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“Black Behind the Ears”—and Up Front Too? Dominicans in *The Black Mosaic*

GINETTA E.B. CANDELARIO

JUANA CAMPOS, ONE OF THE NINE DOMINICANS PROFILED in the Anacostia Museum’s 1994 exhibit *Black Mosaic: Community, Race, and Ethnicity Among Black Immigrants in Washington, D.C.*, was perplexed by the vast social distance between African Americans and whites in the United States when she arrived in 1940. An astute reader of the social landscape, Do a Campos recalled more than fifty years later that “people here were separated like tuberculosis patients, black and white apart.”¹ Neither in New York City, where her boat from the Dominican Republic had docked, nor in her hometown of Pelmar had she experienced the kind of visibly entrenched Jim Crow segregation that characterized the U.S. capital.

1. Juana Campos, interview by Hector Corporan, 1994, *Black Mosaic* archives, Anacostia Museum. *Black Mosaic* files were not systematically archived when this research was undertaken in 1998. Instead, *Black Mosaic* materials were stored in various offices, file cabinets, and boxes throughout the Research Department of the Anacostia. As a result, data source citations are descriptive rather than archival.

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Indeed, it was a new Puerto Rican friend who “instructed” the recently arrived Campos on the rules of Jim Crow. A brown-skinned woman, Juana Campos was to U.S. observers clearly of African descent to some degree and, her friend warned, likely to experience discrimination. From the first, Juana Campos was determined that neither she nor her Washington-born children, Ramberto and Carmen Toruella, would be constrained by Jim Crow.

The experiences of this Dominican family and its representation in *Black Mosaic* provide insight into the relationship between Latino² and African American understandings of Afro-Latino racial identity and identification. *Black Mosaic* was a groundbreaking consideration of blackness in the Americas via the lens of black immigrant communities in Washington, D.C. Included in the category “black immigrants” were Dominicans, a notable fact given the historic erasure of African ancestry and black identity narratives from most Dominican (trans)national histories.³ In both the Dominican Republic and in the United States, the vast majority of Dominicans with some degree of visible African ancestry are categorized as “*indio*” or “Indian” with qualifiers such as “*oscuro*” (dark) and “*claro*” (light). Although Dominican racial identity was in flux from the colonial period through the postcolonial nineteenth century, during the Trujillo era (from 1931 to 1961), indigenist racial classifications were institutionalized via the “*cedulas de identificación*” or identification cards.⁴

The last Dominican census that quantified racial identification was taken in 1960 and found that only ten percent of the nation’s inhabitants were “black.” Recent work on Dominican responses to the United States Census has found that Dominicans in New York—the second largest Dominican city in the world—identify primarily as “other” in terms of race, with about twenty-eight percent self-identifying as “black.”⁵ By contrast, nearly half of Washington, D.C.’s fifteen hundred Dominican residents identified as black in the 1990 Census.⁶ Although a small community, particularly com-

2. I prefer to use “Latina/o”, but am using the standard masculine form here for the sake of consistency with the rest of the articles in this volume.

3. See Jorge Duany, *Quisqueya on the Hudson: The Transnational Identity of Dominicans in Washington Heights* (New York: CUNY Dominican Studies Institute, 1994). Important exceptions are the work of poet and pro-negritude activist Blas Jimenez and of Bienvenida Mendoza, director of Identidad Mujer Negra in Santo Domingo.

4. See Silvio Torres-Saillant, “Introduction to Dominican Blackness,” Dominican Studies Working Papers Series, CUNY Dominican Studies Institute, City College of New York, 1999; and David Howard, *Colouring the Nation: Race and Ethnicity in the Dominican Republic*, Ph.D. dissertation, Jesus College, Oxford University, 1997.

5. Peggy Levitt and Christina Gomez, “The Intersection of Race and Gender among Dominicans in the U.S.,” paper presented at the 1997 ASA Conference, Toronto, Canada, August 8–13; and Carlos Dore-Cabral and Jose Itzigsohn, “La formación de la identidad hispana entre los inmigrantes dominicanos en Nueva York,” paper presented at Congreso Internacional: La República Dominicana en el Umbral del Siglo XXI, 24–26 July 1997, Pontificia Universidad Católica Madre y Maestra, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic.

6. The 2000 census was not available in time to include more recent data in this piece.

pared to the 250,000 or so Dominicans in New York City,⁷ Washington's Dominican community is mature and sociologically complete: it has established leaders, community organizations, cultural events, and local entrepreneurs.

"We are all black behind the ears," goes a popular Dominican saying, mirroring the simultaneous folkloric acknowledgment of African ancestry and the relegation of blackness to the unseen and the unheard of spaces of Dominican national and individual bodies. Dominican national identity has developed historically against the backdrop of Spanish, French, and Haitian colonialism and U.S. imperialism. A Dominican who claims, rejects, or is ambivalent about a black identity, then, references and contends with multiple histories and contexts.⁸ *Black Mosaic* attempted to understand and present that complexity fully. However, it excluded the political-economic framework of Latin American immigration to the U.S. and of Latino identity formation more broadly. Thus, it was only partially successful. The representation of Dominicans in *Black Mosaic* will be considered as a case study of the complexity of displaying Afro-Latino racial identity in the United States.

