



AFRO LATINX STORIES

HISTORIAS AFRO-LATINX



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Letter from the Editor

Identity can be complex for anyone to navigate. For people of color, who seldom see their experiences reflected in the media and benefit from limited spaces that acknowledge their day-to-day, negotiating identity can be an increased tangled endeavor.

Acknowledging that stories of Afro-Latinx, Black-Latinx and Afro-Latin American peoples are often obscured in mainstream news outlets, the *El Nuevo Sol* editorial staff embarked on a podcast project in 2021 with the objective of providing a platform for individuals of these communities. We sought to not only capture a glimpse of their life journeys but also bring attention to their struggles and chronicles of resilience. Through the course of the interview process, we met a diverse group of folks who shared courageous personal accounts of not fitting into racial molds and how they manifested their own lanes instead.

Fast-forward and our audio series was soon transformed into an online site. Now, the project has taken on yet another life via the pages of this small-scale but mighty book.

The collection of oral histories you will encounter inside were documented in English or Spanish or somewhere in-between. In diving into these narratives, perhaps you, too, can see a piece of yourself mirrored in their experience.

- **Melody Soto**

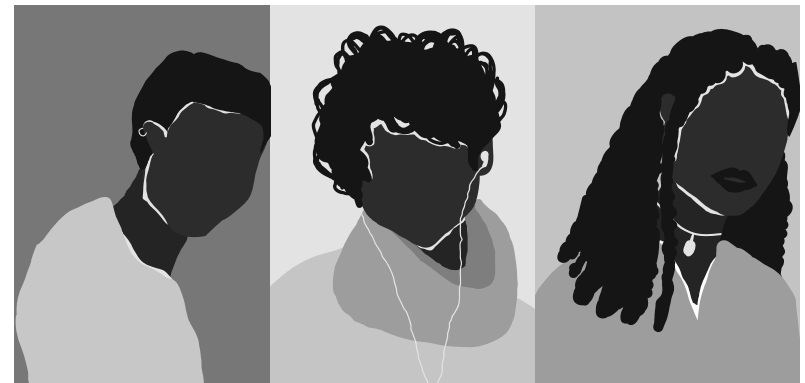


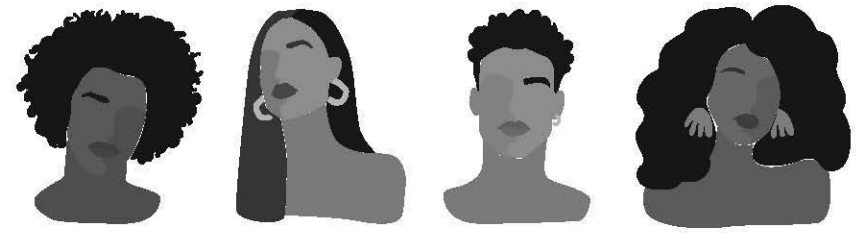
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Why Is it Complex for Afro-Latinxs to Identify Themselves?

- The U.S. Census Bureau's classification of the Hispanic identity: survey forms have described "Hispanic" as an ethnic origin, not a race.
- Most Latin American countries did not collect official statistics on ethnicity or race, especially from populations with African origins, until recently
- The colorism system that allows privileges or disadvantages on the basis of the lightness and darkness of skin color has led individuals to a conscious unrecognizing of their racial lineage
- An unawareness of heritage from families and communities has led to a lack of racial affirmation





Blaxican Borderlands with Dr. Rebecca Romo



Rebecca Romo: My name is Rebecca Romo and I am a professor of Sociology at Santa Monica College, which is a community college in Santa Monica. I have a Master's and a Ph.D. also in sociology.

I wanted to begin the presentation by talking a little bit about my background. Before I begin to speak about my research, I am sharing with you some pictures from my family. The one that you see to the left is my entire family, my mom, my dad, and there's actually seven siblings. So, I'm the sixth of seven. I'm the one little one down there in the bottom with the, I guess, a white dress on, and then to the right is a picture of all my siblings and I when we were adults.

