

Printer Friendly - NEH Summer 2021 Digital Collection - Exploring Afro-Latinidad: Culture, History and Identity

KEVIN ANDERSON JUL 19, 2021 05:20PM

Part I: Joining the Conversation

Introduction: What is Afro-Latinidad?

Afro-Latinidad refers to the collective cultural identity of people of the African diaspora from Latin American countries. This definition obscures layers upon layers of complexity. You could start with the question, what comprises Latin America anyway? Countries where the romance languages predominate means that Brazil and Haiti join Mexico, Colombia and Cuba, among many others. Neither Haitians nor Brazilians speak Spanish, but which, dear reader, would you say more people actually associate with "Latin"? Does color play a role? That is, does the greater predominance of darker skin impact the conception of what is, and is not, Latin? Likewise, how does the ability to sing songs, rhyme raps, trill lullabies, shout insults and, yes, speak plainly in Spanish square with conceptions of Blackness? Did it give pause, like a hiccup, or is the incredulity a tad more persistent? The purpose of this text-set is to illuminate Afro-Latin identity as well as explore some of the historical and cultural forces that have significantly contributed to it.

Click [here](#) for my note on terminology.

Watch video for an interesting exploration of the development of the term "Latino".



Why Do We Say "Latino"?

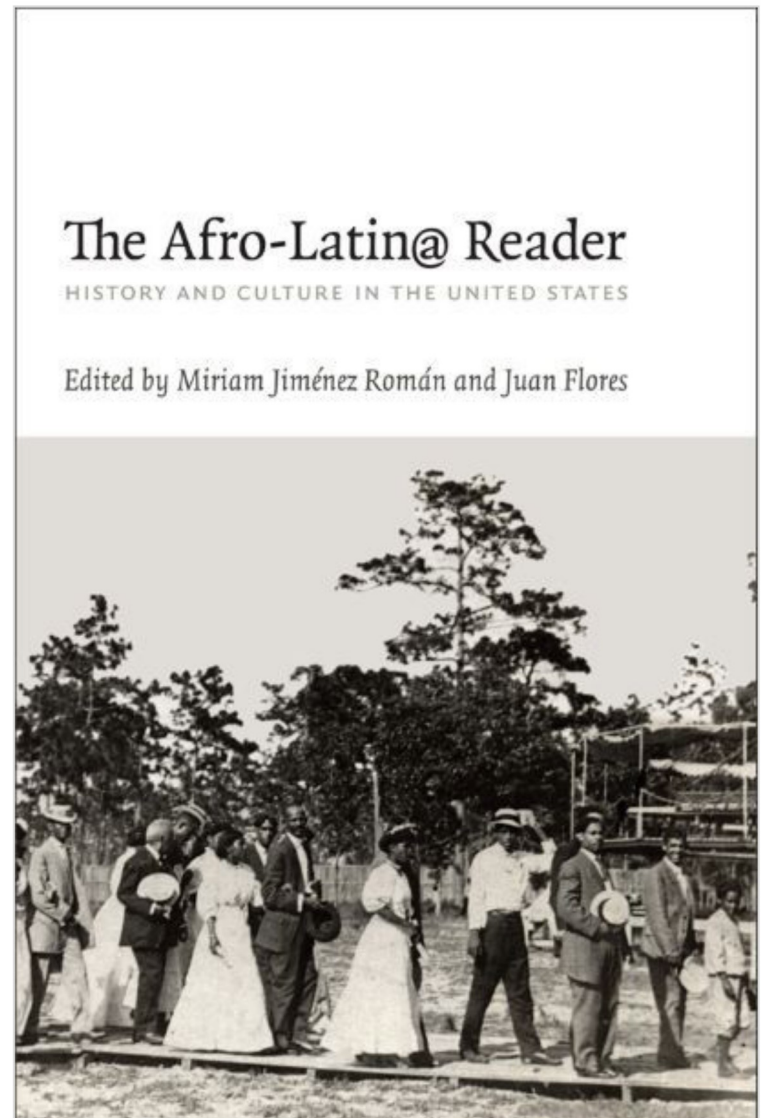
by Origin Of Everything

YOUTUBE

These resources help define, describe and debunk notions and misconceptions about Afro-Latinidad in the United States and Latin America