The Anacostia Museum

The Anacostia Museum is a community-based museum; its founding mandate was to serve the low-income African American community in which it is located. Originally intended by Smithsonian chairman S. Dillon Ripley as a vehicle for bringing the Smithsonian to the people, the primarily African-American Anacostia neighborhood community transformed it quickly into a way of putting themselves in the Smithsonian.⁹ Opened in 1967 at the height of the Black Power Movement, the Anacostia Neighborhood Museum integrated local residents in its work force, volunteer staff, and Neighborhood Advisory Committee. In turn, those residents became the Anacostia's leading constituents. For Anacostia's staff, the museum "became a way of doing things, an approach to the work of the museum and a key to its self-perceived identity as a community-based institution."¹⁰ The increasing professionalization of the Anacostia, however, eventually created barriers to the kind of daily and full community participation that character-

7. Estimates of the size of the Dominican population in New York City range from 250,000 to 500,000 due to the 1990 Census undercount, the transnational nature of Dominican migration patterns, and the substantial number of Dominicans with tourist visas or without documentation.

8. Ginetta E.B. Candelario, "Situating Ambiguity: Dominican Identity Formations," Ph.D. dissertation in sociology, City University of New York Graduate Center, 2000.

9. Portia James, "Building a Community-Based Identity at Anacostia Museum," *Curator*, 39, no. 1 (March 1996): 19-44.

10. James, "Building a Community-Based Identity," p. 34.

ized its first five years. “By the mid-1980s, museum/community interaction was largely confined to the education department’s programs and the director’s individual activities.”¹¹

The Black Mosaic

According to Portia James, the Anacostia’s senior historian and *Black Mosaic* originator and curator, *Black Mosaic*, with its extensive community involvement, represented a modified return to the Anacostia’s original methodology and orientation. However, that return was conditioned by new internal and external circumstances. The most salient internal change was the death of the Anacostia’s founding director, John Kinard.¹² In his absence, the Anacostia staff was forced to reconsider its mandate and constituency.

From the museum’s inception, there had been questions about which groups were being included in the museum’s community. *Black Mosaic* further underscored such questions. Although encountered every day, black immigrants form an invisible community existing within the very core of Washington’s African-American community life and social history and yet still exist on the margins of the city’s public history.¹³

Black Mosaic, then, highlighted both the hegemony of the U.S. African American experience at the Anacostia and an African American effort to bring to the center those on its margins, in this case, “black immigrants.”

The Anacostia finds itself in the complicated position of being a local museum with an institutionally national base. On the one hand, as a Smithsonian Institution museum, it must answer to a national constituency that runs the gamut from those who are relatively unaware of African American history to those who are actively hostile to representations of it. On the other hand, its founding mandate was to serve the residentially proximate yet politically disenfranchised and economically distant Anacostia community. The Anacostia staff’s own residential and economic distance from its local constituency complicates the matter further. In other words, how do predominantly middle-class, African American public historians represent community histories that are culturally, nationally, and personally foreign to them? How did *Black Mosaic* attempt to make the

11. *Ibid.*, p. 26. The Anacostia also moved from the Carver Theatre, in the heart of Anacostia, to its current location on a landscaped park. No longer a drop-in museum, the Anacostia is primarily accessible by car or public transportation.

12. On Kinard see Z. Martin-Felton and Gail Lowe, *A Different Drummer: John Kinard and the Anacostia Museum, 1967–1989* (Washington, D.C.: Anacostia Museum, Smithsonian Institution, 1993).

13. James, “Building a Community-Based Identity,” p. 38.

“invisible” visible to its audience? I argue that it did so through and within an African-American identity narrative that begins in the United States. In other words, Afro-Latinos were “included” in Anglo-centric African American history. A more historically accurate strategy would have re-configured the narrative altogether, as I explore further below.

Internal discussions about how to integrate that “invisible community” into Anacostia exhibits began in 1990 in the context of larger Smithsonian plans to mark the Quincentennial. Additionally, in 1991 the Mount Pleasant Riots—sparked by the killing of a Salvadoran immigrant by an African American police officer—highlighted festering tensions between the African American and Latino communities. Anacostia Director Steve Newsome was explicit about the fact that *Black Mosaic* was intended to serve as a connection between the African American community and the Latino community in D.C.¹⁴ Newsome received special acknowledgement from the Smithsonian Institution’s Latino Task Force in its report, *Willful Neglect*, which noted that the Anacostia was “among the museums making a positive effort” at the Smithsonian to represent Latinos in the United States.¹⁵ Indeed, *Black Mosaic* is mentioned several times in *Willful Neglect*, both for its utilization of community scholars and for its documentation of “the fact that many African Americans are also Hispanic.”¹⁶

Speaking to a Smithsonian *Torch* reporter, Newsome expressed the hope that “the exhibition will give us inroads to communities that were totally disenfranchised from the Smithsonian as a whole and from the Anacostia Museum in particular. There was no consistent relationship between the Afro-Latino community and SI.”¹⁷ Nor would there after *Black Mosaic* came down, for reasons that illustrate the difficulties of attempting to display fluid and contextual Latino identities within the constraints of hegemonic notions of race.

In the United States, racial identification has been categorized largely within a white/non-white dichotomy. Historically, those of wholly European descent have been considered white, although not without a surprising degree of legal, political, and socio-economic conflict.¹⁸ One ceases to be

14. Steve Newsome, “Approaches to Material Culture Research and Representation,” talk presented at the 1997 Inter-University Program for Latino Research Qualitative Methods and Museum Studies Seminar, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., June 1997; Steve Newsome, interview with author, July, 1998.

15. Smithsonian Institution Task Force on Latino Issues, *Willful Neglect: The Smithsonian Institution and U.S. Latinos* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1994), 31.