My mom—my parents are both from Mexico. My mother, she was born in Ciudad Juárez, but her family is from Jalisco. They immigrated up to the border to Ciudad Juárez. And my mother, she came to the United States when she was three years old. My father, he is from a town called Jalostotitlán, Jalisco. That's where he was born. And he came to the United States at 13 years old.

...I'm originally from Sacramento, California, which is in Northern California. They went over

there because of—just like a lot of families that immigrate, they usually go where their social networks are from or where they have social networks and also where there's work. A lot of my tías worked in the canneries in Northern California and like the Campbell Soup Factory, for example.

My dad, he did a lot of work, but one of the first things that he did in Northern California was to work in the fields. He picked onions and tomatoes. My parents, they met over there. And then we—you know, there's seven of us. All my siblings were born there.

I put the title of this slide, "Family and Skin Color," because I wanted to tell you a little bit about my family background, but also about skin color. I mean, I see, as you can notice, we're pretty fair skinned. That's relevant to talking about Blaxican identity and experiences because, growing up—and I know this is not a unique experience. I think a lot of Latinx people experience the whole issues that have to do with skin color. But I remember growing up my dad's side of the family that are from the town Jaloscotitlán, Jalisco—which is—I've never been there myself, but, apparently there's a lot of people that live there that are very light-skinned.

They have blue eyes, green eyes and blond hair.

I remember growing up, my dad and my uncles, they would always brag about their family members in Jalos that were, that looked, you know, European or they looked White. So, you know, you kind of heard all that growing up. And then, also family members that would use terms, you know, in Spanish to talk about skin color—the positive. There is a positive connotation and also negative connotation, depending on what the term is.

For example, some of those terms like güero/güero, you know, when you hear that usually—or somebody calls you that—usually that's seen as a compliment. It's, it's a positive. And then there are other terms that are more derogatory. Right? So, for example, like I have a family member—no one in this picture, in these pictures—a different family member that would use the term india or indiowhenver their kid did something like mischievous. It was like seeing—it was like a negative, like an insult to, you know, to say that.

I'm sure I'm safe not telling you anything that you don't—haven't possibly already heard. But I come from my family—in a Mexican family. And there you did hear a lot about, like it seemed like they valued more the European aspects of Mexican identity and they devalued the indigenous aspects. And also—and didn't even acknowledge the African aspects at all. There was never a conversation about, oh, well, you know, Mexicans are laughing and people in general will have African ancestry or African roots. There is a complete denial of that. Even people who identify as Mexican and do have some African ancestry—I mean, in their physical appearance, also deny it. I know people who've had that experience. And I know that, you know, they were teased growing up and there was always this like denial of or even acknowledgment that there was any kind of African ancestry in among Mexicans.

Now I'm going to fast forward. Growing up in that context, I had my son. This is my son, Emilio. He's my oldest child who's now 19 years old. But he... I had him when I was a freshman in college and actually was at Cal State. I went to California State University, Sacramento, and I had him in my freshman year. And I raised him as a single parent pretty much from the very beginning. So, being a parent of a child who I identify as Blaxican. So, this is... Blaxicans are people who have one Mexican or Mexican-American parent and one African-American parent. And not all people who have that parentage identify themselves as Blaxican. I use the term Blaxican—and this was not a term invented by me. I'll talk more about the interviews that I did with people in the United States. But it was not something that I invented. Something that I heard of, though. And so, when I gave birth to my son... when I was pregnant with him, I did have some family members that were upset because... I was actually the first person in my family to be in an interracial relationship. You know, my dad was disapproving. But the way that he explained it was that it was because of religion. He said, "you know"... I grew up Catholic and my family, they're Catholic. For him, he would always just ask me, "what religion is he going to be?" My son's father and his family, they actually are agnostic. They don't practice religion at all. But the assumption was that, you know. I don't know what my dad thought they were, maybe Baptist. I'm not sure. Like as a stereotypical image. But he used the excuse of, like, religion.

