

4. Enrique Patterson, "Cuba: La nación a la luz de las transiciones," *Encuentro de la cultura cubana* 6-7 (1997): 227.
5. Enrique Patterson, "Racismo, totalitarismo, y democracia," *Encuentro en la red*, November 9, 2007, <http://www.cubaencuentro.com> (site visited on December 24, 2007). The quotations in the three paragraphs following are also from this essay.
6. Enrique Patterson, interview with the author, December 28, 2007.
7. Édouard Glissant, *Poétique de la relation* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990), 83.
8. Enrique Patterson, "Un testimonio de negras y mulatas," *En Nuevo Herald*, March 1, 1999, 13A.
9. Patterson, "Cuba," 229.

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Reflections about Race by a Negrito Acomplejao

When I started talking, and later on, writing about racial matters in the mid-1980s, my father told me, "Eduardo, tú eres un negrito acomplejao" (Eduardo, you are a Black man with a complex).¹ This comment irritated me beyond belief not only because it downplayed the significance of my work on race but, more importantly, because it came from my father, whom I love dearly and who also happens to be a Black Puerto Rican. How could he, of all people, say something like this? I fought with him and reminded him of a few racial incidents in his own life. I reminded him how, when I was ten years old or so, a clerk in a shoe store treated him like dirt because he was Black (one of my first clear memories of racial discrimination). I reminded him how he had been "elevated" to "negro pero decente"² (Black but decent) by "White"³ members of our family because he was a university professor. I reminded him of how he was insulted by the father of my first wife (a mulatto himself but with green eyes)⁴ because he was Black. I reminded him about how few Blacks were ever hired as professors in the university and how he knew that race was a factor in this state of affairs. I reminded him of many, many things, but there was no agreement as he translated all these things as examples of individual prejudice⁵ rather than of "systemic racism."⁶

This argument with my father led me to reflect on the many ways race mattered in my life as a child and as a youngster in Puerto Rico. I think of the overt ways in which race affected me, fully aware that in Puerto Rico, as in most contemporary racial orders, race also matters in ways that are not visible to those who experience discrimination (e.g., teachers not giving students equal opportunity in the classroom, employers not hiring people or denying them promotions because of racial considerations, etc.).

Very early on in my life I noticed that I received less affection from my immediate and extended family than did my siblings. Without having the

tools to understand why this was the case, I struggled as a child. I pondered things no child should ponder: Why doesn't mami love me as much as Pedro or Karen? Why do my White family members (at the time, I did not see them as White but just as "family") seem so distant? What have I done not to deserve the same level of affection as my siblings? Although race was likely not the only reason for the lesser affection I received from my family, it was definitely a factor.⁷

As I grew up, I heard all sorts of racist statements about Blacks from some of my aunts and even from my own mother. They referred to young Blacks as *cocolos* and *cafres*,⁸ and said all sorts of nasty things about the "Black side" of our family,⁹ such as "You know, your aunt does not know better because she is accustomed to living in shit" or "Eduardo, those people do not have class." (I struggled with these comments for a long time as I somehow felt those people were not just "them" but me!) And although these views were uttered in private, they must have affected social interaction as several members of the Black side of our family fought back and referred to some of the White members of my family as *blanquit@s* (whiteys).¹⁰

A good example of how racial perceptions affected social relations was the interaction that occurred at events such as weddings. I remember, for instance, attending weddings where these racial divisions led to what I might call a "soft" segregation: Whites and honorary Whites (such as my immediate family) sat at one set of tables while Blacks and mulatto family members sat at other tables.¹¹ I remember (and still observe) how social interaction among the various sides of my family varied according to their race. If the interaction was between Whites and non-Whites, the exchanges were more formal; interactions between same-race people were less formal and deeper.

As a child struggling for affection and identity, I remember how much I loved visiting members of the Black side of our family (mostly from my father's side). They always welcomed me with open arms whereas my White family members treated me in a more formal, distant manner. (I am now forty-six years old and this emotional situation has not changed at all.) As I matured and recognized (albeit incipiently) the racial roots of some of these family dynamics, I raised hell with my immediate family and created friction because my mother (a *mulata* with a Ph.D.)¹² did not like to associate with the Black side of my family. And as I gained partial racial consciousness about my own Blackness, I raised the issue vociferously every time I could. (To this day, this friction is still part of our family life and a reason why I do not travel as often as I should to my own homeland.)

Although gaining partial racial consciousness¹³ gave me a tool to understand things and fight back, "seeing" how race mattered in my life was also extremely painful for me. The insults and affronts to my dignity and self-esteem experienced during my youth clearly demonstrate that race matters deeply in our Americas.