16. *Willful Neglect*, 30.

17. Jo Ann Webb, “Anacostia Exhibition Looks at Diversity,” *The Torch: A Monthly Newspaper for the Smithsonian Institution*, August 1994, p. 7.

18. See Ian Haney López, *White by Law: The Legal Construction Of Race* (New York: New York University Press, 1996); Virginia Dominguez, *White by Definition: Social Classifications in Creole Louisiana* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1986); and David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York: Verso, 1992).

white when “one-drop-of-(African)-blood” is introduced into the family lineage.¹⁹ Thus, to have African ancestry and to be black are synonymous. This systematization of what Marvin Harris called “hypo-descent”²⁰ has categorized Latin Americans and U.S. Latinos as “not white” by definition. “Not white,” however, has not necessarily meant “black” where Latinos are concerned. Rather, it has meant some version or another of “mestizo.”²¹ Latinos who acknowledge or celebrate their African ancestry do not necessarily identify primarily as “black” because to be black, the reasoning goes, is by definition to be “not mestizo.” The problem with a “mestizo” based notion of Latino identity, then, is that it elides the fact of black racial identity for many Latinos.

In Latin America, racial identification and racial identity are somewhat more fluid and operate on a continuum. Still, black and white are “pure,” polar opposites on that continuum, and white supremacy is the organizing principle, as the mandate to blanqueamiento (or whitening through reproduction) proves. Nonetheless, unlike the United States, racially marginalized individuals can experience some degree of upward socio-racial mobility through economic and political ascendance.²² As Sofia Mora [pseud.], a Dominican policy analyst who arrived in Washington from New York in the early 1980s and was profiled in *Black Mosaic*, explained:

I was very well aware in the Dominican Republic and in St. Thomas, that I was black. But it wasn't institutionalized and . . . the meaning of that was not the same in the U.S. as it was in the Dominican Republic and in St. Thomas, because while there was somewhat of a negative attribute attached to it, it wasn't a source of high status in the Dominican Republic or in St. Thomas. It was certainly not as negative a characteristic, personal characteristic, as it is in the United States and was at that point in time. So I guess what I'm trying to do, is establish gradations of differences. I think there is a difference in terms of how people are perceived as you go from the Caribbean and you come to the U.S. primarily because in the Carib-

19. Joe Davis, *Who is Black? One Nation's Definition* (University Park, Penn.: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991); Naomi Zack, *Race and Mixed Race* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993).

20. Marvin Harris, *Patterns of Race in the Americas* (New York: Walker and Company, 1964).

21. Linda Alcoff, “Mestizo Identity,” in Naomi Zack, ed., *American Mixed Race: The Culture of Microdiversity* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1995), 257–78; Suzanne Oboler, *Ethnic Labels, Latinos Lives: Identity and the Politics of (Re)Presentation in the United States* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995).

22. Richard Graham, ed., *The Idea of Race in Latin America, 1870–1940* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990); Harry Hoetnik, “Race and Color in the Caribbean,” in *Caribbean Contours*, eds. Sidney Mintz and Sally Price (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 55–84; Trevor W. Purcell, *Banana Fallout: Class, Color and Culture Among West Indians in Costa Rica* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993); Nancy Stepan-Leys, “The Hour of Eugenics”: *Race, Gender and Nation in Latin America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991); Winthrop Wright, *Café con Leche: Race, Class, and National Image in Venezuela* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990); Peter Wade, *Blackness and Race Mixture: The Dynamics of Racial Identity in Colombia* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).

bean and in the Dominican Republic you had for many, many, many years people of color, specifically people of African descent living with others who are lighter skinned. Beyond that, the reality is that it is a very small population in the Dominican Republic who could be considered in American terms white. Very small. So Dominicans are people of color and while there is a lack of consciousness, historical consciousness and knowledge about where we came from, because there was never institutionalized racism the impact is different.²³

That Mora does identify as black racially is due in large measure to her experiences within the educational system of the United States and her subsequent political consciousness of the salience of race as an organizing principle here.²⁴ That she also continues to identify as Dominican and more generally as Latina, however, points to the multiple negotiations Afro-Latinos undertake.

When the staff at the Anacostia took up the issue, they were understandably perplexed and in some cases downright annoyed by the seeming unwillingness of Dominicans, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, Costa Ricans, Brazilians, and Haitians of African descent to identify simply or primarily as “black.” Internal memos and research notes for the exhibit document the ongoing dialogue among Anacostia staff and between them and participants over the issue of racial identity.²⁵ Anacostia staff accustomed to the primacy of race in the United States asked themselves and one another how it could be that nationality could be as salient an identity referent as race. Through a series of meetings held in each of the communities represented, oral history interviews, use of community scholars and a fifteen-member Community Advisory Committee, and traditional bibliographic research, exhibit researchers and staff gained increasing insight into Afro-Latin American community, race, and ethnicity in Washington, D.C. This was *Black Mosaic*’s greatest success.

Black Mosaic also conveyed effectively that those of us from the Caribbean, including the Hispanic Caribbean, have historic connections to the African diaspora. In the video on personal identity, for example, Mora explained:

[If I am] asked where I came from, I will say I’m Dominican. But that’s a nationality. It’s not a race. If they want to know where I’m coming from in terms of race, then I am of African descent – recognizing that in many Latin American countries, being of African descent really means being that and some other things. But certainly I am an Afro-Latina. I am an Afro-Latina who was born in the Dominican Republic.²⁶

23. Sofia Mora, interview by Hector Corporan, 1994, *Black Mosaic* archives, Anacostia Museum. “Sofia Mora” is a pseudonym for one of the *Black Mosaic* participants who prefers not to be identified for this piece.