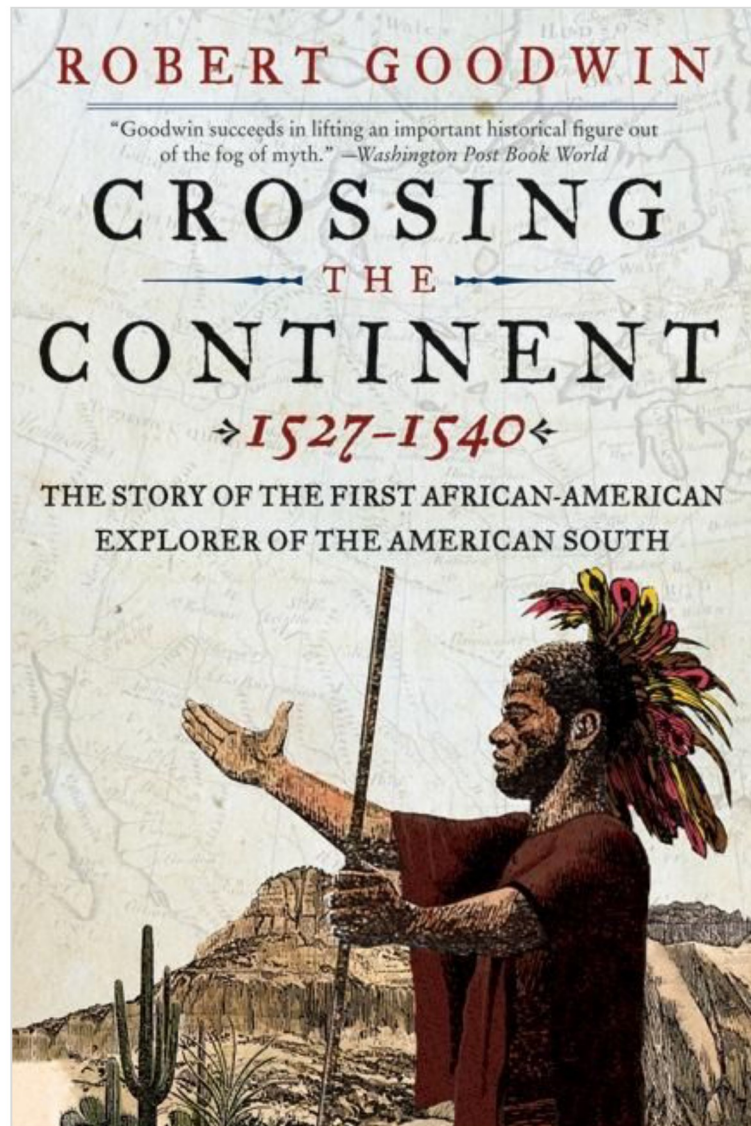
The Afro-Latin@ Reader

This reader is a wide-ranging set of more than 60 personal and academic essays, poems and narratives examining historical roots, media representations, music, gender and many other aspects of the Afro-Latin@ experience. A must read!



The first Afro-Latino in North America???

This is the story of "Estevanico, an Arab Negro from Azamor [North Africa]" according to the original chronicler of the Narvaez Expedition, Cabeza de Vaca. For a fascinating though fictionalized account reimagining Esteban's mostly overland journey from Florida to Mexico City, passing along the Gulf Coast and through Texas, and north again into present-day Arizona, see Laila Lalami's [*The Moor's Account*](#).



8 Young People on How They're Moving the Conversation on Afro-Latinidad Beyond Identity

This Remezcla article presents insightful and incisive perspectives from Afro-Latinx young people attending the 2018 Afro-Latino Festival in Brooklyn, NY. They and their families hail from places such as Brazil, Costa Rica, Guyana and Haiti.

8 Young People on How They're Moving the Conversation on Afro-Latinidad Beyond Identity

This weekend, the Afro-Latino Festival completed its sixth annual festejón at a new venue, The Well, in Bushwick, Brooklyn. The festival, with its packed three-day agenda - including the Afrolatin Talks Conference, Liberación Film Festival, and an outdoor concert - aims to affirm Afro-Latinx identity and offer empowering educational opportunities outside of the confines of academia in safe and accessible ways.

REMEZCLA



Latino USA Podcast - June 15, 2021

In this podcast, cousins Umar Williams and Alexander Newton, who are children of Panamanian sisters, discuss their childhoods, relationship to Español, and the intersection of their Black and Latinx identity. That conversation follows the first part of the episode in which they discuss their experience with the Black Lives Matter protests in the wake of George Floyd's murder.