"You know, what religion is he going to be in?" You know, I remember pointing out to my dad one time, I said, "you know, Dad, we have cousins that are darker than my—if it's about skin color," I don't know. We have—I have cousins that are darker than my son's father, you know. And so, you know, there is just disapproval. I had one of my brothers that I grew up with living in the same house we lived in.

I grew up very—we are actually very low income. So at the time, my dad, he was—we were on food stamps, welfare. My dad wasn't working. We were living in—renting my uncle's house, two-bedroom, small house in Sacramento. The house my parents still live in now. And so, I lived in that house while I was pregnant. I was a teenager with my siblings and one of my brothers. He refused to talk to me the whole time I was pregnant. No, we lived in the same house, little house. And he didn't talk to me at all the whole time I was pregnant.

Then, when I gave birth to my son, all of my siblings came to see me at the hospital except for that one brother. But when I came home, I brought my son home. And, you know, like after you give birth, it's like. It's well, it's difficult,

you know, so you ask for help, and I remember one time I asked my dad if he would hold my son while I took a shower. And every time I get emotional, every time I tell the story. But when I got out of the shower, my son was laying on my brother's chest. You know, the one that never talked to me the whole time. I'm not trying to say that my son's birth changed their anti-Black attitudes, but I did see I did notice something in them that did change. I'm not, you know, like people say, oh, multiracial people are like this. Solving racism. Right. I'm not trying to say that that's what that is. But I did notice that there was something that did change in my brother because after that, he. You know, growing up, like, look, I'm sure everybody has some kind of awareness of this.

Latinos, and I'm going to say specifically Mexicans, because that's what I am and I'll speak from that experience. You know, our anti-Black—there's a lot of anti-Blackness. There's a lot of—you hear it a lot. You know, people openly talk like that. And so I had in my own family, they would. And after my son was born, at least I didn't hear from them anymore. I don't know. I hope that in their heart they have changed. But at least they knew better not to talk that way in front of me.

I also had some family members that would like, when he was born, they said, "oh, he's so dark." I also had another cousin who suggested after my son was born that because his nostrils are a little wide, that I do rub his nose like this and keep doing that. And that would make his nose narrow. And I remember looking at her and saying, "you know? That's how his nose is supposed to be, and I'm OK with it."

And then the other thing I told her was, if that actually worked, we wouldn't have plastic surgery. Thank you for trying to do that favor for me, but... And she was being one hundred percent sincere, like she thought she was actually giving me good advice. Like, not a joke. Not funny, but giving me, like, solid advice.

I also had another cousin who told family in Mexico that night that his father is Puerto Rican, which is not true in that kind of speaks to that racialized hierarchy. So, in my uncle's view, it was better to say Puerto Rican than to say Black, you know, because of the way that we categorize people into these hierarchies of which one is more valuable and which one is less valuable.

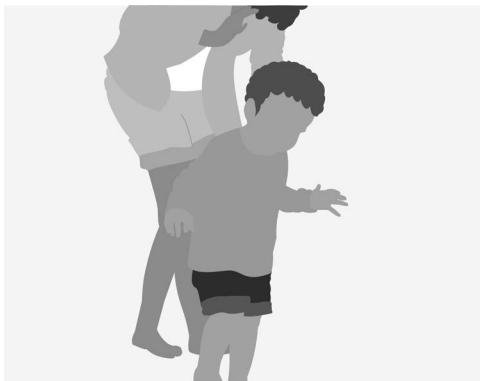
And now I have... we call ourselves a Black-Latino family. This is actually my husband and we're a blended family in many different ways. You know, we had children before our relationship and we also have one together, which is the little boy in

“WHEN I GAVE BIRTH TO MY SON... I DID HAVE SOME FAMILY MEMBERS THAT WERE UPSET... I WAS ACTUALLY THE FIRST PERSON IN MY FAMILY TO BE IN AN INTERRACIAL RELATIONSHIP.”

the blue that's being carried by my stepson. That's our son together. But all of my family members are in some way Black and Latino. Two of my stepchildren are Costa Rican and Black. And then the others are Mexican and Black. And then my son, one of my stepsons, is actually White and Black. But we are, you know, a blended family. This is us.