24. Sofia Mora, interview by author, July 1998, Washington, D.C.

25. Meeting notes, Sharon Reincken files, 1994, *Black Mosaic* archives, Anacostia Museum.

26. “Identity,” exhibit video tape, *Black Mosaic*, Anacostia Museum.

Carmen (Toruella) Quander echoed Sofia Mora. Speaking of her identity, she affirmed:

I know my roots. I took my family to the grave of all of my ancestors. Why is it that you want to take my heart and soul just because you see the color of my skin? Toruella is my last name. That's from the South of Spain. I say, "I'm Dominican. I am a person of color. I am of the African Diaspora but you know what, you talk to me about other things. We came here knowingly. I am a person of color and very proud of it but you cannot stay in that box."²⁷

The "box" Quander refers to is the one that gives racial identity primacy over national or ethnic identity. Francia Almarante, a Dominican hairdresser, put it succinctly: "I am black, but that's not all I am."²⁸

What *Black Mosaic* lacked was an understanding that African American history originated in Latin America. The United States' version of that history is only one chapter in a larger text. Had *Black Mosaic* begun from that premise, it would have provided an even richer and more nuanced display of "community, race, and ethnicity among black immigrants in Washington, D.C." than it did. It might have also established more permanent ties between the Anacostia and the Afro-Latino community, which the Anacostia has not yet done.

Black Mosaic was organized in five major thematic areas: Identity, Memories of Home, Migration, Race and Ethnicity in D.C., and Community Life. It utilized video-taped interview displays, audio-taped interview listening stations, music, participant artifacts (family photographs, documents, clothing, and furnishings), documentary photographs and artifacts collected for the exhibit, most notably a Cuban raft recovered off Florida's coast.²⁹ By all accounts, it was a rich and textured display that appealed in both audio and visual terms.³⁰

Nineteen Afro-Latinos³¹ were interviewed by Anacostia-trained community scholars. Of those Afro-Latinos, nine were Dominican, two were

27. Carmen Quander, interview by author, Washington, D.C., August 1998.

28. Francia Almarante, interview by author, Washington, D.C., July 1998.

29. This boat and its passengers were spotted by Hermanos al Rescate (Brothers to the Rescue) in July of 1992 thirty-five miles off the Miami coast. Both the passengers and their vessel were recovered by the U.S. Coast Guard, who subsequently gave the vessel, made of Styrofoam, tar, cotton fabric, wood and shower curtains to Mr. Humberto Sánchez, a Cuban American collector of refugee artifacts. Mr. Sánchez loaned the vessel to the Anacostia for the exhibit. Kim Freeman files, "History of this Object: Cuban Refugee Boat," March 1994, *Black Mosaic* archives, Anacostia Museum.

30. I undertook my research in 1998, three years after the exhibit had been dismantled. I have relied on archival photographs of the exhibit at the Anacostia, newspaper accounts, exhibit photographs, scripts and documentation, and interviews for data on the look and feel of the exhibit.

31. Since Brazilians in *Black Mosaic* were considered apart from Afro-Latinos although they are Latin Americans, it seems that the designation refers specifically to Latinos from Spanish-speaking communities or Afro-Hispanics.

Cuban, three were Puerto Rican, four were Panamanian, and one Costa Rican. In other words, Dominicans comprised nearly half of the Afro-Latino respondents. Of the nine Dominicans, seven were women and two were men: Francia Almarante, Daniel Bueno, Juana Campos, Luis E. Druyard, Sofia Mora, Juanita Laureano, Casilda Luna, Maricela Medina, and Esperanza Ozuma. In addition, Juana Campos' children, Ramberto Toruella and Carmen Quander, provided artifacts and oral histories of the Latino community. Dominican participants, particularly Doña Campos and Sofia Mora, were featured prominently in promotional literature and local media coverage of the exhibit. Finally, *Black Mosaic's* lead community scholar was Hector Corporan, himself a forty-year Dominican resident of Washington, D.C.

The issue of black immigrants' racial identity was taken up immediately in the exhibit. Visitors were informed:

This exhibit looks at the immigration of people of African descent from Central and South America and the Caribbean to the Washington metropolitan area. It examines how the perceptions and the realities of race, color, and ethnicity have shaped people's identity. It also illustrates their impact on the community life of these groups of Black people in their homelands and in the Washington metropolitan area.³²

A video of various *Black Mosaic* participants speaking about their identities played on a television screen just inside the exhibit space. In it, the featured participants discussed their understanding of nationality and race, and of their pre- and post-immigration experiences of these. Mora recalled growing up in the Dominican Republic essentially unaware of race, despite her poor economic circumstances. She explained:

Well, although I was the darkest child in my family at the time, color was not an issue in any way that influenced my relationship with my parents, my aunt, my uncles, my cousins. It just was not an issue. I was never made to feel that I was less than a full human being. It wasn't an issue for me growing up in the Dominican Republic. It just wasn't. And so feelings of difference in ways that one feels here in the States when one is growing up was not something that I experienced until I came to the States.³³

Many visitors noted that this video was especially compelling and useful in furthering their understanding of the communities represented.³⁴

The first historically substantive section, "The African Diaspora in the Americas," followed this humanistic opening. A brief definition and history

32. *The Black Mosaic: Community, Race, and Ethnicity Among Black Immigrants in Washington, D.C.*, exhibit script, pp. 2–3.

