Haitians and other dark-skinned people of Caribbean origin, with whom they join in the struggle for survival (1998, pp. 143-144). In fact, Torres-Saillant and Hernández suggest that “some members of the community may go as far as to uphold radically Afrocentric views of Dominican culture and ethnic identity” (1998, p. 145).

However, after immigrating to the U.S. and facing a racial system based largely on white and black, Latinos must reidentify to adapt to the racial classification of their new home. This situation is of critical importance for those who arrive in the U.S. as adults. In contrast, those who are born in the U.S., or brought early in life, experience this circumstance differently, for which reason they configure their own racial identity differently. This racial differentiation between Latinos born in Latin America and those born in U.S. territory plays an important role in understanding the whitening process to which this study has been referring. In 2004, Sonya Tafoya carried out a study that included the information gathered by the U.S. Census Bureau in 2000 and which accounted for the importance of other factors such as place of origin, citizenship, education, and age when making racial classifications to reveal a regular pattern that would condition such a classification. This study discovered that an individual’s place of birth, in the U.S. or elsewhere, was a key element in racial classifications (2004, p. 1). She found that 46% of Latinos born outside the U.S. selected “some other race,” as versus 40% of those born in the U.S., with the exception of U.S.-born Cubans. Thus, “foreign-born Latinos more often say they are ‘some other race’ (46 percent) than the native-born (40 percent)” (2004, p. 7).
Furthermore, if we look at the number of naturalized Latino immigrants, between 2% and 6% more—depending on country of origin—identify as “white” in comparison to their non-naturalized counterparts. We see this pattern again if we look at indicators on education, employment, and income, according to which Hispanics who select “some other race” have more tenuous financial circumstances than white Hispanics in the U.S. (Tafoya, 2004, p. 7). Tafoya concludes that “the U.S. born children of immigrants are more likely to declare themselves white than their foreign-born parents, and the share of whiteness is higher still among the graduation of immigrants” (2004, p. 1). Tafoya asserts that Latinos determine their race in relation to their feeling of belonging: “U.S. citizenship is associated with racial identification. Among immigrants from the same country, those who have become U.S. citizens identify themselves as white more often than those who are not U.S. citizens” (Tafoya, 2004, p. 1).

Now, considering that in 2000, only 40% of the Latino immigrants were born outside the U.S., and considering the drop in Latino immigration between 2010 and 2017 (from 43.1% to 16.6%), we can state that in 2017, far more Latinos were born in the U.S. than abroad. This, taken together with the conditions described above, sheds light on why, in recent years, the trend forecast at the beginning of the century has been broken, and there are more Latinos who identify in the category of “whites.”

If, as we indicated earlier, more Latinos who opted for “other race” in 2000 described themselves as white in 2017, we should conduct an in-depth analysis of what social and political changes took place in the U.S. over the course of the 21st century. We should also review what image such changes projected in Latin America, in order to understand why there are more Hispanics born in the U.S. or abroad who identify as whites, thereby determining how the experiences of Latinos, according to the theories of Golash-Baza and Darity (2008), also affected this phenomenon. We can assume that African-American activist political movements, the African-American population’s denunciations of the violations of their human rights in the media in
recent years, as well as the racist comments from a major portion of U.S. society that argues for the racial supremacy of whites have affected Latinos’ decision to attempt to “whiten” their racial identity with the goal of assimilating, settling in, or “acculturating” in U.S. society in a more peaceful manner. It is important to remember that racial identification has certain social and political implications that can define citizens’ lives. In the article with which this section opened, John Logan highlights that white Hispanics enjoy the most stable socioeconomic situation among Latinos, even though black Hispanics have more years of education (11.7 years among black Hispanics as versus 10.5 years among other Hispanics). Furthermore, the unemployment and poverty rates are lower among white Hispanics (2003, pp. 2-3). Logan explains how what he calls “Hispanic Hispanics” find themselves halfway between white Hispanics and black Hispanics in terms of income, unemployment, and poverty, which could also help us understand this “whitening” process to which I have been referring, based on 2017 data.