Recording: Start at 21:25

A Family Conversation On Race And Latinidad - Latino USA

On May 25, 2020, George Floyd was murdered by a white cop, Derek Chauvin. His death resulted in a wave of national and international Black Lives Matter protests, calls for police reform or abolition, and Chauvin's conviction, the first time a white cop has been convicted by a jury for killing a Black man in the state of Minnesota.

LATINO USA

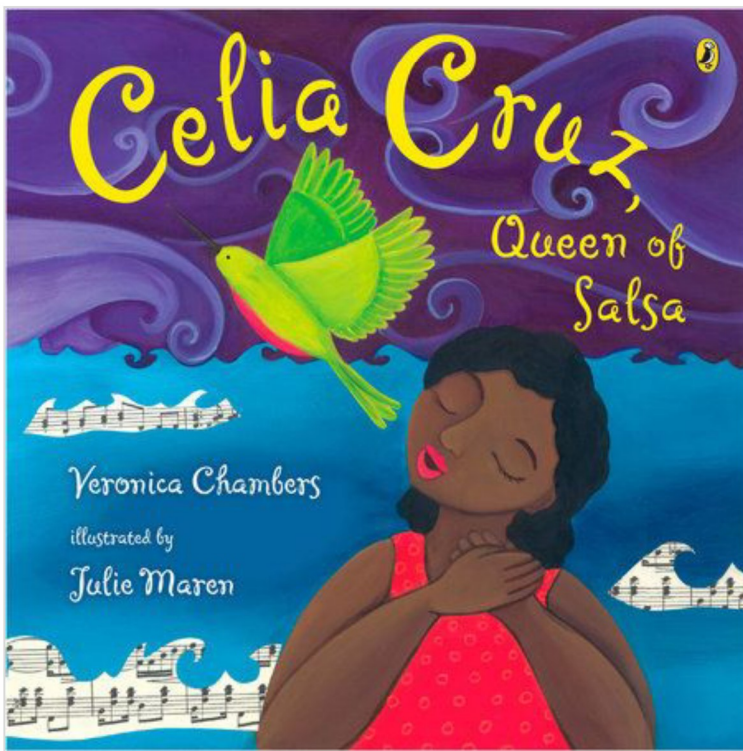


Part II: Children's Literature

These resources include children's books that depict distinctive aspects of the Afro-Latinx experience

Celia Cruz - Queen of Salsa

This book by Veronica Chambers offers a glimpse into Celia Cruz's childhood and her rise to fame, transforming Latin music in the [process](#).



Song: Yo Vivire (I Will Survive)

Listen to one of Cruz's classic performances conveying her determination and dignity.