This is the way that we experience our lives in L.A. And it's pretty interesting because we live in. Well, I live in Sylmar and, you know, it is part of the northeast San Fernando Valley—is very Latino. It's predominantly Latino. We have some interesting experiences with... depending on where we're at. Honestly, we don't really get a lot of looks unless we're in certain parts of the Valley, like, for example, like certain parts of Northridge, sometimes in the west end of the Valley. People stare. Over here, they don't stare too much. I'll talk more about the personal life, personal experiences a little bit later.

But I wanted to move on to the research. The chapter that you read, that was based on my dissertation research, which I'm actually turning into a book manuscript right now, and this hopefully will be published by next year. But what I did was I interviewed people who are Blaxican, who have one African-American parent, one Mexican, Mexican-American parent in the United States. And so I did a total of 40 interviews. All of them were adults. And that had to do with... in sociology. We have to get approval through the what is it called Institutional Review Board, which is like a very rigorous permission to interview people and so it's easier to interview adults than it is to interview children because of the permissions. I mean, it wouldn't have been impossible, but I went with adults and most of the people that I interviewed were from California.



However, they were also part of nine other states, including New York, Indiana, Georgia, New Mexico.

Like I said, their biological parents are African-American and Mexican-American and they consider themselves to be the first generation. We're all, quote unquote, what they would call racially mixed, right? There is no such thing as a pure race in terms of biological. But what I mean by first generation is they consider themselves to be the first of that mixture between an African-American parent and a Mexican, Mexican-American parent. This is different than Afro-Latinx experiences and identities from Latin America or Afro. Let's say Afro Mexican, for example. Who. People that are Afro Mexican in places like the Costa Chica region of Mexico. They've had multiple generations of this mixture. Whereas Blaxicans are more... they consider themselves to be more of a first generation... and their racial formation is specific to the United States. And I'm sure if you have questions, we could talk more about that and what that means.

And then I just want to talk about this picture that you're seeing. So these are actually children from my family. And the mural that you see in the background is actually a Saint. Padre Toribio Romo, who is supposedly, according to my father, somehow part of his relation. He was he's a patron saint of immigration, I believe. And he is from the town where my dad was born. Jalostotitlán or Santa Ana, I believe, which is like a little village right outside of it. This is in my uncle's backyard. One of my cousins, he's a muralists. He painted that.

And I just thought, you know, I took that picture a long time ago, but I thought it was the interesting connection because of, you know, here you have descendants of the Romo lineage. Right? And they're Afro, they're Blaxican, Black and Mexican.

Just a little about the emergence of Black identity, so in the United States in 1967, here was a U.S. Supreme Court case that legalized marriage between people of different races. All the way up till 1967, which was not that long ago, there were laws in different states in the US that prohibited people from intermarrying with one another if they weren't from the same race. After 1967, there was an increase in interracial marriages and also multiracial births. As I've said before, there have this idea of multiraciality is not something that's new. It's a social construct. It's this an idea that that people believe to be real. I guess what I'm trying to say is there's always been multiracial people. It's just that after 1967, you had more that identified themselves consciously as being multiracial...

Mexicans started migrating outside of the southwest, which is the traditional place for migration into places like Georgia and Indiana and New York. That kind of set the stage for these interracial marriages between Mexicans and African Americans, because Mexican and African Americans tend to work in the same kind of industries. You know, low wage labor working. And so, for example, this is an actual respondent that I interviewed and his parents. He is from Indiana and his parents met working at a factory in Indiana. And so his mother's Mexican and his father is African American. They moved to the same neighborhoods. They worked in the same places. And so, that kind of just set the stage for these interracial marriages and multiracial births.