After studying the “whitening” process that the Latino population in the U.S. is experiencing, and after analyzing the ethnic and racial separation carried out by the U.S. Census Bureau, we face a serious problem: Where do we situate those individuals whose self-identification is the product of a combination of their ethnic and racial identities? In other words, where are the Afro-Latinos? Afro-Latinos, like Latino Asians and other smaller groups, are, once again, the victims of a rigid system that does not reflect their situation. How many of those 2,782,900 Hispanics who resided in the U.S. in 2017, and who identified as belonging to two or more races, view themselves as Afro-Latino? How many of those 1,263,898 black Latinos consider themselves Afro-Latino?10

9 Joane Nagel has highlighted that the processes of assimilation, settling in, and acculturation “have been seen as long-term, often intergenerational, frequently involving the dissolution or blending of immigrant or minority ethnicities into a larger dominant ethnicity or nationality” (1995, p. 949).

10 Although the concept of “Afro-Latino” is widely used in the U.S., this is not the case in much of Latin America, for which reason many Latinos of color do not view the concept of “Afro-Latino” as representative of their identity.
3. Being Afro-Latino in the U.S.: double or triple identity?

“Our choice 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” (2000, p. 12). These words from Evelio Grillo are irrefutable proof of the identity crossroads at which Afro-Latinos in the U.S. have found themselves, and where they continue to find themselves. These crossroads are determined by the confrontation of three elements of identity: origin, race, and place of residence. Thus, from childhood, Evelio Grillo, born to working-class Cuban parents in Ybor, Florida, had to navigate the quandary of being American, being black, and having Cuban ancestry. However, this interrelationship between the three concepts poses several questions: What does it mean to be Afro-Latino? And American Afro-Latino? How can these three elements form an integrated identity? Is there a hierarchy among them? Is there a difference between those Afro-Latinos born in the U.S. and those who arrived as adults? Can we talk about the Afro-Latino experience as unique or, to the contrary, does this also vary according to the individual’s particular Latino ancestry?

The term “Afro-Latino” has been used mainly by international agencies to refer to individuals with African ancestry in Latin America and the Caribbean (Flores and Jiménez, 2009, p. 319). It exists alongside other terms, such as “black,” “Afro-descendant,” and “Afro-Latin American,” although the term “Afro-Latino” seems to have achieved the most widespread international recognition, particularly following the emergence of anti-racist movements. The prefix “Afro” clearly refers to these individuals’ African ancestry, regardless of their skin color. Even so, its meaning carries other social and political connotations depending upon the context in which it is used. In Latin America as well as the U.S., the prefix “Afro,” has been used as a tool to combat the homogenization inherent in the national rhetoric (Flores and Jiménez, 2009, p. 320). Furthermore, in the U.S., the prefix “Afro”, together with “Latino,” has shed light on the cultural and socioeconomic diversity within that community, which is otherwise
hidden behind the pan-ethnic conception of Latinos that was discussed in the first section of this study.

Furthermore, the term Afro-Latino has a broader scope, as it helps to shape a transnational discourse that bonds Latinos with African ancestry, beyond the regional and national borders of the various Latin American countries. Thus, the physical presence of Afro-Latinos in the U.S. invites them to do away with geographic borders in search of an “Afro” community with which they share historical and cultural traits, as noted in the examples below.

In 1982, Guillermo Wilson, who had been in exile in the U.S. since 1959, published three poems in the journal *Afro-Hispanic Review*, of which he was the founder: “Desarraigado,” “In Exilium,” and “Cabanga Africana.”¹¹ In all three, he notes the transnational cultural fusion that prevails after the prefix “Afro.” Thus, in the first poem, he refers to his cultural mestizaje (mixture) by calling out to his “Abuelita africana,” then highlighting his own Gongoric tongue, Nazarene litany, and Flamenco dance. In the second, he writes “ASHANTI soy / y me dicen / carlos.” The convergence of Ashanti, an African people of Ghanaian origin, and the clearly Spanish name Carlos signals Afro-Latin roots as an element of identity. It is also significant that the term “ASHANTI” appears entirely in upper case, while the name itself is written in lower case. Furthermore, the title that appears under the label “IN EXILIUM” brings the question to an even higher level by introducing a third element of identity, a new geographic space, in this case, the U.S. Furthermore, the first lines of each of the stanzas in this paragraph allude to the discrimination and marginalization he may have experienced due to his African ancestry, as each of them reflects negative aspects of that heritage: “¡Qué desgracia!” (v. 1), “¡Qué insulto!” (v. 5) y “¡Qué infamia!” (v. 9). Finally, in the third poem, he references the history of slavery, a bonding element between African