El Negrito Acomplejao becomes a "Blican" and Tells His Brethren What Is to Be Done

One fundamental difference between racial structurations such as that of the United States or South Africa and that of most others in the rest of the world¹⁴ is that the former produce clear demarcations of racial groups and we versus them racial situations while "plural orders" produce malleable racial lines where racialized people are less likely to gel as groups and are thus less likely to develop a fully clear racial consciousness. Not surprisingly, it is when we—Blacks from the Americas—migrate to the United States that we develop a strong racial consciousness that then helps us revisit and rethink our personal and collective history.

I came to the United States in 1984 as a Puerto Rican with an admittedly tenuous racial consciousness. After a few years I became a "minority" and, within four years after coming to this country, I became fully racially conscious and began referring to myself as a Black Puerto Rican (I started my racial identity process before the current movement toward the usage of the term "Afro-Latin@"). As a sort of joke, I refer to myself nowadays as a "Blican" (Black Puerto Rican), thus poking fun at Tiger Woods who labeled himself "Cablinisian" (Caucasian, Black, Indian, and Asian).

And what can a Blican tell Afro-Latin@s about what they will experience in the United States and what they can do to fight back?

1. For those new to the United States racial boat, be prepared. In the "mean streets" of America you are not likely to be recognized as a "Latin@."¹⁵ Instead, you are more likely to be viewed and treated as a *negro* (a Black person). This will have monumental implications for your life, and you had better learn this lesson quickly.

2. Afro-Latin@s must resist the temptation to participate in the game of racial innocence that their families play. That is, we must learn our histories and not repeat the nonsense we hear in our communities, such as the idea that racism is just a United States problem and that we do not have racial problems "back home."

3. We must understand that our Latin@ communities are also internally fractured by race and that, therefore, the "enemy" for us here is not just

White gringos. Watch out for friends and families telling you about the "morenos" or the "molletos" (two terms Latin@s use to refer to African Americans). Today they talk about them, but tomorrow they will talk about you. And the lessons about plural orders and the experiences I've narrated about my life in Puerto Rico may happen to you here with Latin@s, so watch out for blanquit@s in your communities.

4. Although I believe that Afro-Latin@s must develop solidarity with African Americans, I also know that African Americans can treat us as "lesser" Blacks. Thus, we must also work hard to educate Black folks here. We must let them know that we, Blacks from the Americas, have a longer presence and history in the "New World." We must also remind them that "Blackness" is a construction and, as such, many of the folks they count as Black came from the Caribbean and Latin America. And this historical trend will continue, so it is in their best interest to be more pluralistic and understanding of us, Afro-Latin@s. Coalition politics go both ways!

5. Afro-Latin@s will notice that Whites treat some Latin@s better than them. They may also notice that some Latin@s are liked by Whites and that many Whites mingle with Latin@s of a certain look (those who look White). They will further notice how these Latin@s are more likely to experience success and occupational mobility (how many Afro-Latin@ professors do we have in colleges and universities?). And some Afro-Latin@s will wonder and ponder. I say, wonder and ponder no more. Latin@s come in all shades and the lighter Latin@s, much like light-skinned African Americans, are more likely to be liked by White folks.¹⁶

6. Latin@s in power in the political, social, cultural, and economic fields are likely to be the light-skinned ones. Afro-Latin@s must begin the struggle to get admitted to colleges, to be represented in TV (Univision, for example, seems to believe all Latin@s are light skinned), to assure that the few affirmative-action-inspired jobs and positions for Latin@s also go to them and not only to the usual suspects (White Latin@s). This strategy will be called "divisive" by some, but we must stand strong and firm. The demand for full representation of all Latin@s cannot be sacrificed at the altar of "unity."

7. Those who, like me, have a Latin@ "accent" will experience the double whammy of racial and ethnic discrimination.¹⁷

The life of Afro-Latin@s in the United States, therefore, entails a triple rather than "double consciousness."¹⁸ We are Latin@s, but we are Afro-Latin@s. And we are people of African descent, although many African Americans see us as not of their kin. Thus, we navigate life as Blacks, as

Latin@s, and as a special segment of the American people with a special sight (now, after much pain, I see this sight as a gift).

But the racial landscape and racial practices in the United States are changing and those changes will have important implications for Afro-Latin@s. The traditional bi-racial order of the country (White versus non-White) is slowly morphing into a Latin America-like order.¹⁹ As such, new racial spaces and racial practices are emerging before our very eyes. Most notably, I contend, an intermediate racial space for "in-betweeners" (honorary Whites) is being carved. This space will allow Latin@s who possess phenotypic and cultural capital to stake a claim to honorary—and maybe even to complete—Whiteness. Further, in the apparently more fluid-emerging racial order, dark ontologies are sharing a space at the bottom with African Americans and other dark-skinned minorities (I label this space "the collective Black"). Thus, for example, although Black Cubans and White Cubans are all Cubans and many live in Miami, their life chances are totally different; Black Cubans seem to have all but joined African Americans at the bottom of the United States (racial) well.²⁰ Accordingly, Afro-Latin@s must work politically with others in the collective Black racial space to achieve racial justice. That justice is highly unlikely to come from Whites or, increasingly, from White Latin@s who will have the option to play out a new racial game as "honorary" or even as "real" Whites.