33. "Identity," exhibit video tape, *Black Mosaic*, Anacostia Museum.

34. Anacostia Museum Education Department files, Unedited Visitor's Comments, March 5, 1995, *Black Mosaic* archives, Anacostia Museum.

of the African Diaspora, a map of the diaspora from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries, and a chart entitled “Blacks and Mulattoes in Latin American countries” were displayed. The accompanying label read:

It is difficult to determine the exact numbers of people of African descent in Central and South America and the Caribbean. Different regions and countries have different definitions of who is Black. In addition, African ancestry is often overlooked or ignored in official censuses, particularly where people of African descent exist in small numbers or where intermarriage with other groups has been common.³⁵

The next panel displayed black Ecuadorians as a case study of the African experience in Latin America. The story of sixteenth-century Maroon leaders Francisco and Juan Mangache of Esmeraldas was presented alongside current literature produced by the Centro Cultural AfroEcuatoriano and photographs of the Esmeraldas region.

The connection between this history of Africanity in Latin America and blackness as understood in the United States was made by the next panel, “The Diaspora as Pan-African Community.” The work and experiences of Marcus Garvey and his Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) were explored in a large label, together with the work of “the activities of Black writers and intellectuals of the Harlem Renaissance and the Negritude cultural movements in the 1920s and 1930s.” Photos and memorabilia of UNIA and such pan-Africanist luminaries as Jean Price-Mars, Aimé Césaire, Langston Hughes, Leon Damas, Claude McKay, Leopold Senghor, Frantz Fanon, and W.E.B. DuBois were displayed alongside the label. The connection between their work and Afro-Latin America is not made until the artifacts of the Congress of Black Culture in the Americas meetings of the 1970s and 1980s.

This section leaps over the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, periods of anti-colonial revolutionary foment and Latin American nation-state building. Most striking is the lack of reference to the Haitian Revolution, particularly given the inclusion of the Haitian community in the *Black Mosaic*. The Haitian Revolution was undeniably a pivotal event in the development of blackness and institutionalizations of nationhood throughout the Americas, including the United States. The only reference to that history in this section is elliptical and gives short shrift to the distinctive ways in which race was used in Latin American and United States’ nation-building projects. “Although individuals may have thought of themselves as, say, Haitians or Cubans,” visitors were told, “some Black religious and political leaders argued that people of African descent should look to Africa as their ancestral home and echoed slave folk beliefs of an eventual return to Africa.”³⁶ That the African American masses in Latin America did not necessarily agree is left unexamined.

35. *Black Mosaic*, exhibit script, p. 7.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

Following a list of common race terms from the region, however, a later section on “Race and Ethnicity in Latin America and the Caribbean” explained:

The racial and ethnic environments of the English- and French-speaking West Indies where there are large Black majorities, are significantly different from those in Central and South America and the United States. In the final years of the colonial era, the emergence of black political leadership, economic and social institutions have encouraged the expansion of the Black middle class. Recent economic difficulties and political crises, however, have prompted significant immigration from these islands.³⁷

Accompanying objects included photographs, newspaper articles, dolls of several skin tones in traditional folk dress, Colombia’s anti-discrimination law, a Dominican passport, a *Dictionary of Latin American Racial Terms*, and a copy of Moreau de Saint-Mery’s famous *Description de la Partie Francaise de Saint Domingue*. Together these objects conveyed, at least in part, the importance of colonialism and imperialism in the development of Latin American racial identities. Case studies of black consciousness movements in Brazil and Panama were presented and effectively situated in their proper political-economic contexts, to display the relationship between U.S. imperial interests in Panama, the racist work and living structures experienced by British West Indian laborers in the U.S.-controlled Canal Zone, and the formation of an Afro-Panamanian identity.

In a following section, “Migration,” an analogy of sorts was drawn between the history of British West Indians in Panama and African Americans in D.C. Visitors were reminded that African Americans (many of them free) had comprised at least a quarter of the capital’s population since the nineteenth century, and had established several communities throughout the district.³⁸ By the turn of the century, the District “hosted the largest urban concentration of African Americans in the entire nation.”³⁹ The great labor migration of African Americans from the Southern United States during the 1930s and 1940s substantially increased and concentrated their numbers and solidified their standing. “But,” the opening panel in the section on Migration explained, “international migration has also made its mark. The vast majority of Black immigrants to this country come from Central and South America and the Caribbean.” African American’s Great Migration north coincided in Washington, D.C. with the arrival of a Latin

37. *Ibid.*, p. 44.

38. See James Borchert, *Alley Life in Washington: Family, Community, Religion and Folklife in the City, 1850–1970* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1982).

39. Robert D. Manning, “Multicultural Change in Washington, D.C.: The Contested Social Terrain of the Urban Odyssey,” Report 91-3, Institutional Studies Office, Smithsonian Institution, April 1991, p. vi.

American diplomatic community. That community often relied upon the domestic labor of Afro-Latino migrants from their countries. Mirroring socio-racial and political conditions in the Dominican Republic at the time, for example, Dominican domestic labor migrants typically hailed from the traditionally African American and West Indian regions and communities in the Dominican Republic.⁴⁰

In the 1940s and 1950s, these Latin American service workers lived alongside African Americans south of Columbia Road, the racial dividing line of the Adams Morgan neighborhood, where much of the international community had settled due to its proximity to the embassies being established. At the same time, however, because of their status as Spanish-speaking immigrants and their work connections to Latin American legations and embassies, they worked and socialized primarily with other Latin American immigrants. Although regular daily or weekly socializing was organized along class lines, because the Latino community was so limited, service staff had fairly regular social contact with elite embassy and legation families during the 1940s and 1950s.