¹¹ Unlike the titles “IN EXILIUM” and “CABANGA AFRICANA,” which appear in upper-case and left-aligned, the title “Desarraigado” appears in the upper part and in lower-case, such that we could think of not as the title of the first poem, but as the header that unites all three poems, leaving this particular poem untitled.
Americans and Afro-Latinos, through the lines: “Me arrebataste de mi / QUERIDA AFRICA / con un diluvio de latigazos” and to his situation of foreignness upon finding himself in an “extraña cultura.”

In Tato Laviera’s case, a simple look at the titles of the poems gathered in his book *Mixturao and Other Poems* (2008) testify to that awareness of a triple identity that appeared in the title of the second section of this study. “Latino,” “Indigenous,” “Tesis de Negreza,” “Bilingüe,” “Harlem Elder Odes” and “Innocence (to 9/11)” are only a few of the poems in this work, which constitutes a perfect testimony to the identity situation that Afro-Latinos face in the U.S.

Furthermore, Afro-Puerto Rican Willie Perdomo, in his poem “Nigger-Reecan Blues,” refers to his triple identity by writing “Yo soy Boricua! Yo soy Africano! I ain’t lyin’ ”(1996, p. 19). The merging of his ethnicity with his race and the use of English offer a glimpse into the three cultural worlds in which the poet moves. Perdomo also acknowledges having experienced the same discrimination as the African-American population due to the color of his skin: “Every time I go downtown la madam blankita de Madison Avenue sees that I’m standing next to her and she holds her purse just a bit tighter. Cabdrivers are quick to turn on their Off-Duty signs when they see my hand in the air” (1996, p. 19). At the same time, Perdomo deals with his identity not just from his own individual perspective, but also through the eyes of the other, of the collective, as the poem begins with someone else asking him a question: “Hey, Willie. What are you, man? Boricua? Moreno? Que? Are you Black? Puerto Rican?” (1996, p. 19).

These examples, to which we could add many others drawn from texts by Jesús Colón, Ernesto Quiñonez, Thomas Piri, or Junot Díaz, are witness to the conception of triple identity that Afro-Latinos face when living in the U.S.
However, just as we argued for the need to move past the limits of a pan-ethnic Latino conception, it would also be a mistake to state that the Afro-Latino experience is the same in all countries. As Suzanne Oboler and Anani Dzidziienyo claim, “the experience of blackness is heterogeneous depending on historical and cultural characteristics as well as the demographic composition of each group” (2005, p. 16). Several critics have highlighted the historical and ethnic diversity within the Latino community (Flores and Yudice 1993, p. 193; Torres-Saillant, 2002, pp. 437-438). However, the fact that it is still necessary to claim diversity within the Latino experience has made it difficult to conduct a sufficiently in-depth analysis of the plurality within the Afro-Latino community. The previous section demonstrated how the culture clash that Latinos experience when adapting to the bi-racial categorization in the U.S. varies according to their country of origin. Thus, it would also be interesting to explore how the experience of blackness in various Latin American countries diverges and how it affects Afro-Latinos’ assimilation in the U.S. In fact, in his study “Raza, racismo, e historia: Are all of my bones from there?” Roberto Márquez studies the configuration of blackness and mestizaje in Latin America by analyzing how different historical moments of conquest, the slave trade, mestizajes, and social-political relationships have affected the configuration of different conceptualizations of race in various Latin American regions. This study also strengthens the need to delve into the particulars of the concept of “Afro-Latino” so that, in a second phase, it would also be possible to determine how these particulars affect that conception of triple identity with which we began this section, and which arises after their arrival or birth in the U.S. In this way if we consider the variety within the “Afro-Latino” concept imported from Latin America as well as the black racial diversity within the U.S. (African Americans, blacks of Caribbean origin from English-speaking nations, black immigrants from Africa), we find a far more plural racial outline of blackness in the U.S. that has yet to receive proper attention. Thus, it is clear, once again, that the Afro-Latino population in the U.S. holds a prominent place in the development and emergence of a more critical approach to the racial and social protocols not just in Latin America, as Márquez suggests (2000, p. 18), but also in the U.S.
4. Contact points between Afro-Latinos and the African-American community in the U.S.