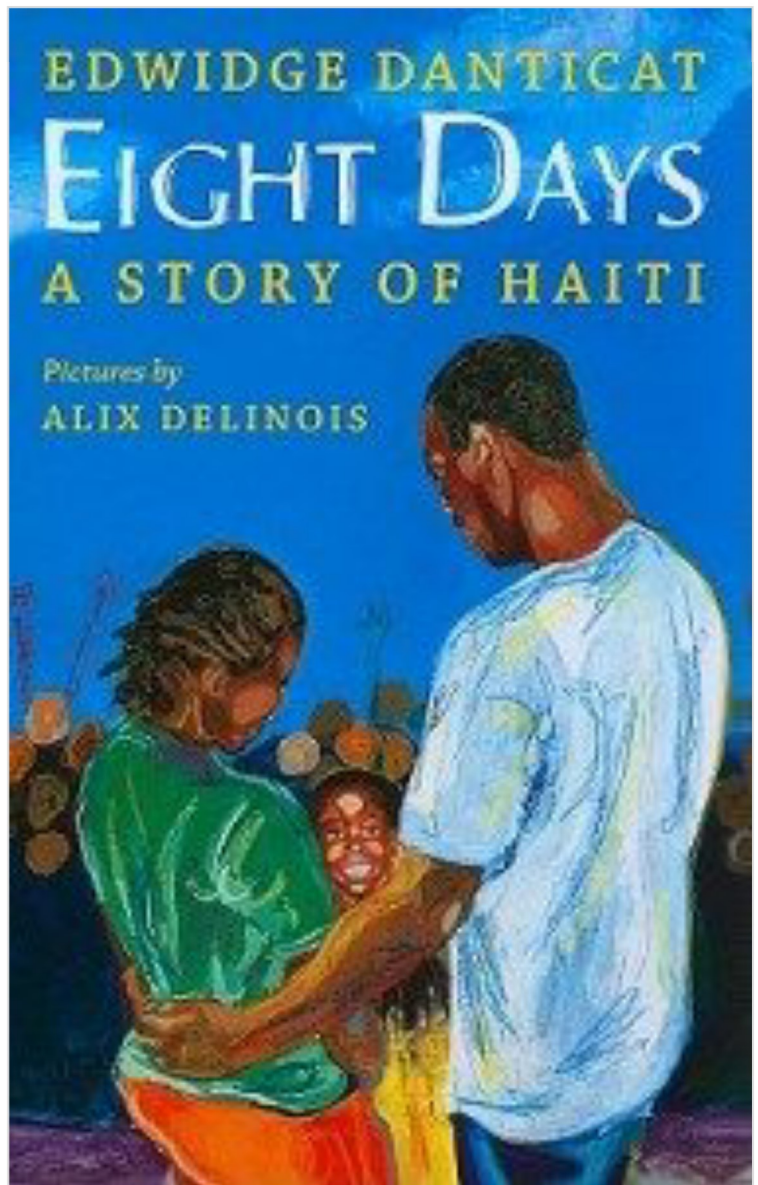
Yo Vivire-Celia Cruz

by camilosmusic

YOUTUBE

Eight Days: A Story of Haiti

This book by Edwidge Danticat is set in the aftermath of the 2010 Haiti earthquake. Junior is pulled out of the rubble on the eighth day and narrates how he used his imagination to maintain hope. The author's note is a personal account of her family's ordeal in this monumental tragedy.



Eight Days: A Story of Haiti

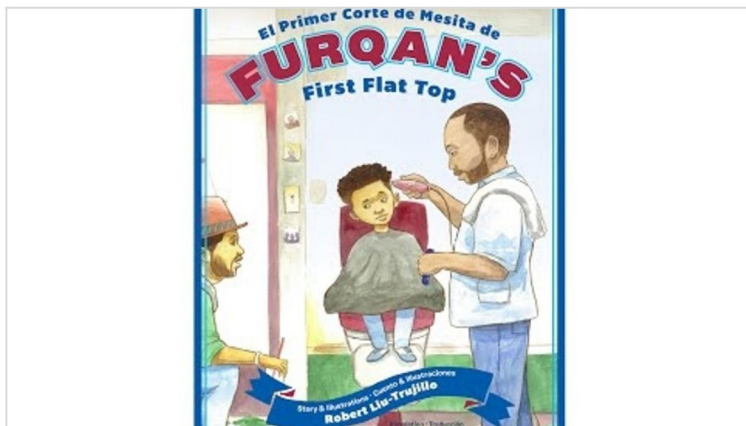
by Lynette Jackson

YOUTUBE

Furqan's First Flat Top by Robert Liu- Trujillo

Furqan Moreno is about to get his hair cut and his father suggests a flat top fade. This is his first hair cut and he worries his hair will

look funny if it is flat. Little does he know that flat top fades are *official*, to quote a common West Indian tribute. Unlike some other children's books about black kids and their hair, the plot does not presume a character who must embark on a journey of accepting their curly or kinky hair. Instead Junior simply is uncertain, and his father provides loving and humorous reassurance. This is a bilingual book.



Furqan's First Flat Top read in English

by Robert Liu-Trujillo

YOUTUBE

Drum Dream Girl by Margarita Engle

This story is a poem based on the childhood of Millo Castro Zaldarriaga, a girl whose heart is drawn to the drums. She defies gender stereotypes and taboos in order to learn how to play them and would eventually become a world renowned musician. In addition to being an inspiring story of following your dreams in spite of social pressure, it also presents the diversity of Afro-Latinx people, here featuring a Cuban girl of African and Chinese ancestry.