Blaxicans started to or with the increase of these multiracial births. They started to identify outside of what we call Black, according to the one drop rule. In the United States, there was a law. There were laws on the books in different states that said that if you had any amount of African ancestry, that you were legally designated as Black. And then, it became more not so much a legal construct, but a social construct. Anybody who has any amount of African ancestry is socially designated as Black. That's why we can look at former President Barack Obama, who has a white mom and a Black father from Kenya, and look at him and say he's just Black. Nobody looks at him and says he's white. Right, because of the one drop rule. And so, Blaxicans, they kind of represent this moving away from identifying as Black, using the one drop rule, which is the way that a lot of people who were mixed with Black previously would identify because not just like, well, legally. Because of... because of socially. That's how people view who is Black.

My research questions centered around, I wanted to know how people identified and why it was that they were identifying in the way that they did. These are all pictures of family members, children from my family. And at the time when I was before I was when I was an undergraduate, before I went to grad school, I only knew Blaxicans that were children from my family. I wanted to learn more about that. And I was also interested in Black-Latino relations generally. So, when I went to UC Santa Barbara, I met my... who is became my mentor. And I'm actually coauthoring the book with Now. G. Reginald Daniel. And he was one of the first people to teach a class on multiracial identity at UCLA. And so it kind of just all fell into place when I went to grad school.

I don't really know that's what I wanted to research. But I had my Blaxican son, and I was interested in looking at Black-Latino relations and it kind of just all fell into place. So just there's

only a couple more sides... and we can have questions. But just a couple of things that I found. And you've read the chapter that your professor provided you, but I found that Blaxicans identify, the ones that I interview. They identify as both Black and Mexican, regardless of what their appearance is, because some Blaxicans have more of an appearance that people mark them as Black and then you'll see in the next slide. Sometimes the I've interviewed people who either are perceived as racially ambiguous or they might fall more towards people perceiving them as being Mexican or Latino. And so regardless of physical appearance, they identified as both... Black and Mexican, and they also saw Mexican identity, not just in terms of ethnicity, which is how the U.S. Census categorize who is quote unquote Hispanic is as a culture. They also saw it as a race, a race as well. So, they viewed themselves as both racially and culturally Black and Mexican, which also in the next slide kind of talk a little bit more about that.

But the picture that you're seeing here is a woman that I interviewed, Enedina and her mom... and she is from Indiana and actually she's the sister of the other person I was talking about on the previous slide. And so that's their mom. And she her their parents met. And like I said, at a factory that they worked out together in Indiana. So this is Guillermo, a person that I interviewed. He is actually a twin. His twin brother—they're fraternal, they're not identical. So that was really interesting because they both had these very different experiences based on their physical appearance. Because Guillermo, he you know, if you can look at his picture, he had his hair is straighter. He has lighter skin. And when people look at him, they didn't perceive him as being Black, even though his mother's Black and his father's Mexican. And so he would do things like in college, like join. He joined a fraternity that was a multicultural fraternity. And there was these different strategies. He said that he would use to let people know that, you know, he was not just Mexican, but Black as well, you know? And so it's really important for him, for people to know that he was both Black and Mexican.

It's something in the book that I write about some of the strategies that they used to like not only embrace both being Black and Mexican, but how they represent that to other people or how that is become so important in their lives that they do things like, for example, like hair became it was a very hot topic that people talk about a lot, not just the women, but the men as well. And so, like wearing their hair in certain kinds of hairstyles, growing it out and putting it into dreadlocks, you know, that kind of represented the African or the Black side of themselves. And so Guillermo said, I usually say I'm Blaxican, because I don't want to

deny both of them. I always say Blaxican off the top. People already know what I'm talking about.