In the previous section, we concluded that Afro-Latino immigration in the U.S. expanded the country’s racial spectrum. Now it is time to analyze the contact points between the Afro-Latino and African-American community in the U.S. to determine if, as Juan Flores and Miriam Jiménez Román argue, the prefix “Afro” “serves to link struggles and declare community of experiences and interests,” in this case, between both social groups (2009, p. 320).

From an analytical point of view, several critics have identified numerous commonalities between the two communities. In 1989, Denton and Massey affirmed that, like African Americans in the U.S., black Hispanics were more segregated than white Hispanics. Furthermore, they suggested that, in terms of spatial distribution, “black Hispanics are very segregated and are much more like U.S. blacks than white Hispanics” (p. 800). In terms of social distance, they also demonstrated that black Hispanics are closer to U.S. blacks, and that it was even more likely for these groups to share a neighborhood with the latter than with themselves, that is, with other black Hispanics (1989, p. 802). Later, in 2000, Alba, Logan, and Stults bolstered Denton and Massey’s claim in terms of disparities between the residential situation of black Hispanics (2000, p. 617). Also in 2000, Revel Rogers wrote: “Latinos, Afro-Caribbeans, and other non-white immigrants will have incorporative political experiences much like those of African Americans” (2000, p. 18). Setting aside the distinction between Latinos and Afro-Caribbeans (erroneous, in my view, as there are a significant number of Afro-Caribbeans who also identify as Latino), the study nevertheless makes several interesting points. From the perspective of minority groups, it stipulates that racial minorities share a common situation of oppression that, inevitably, hinders and complicates their political incorporation (Rogers, 2000, p. 19). This idea is closely linked to what we argued in the previous section on the transnational discourse, whose voice is the Afro-Latino community. However, it raises two additional issues that require
greater attention: first, a comparative study with other minority groups and their incorporation in the U.S., such as, for example, Asians or Indians; that is, if there are commonalities between Afro-Latinos and African Americans because they are both minority groups, those commonalities ought to be shared by other minority groups beyond those particularities added by the prefix “Afro”;12 and second, it is worth considering whether the shared situation of oppression is determined by race or by the fact of being a minority and, if the latter, if they share the same situation with individuals from other minority groups, such as, for example, the LGBTQ community. This also leads us to question in what way that situation of oppression shared by Afro-Caribbeans and Latinos in the U.S. intensifies for those individuals who are part of that minority group due to various aspects of their identity and if, in some way, it is possible to observe the same situation among Afro-Latinos in the LGBTQ community and LGBTQ African Americans.

Another important difference that Rogers identifies between African Americans and non-white immigrants lies in the inequalities that emerge from the mechanisms of assimilation. Afro-Caribbeans, and also perhaps Afro-Latinos (that is, non-white immigrants), may enjoy choices or cognitive strategies for assimilation that derive from voluntary immigration, whereas, in the case of African Americans, these choices and strategies would not be available, given their particular history in the U.S.13 Another element that differentiates these groups is the transnational identity discussed at various points in this study. Rogers argues that Afro-Caribbeans, like Afro-Latinos, as Flores and Jiménez Román pointed out (2009, p. 320), present a transnational identity oriented toward their countries of origin and which divides their emotional and cognitive ties between two nations: the identity of their country of origin and that of the