Drum Dream Girl

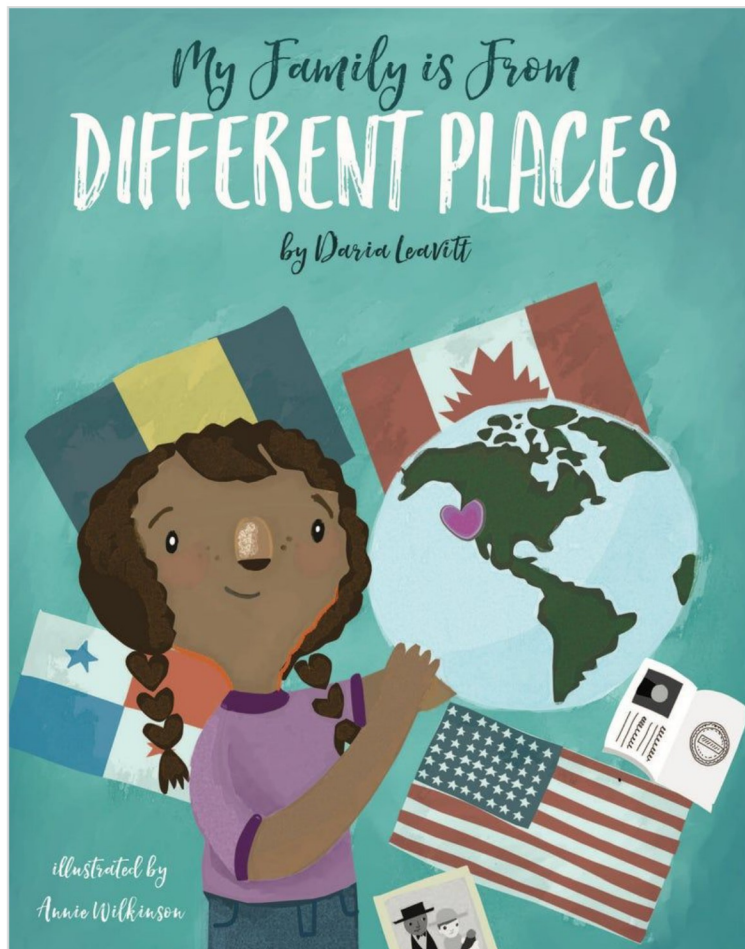
Girls cannot be drummers. Long ago on an island filled with music, no one questioned that rule-until the drum dream girl. In her city of ...



GOODREADS

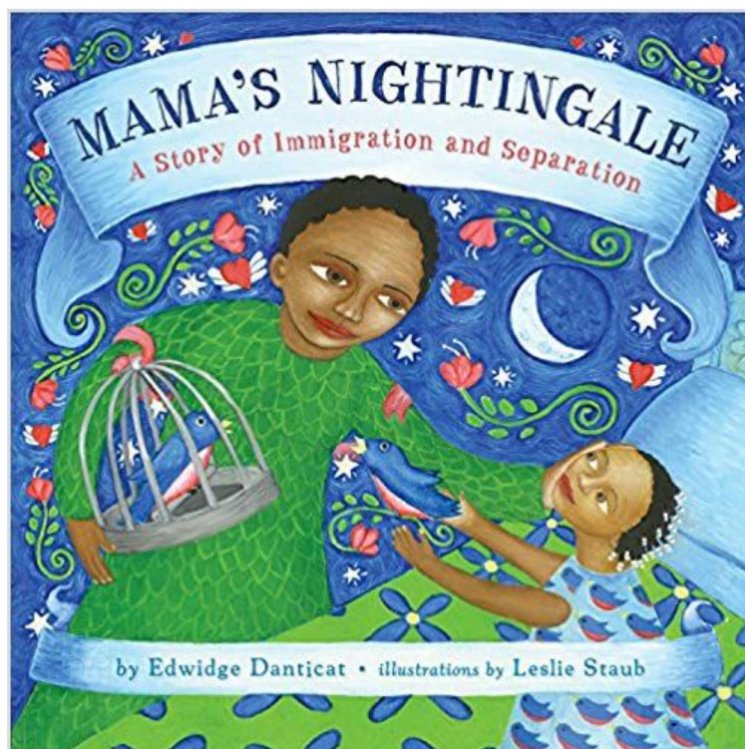
My Family is From Different Places - Daria Leavitt

This is the story of Elena, a multi-racial girl whose Panamanian mother explains how having a racial identity that does not neatly fit into one box is a blessing rather than a burden.



Mama's Nightingale

This story for earlier readers is about a Haitian American family's struggle with immigration. Saya's mother is detained in a U.S. immigration facility.



Mama's Nightingale Read-Aloud



Mama's Nightingale - A Story of Immigration and Separation (Read Aloud)

by 2nd Grade Greenleaf Teachers

YOUTUBE

Part III: "I got a story to tell..."