Black skin becomes like this easy way for you to understand that they're both Black and Mexican. And there's other terms that people use as well, like Afro-Chicana, Afro Mexican, even though it doesn't mean exactly the same thing as when we think about African Afro Mexicans from Mexico. A little bit different. OK. And so what ways that they learned about their hybridity or this mixture of not just racial identity, but also cultural identity was through their parents. So my parents exposed me to both my cultures through music. So they talk about music a lot. The different kinds of music that their parents listen to. We eat outside. We eat soul food and enchilada. So also talked about like different kinds of food that was served on the dinner table. And it wasn't like they always, you know, like a mixture of both at the same time. But one day they might have eaten collard greens and then the next week their mom prepared menudo or something.

And then there was also, you know, navigating anti-Blackness, which is something that I when I started the presentation, I talked about it from my own experience. But this is Latoya and her mom who's Mexican. Her father's African-American. She was raised primarily by her mom and also her grandparents, who are Mexican and only speak Spanish. So, she said, my mom always made it



clear to me to talk to me about why I was different from other people. My grandparents helped raise me and they didn't speak English. I had episodes of kids calling me names, calling me the N-word in elementary school and even junior high. I had my grandpa who told me that I wasn't Black but Mexican. And so that was a pretty common theme that came up, especially on the Mexican side of the anti-blackness. I don't think that Latoya's grandfather was trying to tell her that she wasn't Black in a way. I think. Let me rephrase that. I think he was more trying to instill a pride of being Mexican. But at the same time, he was denying her Blackness. And I say that because it's really complicated. You know, and is very nuanced because she talks about her grandparents in a very caring and loving and compassionate way. But at the same time, having to deal with comments that came from her grandfather. And having to constantly negotiate that and then having always like her mother, who is on her side, that is instilled this pride in her of being both Black and Mexican and not feeling ashamed of being Black, but giving her encouragement to embrace her Black identity. And so this is kind of just some of the nuances that you find in the whole negotiation of what it's like to be both Black and Mexican.

Then I know because I'm I don't want to take too much time and I want to give some time for Q&A. But I wanted to just end this part by talking about where I started, which is about my experiences with my son. So, this is on the right-hand side. He would probably hate that. I am using those pictures right now. If he knew. But on the right hand side, he turned 18 last year and he this was actually him right after he voted in Michigan, which is where he's at in college right now. And so was really proud of this picture because first time that he voted and he had to stand in line for two hours, you know, talk about voter suppression... on his birthday. It actually was one of birthday that he voted. And then the other picture asked him and I when I first time I went to go see him play soccer in Michigan, his first one of his first time, I saw him play soccer in college. And so just a little bit about our own experiences.

I raised them mostly in Southern California. I went to get my Master's and Ph.D. at UC Santa Barbara. And then we moved here to Southern California, to Sylmar, actually, when he was probably like eight years old. And so I grew up in Sacramento. It is segregated. But in my opinion, it's segregated mostly by class, not by race. And when I moved to L.A., this is the 10th most segregated city in the country. And so. It was a different experience coming in, living around predominantly Latinos, which is what my neighborhood is. I think we're like 90 percent

here. And so the experiences with him going to school in. Was that of a lot of Latinos, his classmates. They didn't see him as Mexican. Not even as half Mexican. Even if they saw me, they saw me drop me off and talk to their parents. They never saw him as that. He has been called the N-word. You know, I would say starting in fifth grade was the first time that he was called that by Latinos, as the thing, too, is like the. It's very painful. You know, when people from the group that you see yourself as being a part of are the ones that are hurtful in that kind of way. And I'm not trying to say Latinos are the only ones that are like that because we know there's a lot of anti-Blackness in every single group, right—that's not Black. But there was like a lot you experience a lot of anti-Black and it's now as painful as a parent because, you know, as a parent, I wanted to go up there to the elementary school. You know, what you feel is that you want to go and pull on a little kids here or you want to talk to their parents or you want to do something. But, you know, my husband always calmed me down. OK, so, you know, he experienced that.