12 Rogers refers to other minority groups such as Asians, but a more thorough comparative study is necessary to determine the similarities between Afro-Latinos, African Americans, and Asian Americans. In a later phase, it would be interesting to address comparative studies with individual Afro-Latinos who are part Asian and who have also emigrated to the U.S., to identify how they relate with the different minority groups mentioned.
13 Contrary to Rogers’ arguments, the immigration of all Afro-Caribbeans or Afro-Latinos is not voluntary, but rather, in many instances, is the product of forced political exile, as is the case of Cubans, Chileans, and Venezuelans, among others, at different moments in history. The socio-economic situation of their countries also makes the adjective “voluntary” very questionable in relation to immigration.
U.S. By contrast, Rogers argues that African Americans determine their identity with respect to the U.S. (Rogers, 2000, p. 39). However, this raises a new quandary regarding Afro-Latinos born in the U.S.: is their transnational identity also linked to that double “homeland” that Rogers describes or, rather, is it a double identity that is not linked to any particular territory, but rather a feeling of pan-ethnic Latino community? This question is of particular importance if we recall Sonya Tafoya’s discoveries; she affirmed that second- and third-generation Latinos were more inclined to declare themselves white and that for Latinos, race was a system for measuring belonging (2004, p. 1). Springboarding from the U.S-white binary position, it is possible to think of that transnational identity taking a different shape in future generations, whose identities may begin taking forms closer to those held by African Americans.

Rogers also points out that “Unlike African Americans, however, they [Afro-Caribbeans] do not have reference to a collective memory of long-standing racial suffering in the US” (2000, p. 45). Although it is true that neither Afro-Caribbeans nor Afro-Latinos have that memory of racial discrimination in the U.S., it is impossible to deny that many of them have a similar memory from their countries of origin. Although there exists the thesis of racial democracy in Latin America, according to which the nations of that territory do not suffer from racial prejudice (Degler, 1986; Freyre, 1951; Hoetink, 1967), numerous critics have dismantled that theory (Marx, 1998; Nobles, 2000). As Peña, Sidanis and Sawyer have written, following the lead of Marx, Moya-Pons, and Nobles: “Latin American countries have a history of ‘Whitening’ privileges and laws that give jobs, land, tax breaks, and other benefits to European and Asian immigrants in an effort to decrease the relative portion of Blacks in Latin societies” (2004, p. 750).

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14 We cannot ignore the discrimination that some Caribbean countries experienced during the time of American domination, such as the Dominican Republic between 1916 and 1924 (García-Peña, 2016).

One merely has to turn to the recent example of Carlos Acosta, the protagonist in Icíar Bollaín’s film *Yuli* (Calderwood, Egan, Gordon, and Bollaín, 2018), which recounts the life of the first Afro-Cuban dancer in Cuba. In the film, the protagonist’s father, Pedro Acosta, reminds his son of the collective memory of racial discrimination to which Rogers refers: “Por tu sangre corren 350 años de esclavitud. Y eso deja marca, hijo, en la cabeza, en el corazón y hasta en el nombre, Acosta, esas son las marcas que nos separan.” [Three-hundred and fifty years of slavery run through your veins. That leaves a mark, son: in the head, in the heart, and even in your name, Acosta; those are the marks that separate us.] Evelio Grillo also alludes to the collective history of suffering stemming from being black: “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” (2000, p. 44).

Furthermore, among those born in the U.S. who belong to second or third generations, that collective memory may have been transferred to these individuals when they identified as black and were educated in black institutions and raised in black settings. In reference to this phenomenon, Grillo writes: “My acculturation by the black American community of Tampa had taken. I thought black American. I felt black American. So, generally, my classmates took me in as just another black boy” (2000, p. 66). Thus, in many cases, that “difference” to which Rogers alludes is blurred and, rather than dividing communities, we could say that it unites them.