Ramberto Toruella, Juana Campos' son born and raised in Washington, D.C. during the 1950s and 1960s, recalled:

The only Latinos in this town were embassy personnel. The support staff of the embassy. So we grew up with all the embassies. If the Embassy of Venezuela would have a celebration to celebrate their Independence Day, all the Latinos were invited. And we'd go to the Venezuelan Embassy, eat Venezuelan food, and dance Venezuelan dances. And the same with the Mexican Embassy, the Dominican Embassy. There was a handful, within a 50-mile radius there must have been 100 Latinos. We knew every Latino in D.C. Every Latino in D.C. knew each other.⁴¹

This working and social relationship with both Latin Americans and white D.C. shielded early Dominicans from the sort of Jim Crow policies and practices their contemporary African American neighbors and co-workers were experiencing.⁴² It also enabled the retention of a Latin American identity for the first generation, and the formation of a generalized Latino identity for the second generation through shared cultural practices—particularly food ways, dance, and religion—and through the retention and use of Spanish.

40. See Alfonso Aguilar, "Leyendas de nuestra historia: Juanita A. Campos, 54 años de vida en D.C.," *Foro Newspaper*, 28 April 1994; Juana Campos, interview by Hector Corporan, *Black Mosaic* archives, Anacostia Museum; Juana Campos, interview by author, August 1998, Washington, D.C. Author's notes.

41. Ramberto Toruella, interview by author, August 1998.

42. América Paredes, for example, was a Dominican domestic in the Georgetown townhouse of John F. Kennedy during his terms as representative and senator. She continued to work for the Kennedy family after Kennedy's assassination until her retirement in the early 1990s, and still vacations at the family's Hyannisport home. Hector Corporan, interview by author, August 1998, Washington, D.C.

For second-generation Dominicans coming of age in the 1950s and 1960s, Spanish language use became a means of affirming a Latino identity and for Afro-Latinos a shield against anti-black racism. As *Black Mosaic* pointed out, a series of widely publicized racist incidents leading to diplomatic debacles occurred in 1961. International attention was focused on the United States and on D.C., in particular when several dignitaries from newly independent African nations were refused service at Maryland and D.C. establishments on repeated occasions.⁴³ As a result, President Kennedy sent identical letters to governors of Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, and Virginia—states through which diplomats frequently traveled. These letters asked the governors for their cooperation in assuring “friendly and dignified receptions for diplomatic representatives of foreign countries who may be working, living, and traveling in your State during their Assignment in the United States.”⁴⁴

In this context, Ramberto’s recollections are instructive:

All we spoke at home was Spanish. So we didn’t know any English. All our friends were Spanish speaking. And we when we started learning English, my mom would always say, “Never speak English in public. Always speak Spanish.” At the People’s Drug Store, blacks couldn’t eat. “No coloreds.” Coloreds could not sit at the counters and my mom would take us there and the waitresses would look at her and look at us. We were actually speaking Spanish because then they’d say, “Oh, they’re not colored, they’re foreigners. You can feed them.” We grew up like that. We grew up going everywhere because my mom knew how to play the game. So we grew up knowing it was important that we were Dominicano, Latino, Dominicano.⁴⁵

Do a Campos clearly understood that she and her children could be taken for African American. She was also, it seems, aware of the foreigners’ exemption.⁴⁶ Through her use of Spanish, she actively resisted the social and spatial restriction African American identification implied, and she taught her children to do the same.

On the one hand, Do a Campos’ refusal to be perceived as African American could be understood as a negation and a refusal of a black identity. And indeed, Do a Campos does not identify as black; instead, she understands herself to be *india*, just as she did nearly fifty years ago when she left

43. Calvin B. Holder, “Racism Toward Black African Diplomats During the Kennedy Administration,” *Journal of Black Studies* 14, no. 1 (1983): 31–48; Timothy Maga, “Battling the ‘Ugly American’ at Home: The Special Protocol Service and the New Frontier,” *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 3, no. 1 (1992): 126–42.

44. John F. Kennedy, Correspondence, April 13, 1961, Central Files, John Fitzgerald Kennedy Library.

45. Ramberto Toruella, interview by author, August 1998, Washington, D.C.

46. Similar experiences and negotiations occurred for Latin American and Latino baseball players during the same era in the United States. See Adrian Burgos, Jr., “Jugando en el Norte: Caribbean Players in the Negro Leagues, 1910–1950,” *Focus/En Foco: Race And Identity* (New York: Centro de Estudios Puertorrique os, Hunter College, 1996).

the Dominican Republic.⁴⁷ However, soon after her arrival in D.C., Do a Campos understood that her racial self-perception differed radically from the perception of both Anglo and African Americans. To them she was “black,” and that meant subordination. She understood quickly that Spanish language use and retention would mediate anti-black racism.