These resources include reviews of classic and contemporary memoirs and YA novels

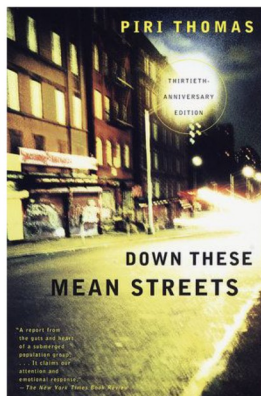
Down These Mean Streets by Piri Thomas

This memoir is a literary classic published in 1973. Piri is a dark-skinned Puerto Rican man whose family rejects their African heritage. It fits within the journey-to-acceptance genre where in this case after many hardships, brought on by a free but troubled will, he reconciles his black and Latino identity.

Down These Mean Streets by Piri Thomas: 9780679781424 | PenguinRandomHouse.com: Books

"Piri Thomas describes the passionate, painful search to validate his manhood...He has done it all in Harlem's mean streets and gone on from machismo to manhood, acquiring during the journey an understanding of man."-The Nation New York Public Library Books for the Teen Age WINNER Get the latest updates from Piri Thomas And go from well-read to best read with book recs, deals and more in your inbox every week.

PENGUINRANDOMHOUSE.COM



Daughters of the Stone by Dahlma Llanos-Figueroa

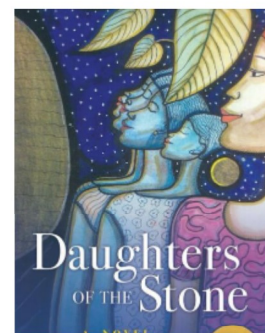
An epic, moving story that follows five generations of Puerto Rican women that begins with Fela, an enslaved woman of African

descent. Major themes include heartbreak, loss, rejection, spirituality and family.

Daughters of the Stone|Paperback

A lyrical powerful novel about a family of Afro-Puerto Rican women spanning five generations, detailing their physical and spiritual journey from the Old World to the New.It is the mid-1800s. Fela, taken from Africa, is working at her second sugar plantation in colonial Puerto Rico,...

BARNES & NOBLE



Clap When You Land - Elizabeth Acevedo

This is the follow-up YA novel to award winning *Poet X*. It follows two sisters, Yahaira and Camino Rios, who don't even know each other exists until their father dies in a flight bound for the DR. There are two particularly standout features of Acevedo's novel. First, its beating heart is the community of Afro-Dominican women which besides the sisters includes Camino's curandera aunt (Tia Solana),Yahaira's mother (Mami), and Dre, Yahaira's girlfriend. On that last score, the novel presents characters of multiple intersectionality, and unlike earlier wave literature about LGBTQ youth, or even Twin in *Poet X*, Yahaira's sexuality is not a puzzle to be solved but a matter of fact, like the humus that enriches the ground that lies under her feet.

In addition, *Clap When You Land* offers an intriguing plot and a realistic depiction of a child grappling with the inevitable discovery that their parent, at one time nothing short of a demigod, may in fact be THE poster-boy for the frailties and pain-inflicting flaws inherent in the human condition.



NPR Interview with Elizabeth Acevedo

This interview is worth a listen. Acevedo says, "The question of identity is a big one... What does it mean to not be from here or from there. What does it mean to claim an ethnicity, but never have visited the country where your parents are from?"

Tragedy Reveals 2 Secret Families In 'Clap When You Land'

Elizabeth Acevedo's new *Clap When You Land* is a novel, in verse, about two sisters losing their father, their hero, and finding each other along the way. Camino Rios lives with her aunt in the Dominican Republic, and waits all year for her dad to visit her for the summer.



NPR.ORG

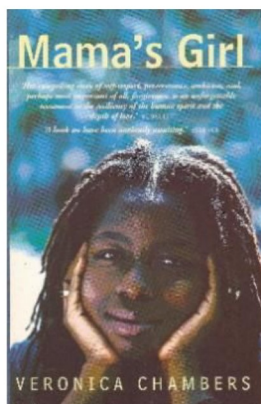
Mama's Girl by Veronica Chambers

Mama's Girl is set in Brooklyn, where many West Indian people migrated after 1965. It is mainly a story of a mother-daughter relationship. I have included it here to spotlight a life-story of a Panamanian American, who, if Black (as Chambers is), has waves of migration and acculturation threaded through their family history. Many Panamanians of significant African descent arrived from Anglophone countries such as Barbados and Jamaica in the early 20th Century, learned Spanish, bore Spanish speaking children in Panama, many of whom in turn immigrated to the United States. That culture is simultaneously Panamanian, West Indian, Black, Latin and, yes, American.

Mama's girl

Skip to main content Stock Image
Published by London: The Women's Press,
1996 Used Condition: Very Good Soft cover
About this Item First edition, a paperback
original. Very good indeed in wrappers.
Autobiographical novel from the former
editor of the New York Times Magazine.