In 2003, comparing Afro-Latinos with African Americans, Logan demonstrated that both groups, on average, have lower incomes and higher unemployment and poverty rates than the average for non-black Hispanics (2003, p. 3). He also discovered that both black Hispanics and non-black Hispanics have similar experiences of discrimination from whites, according to the metropolitan areas in which they live. The difference is that black Hispanics live in areas with a larger number of Hispanics (2003,
In fact, Evelio Grillo, cited earlier, explains that in his city of origin, Ybor, Florida, “black Cubans and White Cubans lived apart from one another” (2000, p. 9) and that “black Cubans and black Americans lived together” (2000, p. 10). When he moved to Washington, D.C., to study at Howard University thanks to grants created to support black youths, he also moved to a black American neighborhood (2000, p. 60). One particularly interesting piece of information that Logan provides is the fact that the degree of discrimination between African Americans and Afro-Caribbeans (from non-Spanish-speaking countries) is greater than that which exists between non-black Hispanics and black Hispanics. Thus, he argues that “black Hispanics potentially provide a bridge between the black and the Hispanic communities” (2000, p. 10), as African Americans seem to be more disposed to accept Spanish-speaking Latinos than English-speaking Latinos and, in this way, black Latinos may act as a bridge between non-black Latinos and African Americans.

Although this information would seem to foster social and political closeness between these two communities, it remains to be seen if, from a cultural point of view, both communities also have commonalities where the “Afro” once again emerges as a bridge. Flores and Jiménez Román have argued that it is in music, more than anywhere else, where the greatest convergence between Afro-Latino culture and African-American culture has occurred. In the case of Afro-Cuban music, they offer the example of “Cubop,” which was born in the 1940s as a result of the fusion of both cultures (2009, p. 324). Furthermore, in the field of religion, Jadele McPherson carried out a very interesting study on Afro-Cuban and African-American fusion in the practice of African religions in Chicago. She asserts that the practices of Ocha, Palo, and Spiritism construct shared narratives that link the experiences of African Americans and Afro-Cubans with the Afro-Atlantic diaspora (2007, p. 122). After a study of the houses where such practices are carried out, she found that all of them are made up of adherents with both Afro-Cuban and African-American backgrounds (2007, p. 127). Thus, she concludes that Ocha, Palo, and Spiritism are “part of a socio-cultural system that African Americans and Latinos utilize to create their own narratives of their cultural
and historical legacies in the United States and abroad” (2007, p. 133). Although it is true that studies on the relationships between African Americans and Afro-Cubans, as well as Afro-Dominicans and Afro-Puerto Ricans, are more extensive, there is a profound historiographic silence regarding the relationships between African Americans and the other subgroups of Afro-Latinos. In fact, McPherson highlights the existence of an Afro-Peruvian Catholic Saint, San Martín de Porres, within the practices of Afro-Cuban religions in Chicago. However, to my knowledge, few studies explore, for example, the relationship of Afro-Peruvians to religions of African origin. Furthermore, it is notable that in a study of Latino religions in the United States, such as that conducted by Peggy Levitt (2002), the only mention of religious practices with African origins by Afro-Latinos in the U.S. is in a line highlighting the Afro-Caribbean influence on Puerto Rican and Mexican religious practices (2002, p. 154).

On the other hand, from a literary point of view, Doris Sommer has analyzed the persistence of the African imprint on the most important Afro-Latino writers, some of whom are or were U.S. residents, such as Carlos “Cubena” Guillermo Wilson and Tato Laviera (2018). Juan Flores has also highlighted the work of Arturi Alfonso Schomburg for his contributions to knowledge of the black world and his interest in the role of Afro-Latinos in the U.S., to the point that, according to Flores, it functions as a nexus between the Afro-Cuban poet Nicolás Guillén and African-American writer Langston Hughes (2005). Furthermore, William Luis has analyzed the African presence in literature written by Afro-Caribbeans both in the U.S. and elsewhere. The writers he highlights include Jesús Colón, who, according to Luis, was “visibly Afro-Puerto Rican and was treated as an African-American” (2013, p. 37). Luis also notes the role of Felipe Luciano as a bridge between African American and Afro-Puerto Rican communities (2013, p. 38). Similarly, the abovementioned poem by Willie Perdomo (see p. 20) tackles how dark-skinned Puerto Ricans define their identity when living in

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16 For more information on religious myths of African origin in Cuba, see the work by Alberto Sosa (2019).
17 In the story “The Mother, the Young Daughter, Myself and All of Us,” (1982), he recalls his experience of discrimination due to the color of his skin, despite his Latino or U.S. origin. In a conversation between two of the characters, one tells the other: “I won’t sit beside no nigger.”