Final Words from the Black Man from Puerto Rico

I said almost all I wanted to say in this essay. I engaged in forbidden discussions likely to anger some but, hopefully, to serve as inspiration to many others. I outlined issues and subjects (e.g., how race fractures families in the Americas and how that is central to the reproduction of the racial order, etc.) that I hope others will work on in a systematic fashion in the future. I discussed personal matters that I have never discussed publicly in the hope that others will join me in exposing how deeply the tentacles of racism work in our America and in our own souls. I have done so hoping that people of color in the Americas wake up and begin analyzing in a serious fashion how race has affected their lives. We must expose how much discrimination we have suffered so that we can begin changing the terrain of discussion and action from the limited concept of prejudice to the more complex notion of systemic racism.

We must work hard to examine and uncover the practices and mecha-

nisms at play that produce and maintain racial privilege at the economic, political, social, and psychological-attitudinal levels. Based on my knowledge of the almost invisible, now-you-see-it, now-you-don't way race operates in our societies, I believe it is likely that analysts will unearth a system of *racismo solapado* like that in most of Latin America and the Caribbean and akin to the one I have argued rules public racial interactions in post-civil rights America.²¹

This process ought to be connected to organizational and political efforts to force race from the background to the foreground. These processes may help Afro-Latin@s in the Americas to develop their incipient consciousness and move from a "race in itself" to a "race for itself" level of consciousness. In my case, like that of so many Afro-Latin@s, it was the "shock therapy" of navigating the in-your-face racial order of the United States that led me to wake up and accept my Blackness. Now, at forty-six, I can tell anyone who cares to listen that I am not a *negrito acomplejado* but a proud Black man from Puerto Rico!

Notes

1. This is an abbreviated version of a longer piece in progress entitled "Las historias prohibidas de pulgarcito: Reflections about Race by a 'Negrito Acomplejado.'" In the Spanish-speaking countries in the Americas with a significant African influence, words with the ending *ado* are usually shortened to *ao*. Thus, the word *acomplejado* is pronounced *acomplejao* or the word *pescado* (fish) is pronounced *pescaao*. For the specific case of Puerto Rico, see Manuel Alvarez Nazario, *El elemento afronegroide en el español de Puerto Rico, contribución al estudio del Negro en América* (San Juan, P.R.: Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, 1961).
2. Throughout the Americas, and under the myth of racial democracy, our racist culture remains intact. I grew up listening to sayings such as "Black but decent," "You are Black but have a white soul," "Blacks will screw up, either when they come in or on their way out." For the case of Puerto Rico, see Isabelo Zenón Cruz, *Narriso descubre su trasero: El negro en la cultura puertorriqueña*, 2 vols. (Humacao, P.R.: Ediciones Fundi, 1974, 1975). For the case of the Dominican Republic, see Ninfa Partitño Sánchez, "Relaciones interétnicas en República Dominicana: Racismo y antihaitianismo," in *El racismo en las Américas y el Caribe*, edited by José Almeida Vinuesa (Quito, Ecuador: Abya-Yala, 1999), 97-126.
3. When I refer to the White members of my family, I mean White by Puerto Rican standards. Our standards are more flexible than those of the United States, and many Puerto Rican "Whites" would not be regarded as such in the United States.
4. In the Americas, the construction of race includes more components than in the United States, where phenotype and acknowledged ancestry dictate, for the most part, racial classification. Hence, it is possible for "mixed people" (a funny notion, as we are all "mixed") who have *pelo bueno* (good hair), light eyes, European facial features, or

even nonmorphological characteristics such as education, "high" culture, or money, get "elevated" to Whiteness or at least to honorary Whiteness in our societies.

5. In the Americas, cases of discrimination are interpreted by most people as instances of "prejudice" (see Tomás Blanco, *El prejuicio racial en Puerto Rico*, edited by Arcadio Díaz Quiñones (Río Piedras, P.R.: Ediciones Huracán, 1985). This allows for any systemic pattern to be reframed as an individual-level problem.