The issue for Do a Campos was not one of allegiance to one group or the other, however. Rather, it was a refusal to be relegated to second-class citizenship by either community. Do a Campos was a labor migrant who left the Dominican Republic in 1940, during the Trujillo era and shortly before the end of the decades-old U.S. Customs Receivership.⁴⁸ Her pre-migration experience of the United States, in other words, was in the context of a country deeply affected by U.S. neo-colonial and military intervention.⁴⁹ It is understandable, then, that Do a Campos did not feel herself to be caught on the horns of what Swedish sociologist Gunnar Myrdal called the United States’ “American dilemma.”⁵⁰ The issue for Do a Campos, instead, was her family’s ability to negotiate both “the [U.S.] racial state,” as Omi and Winant put it, and the socio-racial geography of D.C. on pragmatic terms.⁵¹

Ironically, Do a Campos’ story was at the center of *Black Mosaic*. The pedal-footed sewing machine with which she made her living in Washington was prominently displayed in *Black Mosaic*, and a picture of her alongside it at the exhibit’s opening day was widely circulated in promotional materials. She derived great pleasure from her participation in *Black Mosaic* not because she understood herself to be a black immigrant, but because she understood the exhibit to be a celebration of Latino immigrants’ survival in Washington, D.C.⁵² For Do a Campos, *Black Mosaic* was a more fixed, if comparably short-lived version of the yearly Latin American Festival she had helped establish in Washington twenty or so years earlier.⁵³ Why, then, did Do a Campos participate in *Black Mosaic*? Simply stated, as she had done throughout her experience in Washington, she ignored the racial context of the event and focused on the part of the exhibit that served her purposes. For her, *Black Mosaic* was an affirmation of her success as an immigrant and as the “godmother” of the Dominican community in Washington.

47. Juana Campos, interview by author, August 1998, Washington, D.C.

48. The U.S. collected and managed Dominican Customs revenues from 1905 to 1941. Since import revenues represented the principal source of currency exchange, the U.S. was effectively managing the Dominican economy during this period.

49. See Pope Atkins and Larman C. Wilson, *The Dominican Republic and the United States: From Imperialism to Transnationalism* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998).

50. Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (New York: Harper, 1944).

51. Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1980s* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

52. Juana Campos, interview by author, Washington, D.C., August 1998. Author’s notes.

53. See Olivia Cadaval, *The Hispano American Festival and the Latino Community: Creating an Identity in the Nation’s Capital*, Ph.D. dissertation in American Civilization, Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, George Washington University, Washington, D.C., 1989.

By contrast, for Doña Campos' children and those of their generation who came of age in Washington during the 1960s and 1970s, *Black Mosaic* was successful in affirming their membership in several socio-cultural communities: Dominican, black, Latino, Afro-Latino. As it was noted in *Black Mosaic*'s section on Race and Ethnicity in D.C., "Afro-Latinos had to adjust to an unaccustomed social distance between the races and to U.S. classifications that sought to divide their ethnic community into two racial groups: 'Blacks' and 'Hispanics'."⁵⁴ However, the underlying sociological and historic reasons for those affiliations were not sufficiently explored by *Black Mosaic*. Despite recognizing and presenting race and ethnicity in Latin America as distinctive from that in the United States, *Black Mosaic* never questioned, and therefore never explained why this particular group of Latin American immigrants identified as black.

These Dominicans identify as black nearly twice as often as Dominicans in New York City precisely because the Dominican community in D.C. is small, has origins in West Indian and U.S. origin African-American communities in the Dominican Republic, took root in a segregated Southern city, and came of age in the midst of a large, economically and politically diverse African American community. As Hector Corporan put it, they "didn't have a choice but to recognize their blackness." The lack of a large Dominican community "creates a discontinuity of all the racial classifications that we use in Santo Domingo, which has been transplanted in New York City, but here that disappears."⁵⁵ That they continue to sustain an ethnic identity as Dominicans, or more generally, as Latinos despite lacking a broad community base is sociologically noteworthy.

Both Anglos and African Americans expect Dominicans to assume and ultimately to celebrate a black identity. African Americans, historically and contemporarily, insisted that Dominicans (and African diaspora communities generally) identify as black. Other Latinos, conversely, insist that ethnicity supercedes race in the structuring of Latino identity. As it was explained in *Black Mosaic*, "Unlike other immigrants, Black immigrants must also adjust to and successfully situate themselves within two distinct environments—society at large and the African American community. Thus they must often negotiate a conflicting set of expectations."⁵⁶

In Washington, D.C. there was and continues to be an incentive to black self-identification. There African Americans are a numerical majority, wield increasing political power, hold the vast majority of government posts and jobs, and occupy a diversity of socio-economic statuses (for example, just outside D.C., Maryland's Prince Georges County has the highest percent-

54. *Black Mosaic*, exhibit script, p. 86.

55. Hector Corporan, interview by author, Washington, D.C., 1998. Author's notes.

56. *Black Mosaic*, exhibit script, p. 86.

age of affluent blacks in the country). As former Howard University professor and historian Maricela Medina put it:

Well, in my case I didn't have to go the Dominican route. I could go the African American route. And that was another thing that I found out, as opposed to people who think there are only disadvantages to being African American. There were a lot of advantages when I went to school because this was the time of the Civil Rights Movement. The Black Power movement. The militancy on campus. A lot of things were changing and there were a lot of opportunities offered to African Americans. Puerto Ricans were always included and Mexican Americans, but if you were Hispanic of any other origin, unless you qualified as African American, you weren't able to participate.⁵⁷

Although she self-identified as Hispanic, financial aid to Hispanics was limited to those of Mexican, Puerto Rican, or Cuban national origin. Thus, Dr. Medina attended Howard University as an undergraduate and went on to pursue a graduate degree in Latin American history from the University of Michigan with financial and institutional support received because she self-identified as black, if not African American. She subsequently taught Latin American history at Howard and continuously challenged her students to reconsider their notions of blackness and hispanicity.