ABEBOOKS



Part IV: Where We're From

These resources include an annotated map, research reports, oral and academic histories and videos exploring identity and place

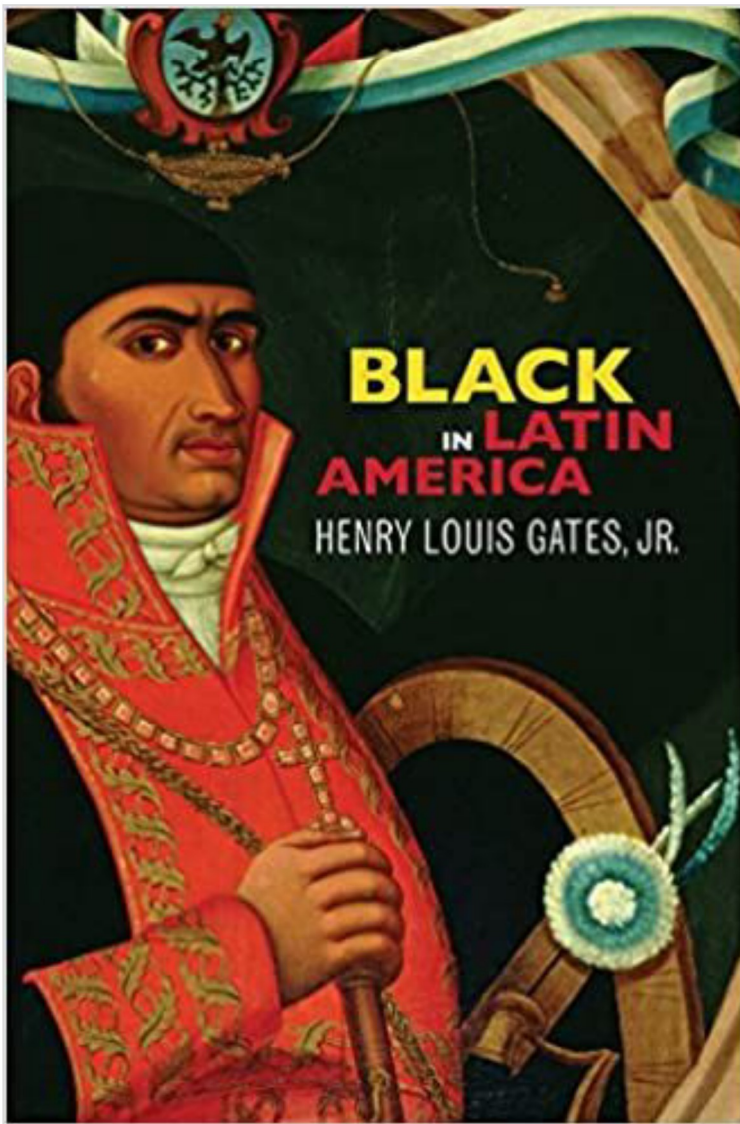
Map

(from the Pew report, "Afro-Latino: A deeply rooted identity among U.S. Hispanics " (below))



Black in Latin America by Henry Louis Gates

Gates' really important exploration of the varied and evolving place of Black people and Blackness Latin America. He also produced a [documentary](#) series based on this book.



Report: How U.S. immigration laws and rules have changed through history

This [report](#) provides a comprehensive yet concise overview of the impact of the U.S. immigration laws over the course of U.S. history. There is relatively comprehensive timeline of the laws, starting in 1790 Naturalization Act, which stated that only a "free white person" could apply to become an American citizen.



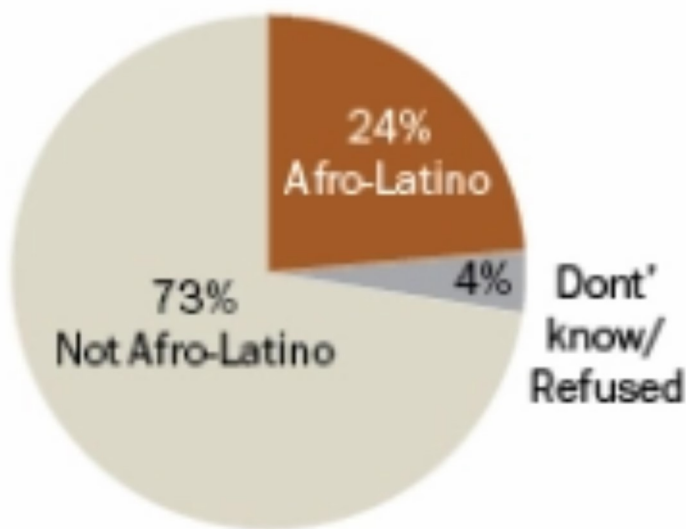
Report: Afro-Latino: A deeply rooted identity among U.S. Hispanics