And then he went to Sylmar High School and played soccer. He was on the soccer team. And that was an interesting experience, too, because. While they were his teammates and him playing soccer and being athlete, it's been very eye opening because he's been called the N-word also like on the soccer field, not by his own teammates. But, you know, by other teams, and so his freshman year at Sylmar High School, there was actually a fight. And some of you I don't know. It was on the news. I know there's a lot of things on the news. And it was a long time ago, but there was a fight between they happened to be between African-American students and some Latino students. So it kind of turned into this, like, racialized event in sort of a way where. It had to do there have to be honest. It was like supposedly involved a gang. And so the gang supposedly put a, quote unquote, green light on all the Black students, which is green light means that when you see them on sight, either, well, actually means kill them. And I don't know if it was all that serious, but some kind of violence, you know. And it was, you know, him being both Black and Mexican. It was really difficult kind of time to navigate. A lot of African-American students actually ended up leaving school. And then some of them ended up staying there.

But I do remember I canceled all of my office hours after classes to drive all the way from Santa Monica to Sylmar to pick him up after school and drive them home because I didn't want him walking through the neighborhood. You know, my husband says I exaggerate, but it's because he lives here. He's been like he grew up in Brooklyn.

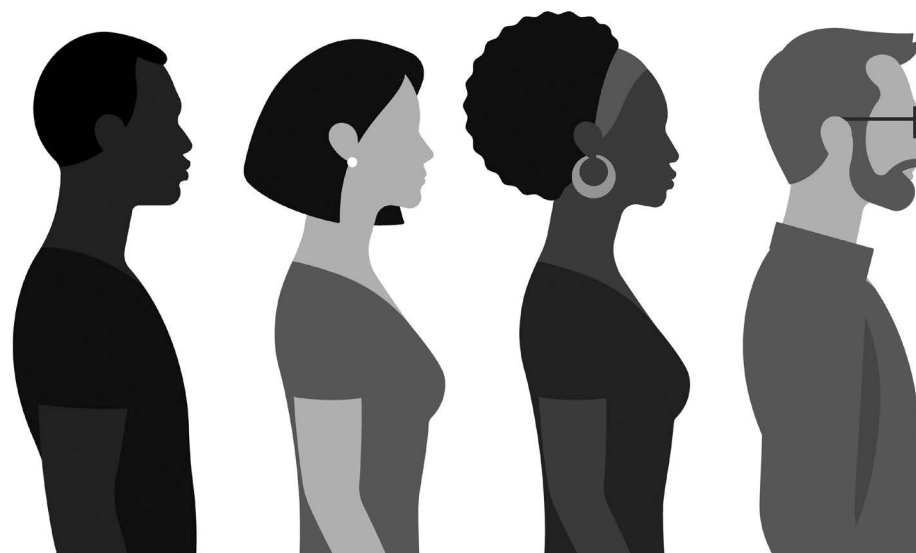
“HE HAS BEEN CALLED THE N-WORD... FIFTH GRADE WAS THE FIRST TIME THAT HE WAS CALLED THAT... IT'S VERY PAINFUL.”

So, you know, he has a different experience. But for me, it was like I'm not you know, I'm not going to take any chances. And I wasn't the only parent that felt that way. Latino parents and also African-American parents, we're both worried about our kids. And there was actually. Well, you all can ask me more questions about that, I want to go on and on. If you're curious, but. One of the reasons that I did this work, and I like to share this work, is because Mexicans in particular and Latinos in general don't we are not aware of the African ancestry, African roots that we have in the more awareness that we have of that. I think the less kind of anti-Blackness, indiscriminate discrimination and prejudice that we have towards one another with the more awareness that we have.