The class stratification of the African American community in Washington, D.C. also serves as an incentive to assimilation into a black racial identity. As Carmen Quander explained:

So that the Dominican blacks that come here or the mixed blacks, like myself, that come here, we get involved in the African American community and we see that there is a very, very deep class-consciousness and that there is a place for us. A positive place. But for example, in New York City, although there are affluent African Americans, they are not in a mass concentration the way you have in D.C.⁵⁸

Conversely, the relative political and economic disempowerment of African Americans in New York, particularly those next to whom Dominicans live and work, and with whom they go to school, reinforces the prevailing Dominican association of blackness with low socio-economic standing. In that regard, the story told by *Black Mosaic* can be considered an important chapter in transnational Dominican history.

The participation of Dominicans in *Black Mosaic* represents a substantial shift in the history of transnational Dominican identity. Anacostia staff worked hard to display Dominicans and Afro-Latinos in what it considered historically accurate terms. However, because they were working from within a U.S.-based African American frame of reference, they placed

57. Maricela Medina, interview by author, Washington, D.C., August 1998.

58. Carmen Quander, interview by author, Washington, D.C., August 1998.

Dominicans inside that context, rather than interrogating the connection between contexts. As Kirshenblatt-Gimblett explains:

Objects are set in context by means of long labels, charts, and diagrams, commentary delivered via earphones, explanatory audiovisual programs, docents conducting tours, booklets and catalogues, educational programs and lectures and performances. . . . In-context approaches to installation establish a theoretical frame of reference for the viewer, offer explanations, provide historical background, make comparisons, pose questions, and sometimes even extend to the circumstances of excavation, collection, and conservation of the objects on display. . . . In-context approaches exert strong cognitive control over the objects, asserting the power of classification and arrangement to order large numbers of artifacts from diverse cultural and historical settings and to position them in relation to one another.⁵⁹

Black Mosaic situated the experience of Afro-Latinos in the context of African American history in the United States. Because of this, it missed the opportunity to note that African American history began in South America. For example, the enslavement of Africans and African revolutions both first occurred in the Caribbean, specifically on Hispaniola. The absence of that historic connection was glaring even to visitors.

Throughout *The Black Mosaic* exhibit, two concerns clearly emerged from the expressions of support and feedback from visitors: Visitors communicated that the concept of the African Diaspora as presented by the exhibit was not sufficiently explored. They were intrigued by the concept and wanted a more concrete, historical discussion. Also, many in our traditional (African American) community miss seeing themselves. They want an examination of how the histories of the African American and immigrant communities were linked.⁶⁰

It would have been possible, for example, to explore those centuries overlooked by *Black Mosaic* during which the African presence in the Americas was principally located in the Spanish, French, and Portuguese colonies. At the same time, the migration of African Americans from the United States and establishment of colonies in places like Haiti and the Dominican Republic during the early nineteenth century would have added an often overlooked dimension to African American history.

Similarly, there was no discussion of how the diverse slave economies influenced subsequent racialized nation building projects. On Hispaniola, for example, reliance on a cattle-ranching-based slave economy in the

59. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Objects of Ethnography," in Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine, *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1991), 390.

60. "Building Bridges: African American and Latino Communities in Washington, D.C.," Internal Memo, date and author unknown, *Black Mosaic* archives, Anacostia Museum.

context of an impoverished and abandoned Spanish colonial outpost led to less social, political, cultural, and economic distance between the “white” Creole elite and the African and Afro-Hispanic masses until the mid-nineteenth century.⁶¹ That legacy has affected subsequent Dominican ethno-racial identity formations and representations, at home and abroad.

After the exhibit closed in November of 1995, Anacostia researchers and staff continued their attempts to institutionalize a relationship with the Latino community. Several programs geared toward Caribbean and Afro-Latino communities were organized post-*Black Mosaic*, primarily around music. These petered off, however, by mid-1996.⁶² Dominican community scholar Hector Corporan was charged with researching possible sites for a Latino Community Museum that would be located in Adams Morgan and initially sponsored by the Anacostia. Although internal discussions, research, and community outreach led to two sites being considered actively, the project was ultimately dropped, and Corporan subsequently did not have his contract renewed at the Anacostia.⁶³ In many ways, those events reflect the current status of Afro-Latinos and our public history, at the Anacostia and beyond.

A possible remedy to this circumstance is a reconfiguration of our understanding of who and what constitutes “African America.” Local geographies, particular histories, national contexts, and specific material conditions at times lead to competing interests, and at others allow for connections between these spaces and peoples to be made. I am not arguing for an essentialist notion of affinities based on some putative ancestral linkages. Rather, I am arguing that there are enough shared conditions of economic exploitation, material deprivation, ideological and physical violence, and extraction of cultural capital linked to those historic connections to create an agenda based on shared issues. So long as Anglo-African Americans and Latinos perceive themselves as visitors in each other’s houses (to borrow Appiah’s metaphor⁶⁴), then they will not feel any loss or damage to that house to be their own.

61. See Torres-Saillant, “Introduction to Dominican Blackness.”

62. Louis Hicks, interview by author, Washington, D.C., June 1998.

63. Hector Corporan, interview by author, Washington, D.C., August 1998; Sharon Reincken, interview by author, Washington, D.C., July 1998.

64. Anthony Appiah, *In My Father’s House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).