This 2016 report describes "the complex and varied nature of race and identity among Latinos." It reveals lots of really interesting dimensions to the Afro-Latinx community. According to the report, "In the U.S., Latinos with Caribbean roots are more likely to identify as Afro-Latino or Afro-Caribbean than those with roots elsewhere (34% versus 22%, respectively). Those who identify as Afro-Latino are more concentrated on the East Coast and in the South than other Latinos

Poll

A quarter of U.S. Hispanics identify as Afro-Latino

Do you consider yourself to be Afro-Latino, Afro-Caribbean, or Afro-(country of origin), or not?



Source: National Survey of Latinos, conducted Sept. 11-Oct. 9, 2014 (N=1,520 Hispanic adults)

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Podcast: La Brega

La brega is a commonly used term among Puerto Ricans. It reflects a seemingly universal human response to the ever-lurking possibility of defeat: in a similar vein, the Japanese say "Shikata ga nai" and the French, "C'est la vie." But *la brega* is not defeatist. It instead "implies a challenge we can't really solve" and thus requires -- the people are called to -hustle. The ubiquity of *la brega* informs the culture, the podcast asserts. To me, it seems to provide a good primer on the historical and political forces in the U.S. AND Puerto Rico that drove an explosion of migration in the

mid-20th Century, and the various resultant effects on Puerto Ricans there and here (wherever that happens to be).

1. What Is La Brega? | La Brega | WNYC Studios

Alana Casanova-Burgess: A few months back, a friend sent me a photo of a water truck in a pothole in Caguas, Puerto Rico.

At first, I thought it was photoshopped. The front half of the truck was up in the air, wedged in an enormous crater in the middle of the road.

WNYC STUDIOS



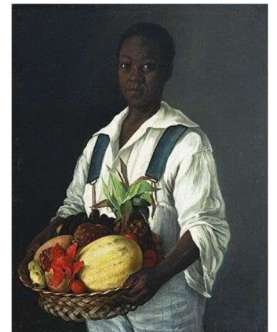
High School Spanish Class Inquiry on Afro-Mexican Invisibility

In this article Michelle Nicola, who teaches a Spanish course to high school students who are predominantly *heritage speakers*, describes her unit on Afro-Mexican History. She leads students on an inquiry in which they 1) reconsider the African roots in Mexican identity (what the Mexican government in 1992 acknowledged as *la tercera raiz*) and 2) discover the historical and political forces that contributed the Afro-Mexican invisibility. Teachers may find particularly relevant Nicola's strategy for creating interdependence in group work that she explains yielded a greater degree of analysis and understanding than if they had worked separately.

Rethinking Identity: Afro-Mexican History

By Michelle Nicola Illustration: José Agustín Arrieta (1802-1879) "This is the country of my ancestors. It includes the fandango-music that takes Spanish instruments and plays them with African style, songs like 'La Bamba' that trace their way back to slavery and still influence music today, and a Mexican president with both Spanish and African ancestry.

RETHINKING SCHOOLS



Video: Brooklyn Panamanian Parade 2019

This is the most recent Panamanian Parade



PANAMANIAN PARADE 2019 BROOKLYN NY

by juan delvalle

YOUTUBE

accounts will be directly linked (just the landing page [here](#)) but some interesting histories include Jeffrey Adolphus (Belize), Winston Brewster (Trinidad), and Joyce Quamina (Trinidad), a carnival organizer.

Oral History: Center for Brooklyn History - Oral History Collection

The Center for Brooklyn History has a library of oral histories on all sorts of topics. Linked here is a collection from the

"West Indian Carnival Documentation Project records 1994-1995 (2010.019)" The carnivals took place on Eastern Parkway, where the Brooklyn Museum is located. These are intimate conversations that people with faith and trust generously shared their time and lives with interviewers. As such, no

Video: Remembering Flatbush

This video takes viewers on a tour of the Flatbush neighborhood in Brooklyn.



Remembering Flatbush

by Doc Timberlake

YOUTUBE