6. Joe R. Feagin, *Systemic Racism: A Theory of Oppression* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

7. As an adult, I got confirmation from my own mother about how a nightmare she suffered as a child created an emotional block that affected how she interacted with me. The details are not essential to this story, but the fact remained that she read me through that nightmare *negro*. The racist component of this story, and the fact that it connects my mother's tragedy to the racial grammar of the West, is how she processed her negative experience with one Black person as symbolic of the "evil" in all Blacks. On this issue, see chapter 5, "The Face of Blackness," in Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967). See also Fanon's discussion of the influence of race on the affective networks within families in the Caribbean (191).

8. These two words are of African origin, and in Puerto Rico they refer to the poor, Black, and unrefined.

9. Families are always regarded in the Americas as "extended families" and most families have "Black" or "Indian" sides.

10. The word *blanquito* literally means "whitey," but it is used in Puerto Rico to refer to people with money. However, since the people who have had money throughout Puerto Rican history have been, for the most part, White people, the word has an unmistakable racial component to it.

11. Segregation in plural racial orders is usually "soft" because of the level of racial mixing. This explains in part why, for example, residential segregation is not so prominent in Latin America. Missing in most analyses is an understanding of (1) the extent of soft segregation, (2) the extent of hierarchy in social interactions, and (3) the existence of deep practices of segregation in marriages and social interaction among the White elites in these societies. Puerto Rico has a Spain-oriented Puerto Rican and Cuban elite with its own clubs (Casa Cuba, Club Náutico de San Juan, Casa de España, etc.) that help maintain racial-cultural "purity" among these folks. Thus, they may live in a "plural society," but they maintain a *White habitus*. See Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists*, 2nd ed. (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006).

12. Explaining inter-racial relations in the Americas is, and will be, a central challenge for social analysts in the future.

13. In plural racial orders, it is very hard to gain full racial consciousness. The structure of these societies not only forbids talking about race but fosters a nationalist sense of self (We are all Puerto Ricans!).

14. Because it was in the United States that "race studies" emerged, the analysis of racial matters still follows their logic and traditions. This has produced a scholarship that tries to explain the many from the few—that is, we still try to explain most of the racial situations in the world based on concepts, ideas, and analyses based on the racial experience of the United States. I have criticized this stand in essays in my book

with Tukurfu Zuberi, *White Logic, White Methods: Racism and Methodology* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2008).

15. I borrow the term "mean streets" from Piri Thomas, *Down These Mean Streets* (New York: Knopf, 1967).

16. Edward Telles and Edward Murgia, "Phenotypic Discrimination and Income Differences among Mexican Americans," *Social Science Quarterly* 71, no. 4 (1990): 682-96.

17. Bonnie Urciuoli, *Exposing Prejudice: Puerto Rican Experiences of Language, Race, and Class* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1996); Alberto Dávila, Alok K. Bohara, and Rogelio Sáenz, "Accent Penalties and the Earnings of Mexican Americans," *Social Science Quarterly* 74 (1993): 902-116.

18. W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Signet Classic, 1995).

19. Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists*, 2nd ed. (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006).

20. Correspondents of the *New York Times*, *How Race Is Lined in America* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2001).

21. Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists*.

SILVIO TORRES-SAILLANT

Divisible Blackness

Reflections on Heterogeneity and Racial Identity

Blackness is divisible by as many contexts in which it might occur. Blackness mattered to the second-century BCE Roman playwright Publius Terentius Afer (commonly known as Terence), and to Alexander Sergeyevich Pushkin, the towering Romantic poet in Frederick the Great's Russia, differently from the ways it mattered to the Surinamese political thinker Anton de Kom in the 1930s or his contemporary in the United States, Marian Anderson, the revered operatic singer from Philadelphia. When it comes to the race question—hardly a subject suitable for scientific demonstration—personal experience can adequately compete with other forms of knowledge in the power to lay out the issue under discussion. With that in mind, I would like to start my reflections by allowing myself the indulgence of bearing witness. I shall cite a few incidents that strike me as emblematic of the complexity of racial identity. I present each as a vignette that I hope may elicit conversation about the diversity of the experiences that often place us face to face with the social and political significance of a Black person's phenotype as she or he interacts with the inhabitants of a world informed by the racial imagination.

The first vignette takes place in Moscow, where in 1984 I had the good fortune of visiting as a guest of the USSR Academy of Sciences thanks to a Russian scholar whose acquaintance I had made while pursuing graduate studies at New York University. On a particular Sunday afternoon I ventured to the circus on my own, my guide having already done enough escorting and orienting earlier in the week. I must have arrived at the circus after the show had already started, for I found no line or crowd outside. The deserted entrance area made all the more conspicuous the tall, thin figure of a Black man, dressed in a well-fitting dark-gray suit, standing near the door as if he were waiting for someone on the way in or out. Possibly only a