We need more studies that explore the role of Afro-Latinos’ role as a link with African Americans through other cultural aspects, such as art, food, and dance. However, these examples are sufficient indications to assert that, in the case of these two groups, the term “Afro” not only links people of African heritage, but also, as Alejandro de la Fuente suggests, it reflects processes of “creolization, hybridization, syncretism, and cultural nationalization” (2018, p. 354).

5. Conclusions

Vielka Cecilia Hoy, a California resident born to black parents—a Nicaraguan mother and a Panamanian father—describes her experience filling out one of the Census Bureau forms with her two cousins:

“Ethnicity? What are you going to check, Lucia?” Mayra asked.

“Costa Rican.”

“That isn’t an ethnicity, it’s a nationality,” I responded. “Besides, you were born in Nicaragua.”

“But I feel Costa Rican and what is it with these options? I’m not White or Black.”

“How do you figure? You look Black to me,” I challenged.

“They mean Black like you, not Black from anywhere else. And there isn’t any such thing in Costa Rica. Everyone is just Costa Rican.”
“What makes someone Black like me”?
“Born in the United States. I don’t think you can even say Nicaraguan. You are African American now. So I’m putting Costa Rican and checking Other” (pp. 427-428).

The confusion when filling out the ethnicity category, the dilemma people face when having to choose between White and Black, the different conceptualization of “blackness,” as well as the association between blackness and the U.S. and, therefore, the “conversion” of an Afro-Latino into an African American because she is black and was born in the U.S., demonstrate the complex identity issues that Afro-Latinos face in the U.S.

However, this situation does not seem to have an easy solution. Edward Telles writes that the U.S. Census Bureau has proposed the most significant change to the questions of race and place of origin since, at least, 1980 (2018, p. 156). This change consists of two actions: on the one hand, the drafting of a single question that eliminates the question on the Latinos’ place of origin; and, on the other hand, the obligation to add the category Hispanic/Latino as race (2018, p. 156). In this way, Latino/Hispanic would be another race, the same as white, black, and all the other categories that I noted at the beginning of this study. However, this change still leaves Afro-Latinos in limbo, as, regardless of the format, they would still be unable to identify themselves as such. Although this is simply a proposal, it seems that the future for Afro-Latinos must follow other roads, as the U.S. government is not contemplating the identification of Afro-Latino as an option.

Given this reality, the status of Afro-Latinos in the U.S. simultaneously encourages us to rethink the racial history of the U.S. and raises the challenge of questioning the black/white binary. Thus, the presence of Afro-Latinos expands the North American concept of race, which can be used as a tool for awareness to help put an end to the episodes of discrimination that racial minorities have experienced in the
U.S. At the same time, it encourages us to explore the connections between other minority racial groups—not just African Americans, as this study has expressed, but also other minority groups, such as Asian Americans and Native Americans. In this way, Afro-Latinos operate as a tool for dialogue with other minorities. However, to achieve this, researchers must further study the influence of Afro-Latinos on different aspects of cultural and social life in the U.S. with a view to, in a later phase, carry out comparative studies with other minorities.

Furthermore, it is also interesting to address the relationships that emerge between Afro-Latinos and other minority groups, not just from a racial point of view, but also from the perspective of other subordinate aspects, such as gender, sexuality, and religion. Although Karen Juanita Carrillo rightly affirmed that “Latinos and Blacks have one key uniting factor, though: they are both marginalized by the United States’ dominant white culture” (2017, p. 6), these are not the only two groups that have a shared experience of marginalization by the dominant culture in the U.S. Therefore, we should expand our horizons to address the relationships of power not just from the viewpoint of race, but also through the lens of other minority elements, thereby making the bridges of communication far more enriching for a shifting U.S. society.

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