A lot of people like not even, you know, sometimes even Blaxicans and other Latinos, they don't even know that we have Afro Latinos. They don't know that Afro Mexicans exist in

Mexico. They don't know that Mexican culture is actually influenced by African culture in a lot of ways. One of the most famous songs that people recognize, which is La Bamba, which is, you know. Made famous by what they call what they started calling him, Ritchie Valens, which is right here in the San Fernando Valley, is actually a song after this African tribe called The Mom Bomba. And so that the song is actually originates from people who were enslaved, Africans that were enslaved in Veracruz, the zapateo, which is a dance that ethnomusicologists, they've traced this dance step, which is like the tapping. Right. If anybody's ever danced Folclórico, you learn to do that dance step. And it's actually an African down step. Know we can trace that back to Africa. Also food and, you know, Latino culture and specifically in Mexican culture, supposedly—agua de Jamaica. And then one scholar, he actually argues that even Mexican rice, the cultivation of rice actually comes from Senegal. And so there's you know, there's so many things about Mexican culture that has its roots in Africa.

And we don't recognize our relation. Right, because of the history of colonization, imperialism and slavery that has taught us that the worst thing that you can be is Black. Right. In the devaluation of Blackness, when actually if we look deeper into the roots. Latinos have African ancestry as part of their not just physical embodiment, but also in the culture itself.





Man sitting on a mule. San Basilio de Palenque, 1976



Man standing next to a tree. San Basilio de Palenque, 1976

Growing Up Blaxican in the South



Alexis Amezcua: My mom is African-American and my dad is Mexican. He is a first generation—and his whole family comes from Guadalajara and my grandparents immigrated over here and then they started their family over here. And all these kids had tons of kids over here in California.

Liliana Ramírez: Alexis grew up knowing how to only speak English. Although she doesn't speak Spanish she understands most of it. When she visits her dad's side of the family in Mexicali, Mexico, she tries her best when she communicates with her grandparents. Alexis is amazed at all the things her family can do, while living in a third world country.

Alexis Amezcua: I really like it (Mexicali)—to me, it looks like California. I don't care what anyone says. It is so close to the border anyways. Some of my cousins' houses are super nice and they're like, "Yeah we built this from the ground up." And it makes me like so proud because they did all this by themselves and they didn't need anyone else's help nor "American money" to do it. I truly love it. It's really beautiful out there and I love the food! I can eat, eat, eat—I don't care.

Liliana Ramírez: Being Afro-Latina, Alexis identifies herself as an African-American rather than an Afro-Latina. However, sometimes she does try to input both races on paper—but it is never an option. She typically has to choose either one. People have the tendency of doubting her own identity.

Alexis Amezcua: When I do it (identify) around certain people, they're like, "no you're not," or "speak Spanish," "you're not light enough," or be like, "you look Black." To save the hassle of explaining or hearing all the words and stuff, I just say I'm Black because I don't want to hear the criticism, or people telling me I'm not what I am.

Liliana Ramírez: Alexis was raised to see everyone the same. Growing up, she did not know the definition of race. Her parents taught her to not discriminate against anyone for the color of their skin.

Alexis Amezcua: So, once I got to Arkansas, people were like, "your hair is good," "you don't look all Black, you look mixed." That's when I

“TO SAVE THE HASSLE OF EXPLAINING... I JUST SAY I'M BLACK BECAUSE I DON'T WANT TO HEAR THE CRITICISM, OR PEOPLE TELLING ME I'M NOT WHAT I AM.”

started asking questions like, "Oh, am I fully Black?—like I don't know." That's when I would respond that I was Afro-Latina. I was pretty much depicted as different and because I was mixed with good hair. That's when I really started to realize that I'm Blaxican or Afro-Latina.

Liliana Ramírez: Alexis was born in California and moved to West Memphis, Arkansas at the age of 7 and then later moved back to California as a teenager. When she first moved to Arkansas she experienced a culture shock and was not aware that many people have never seen a person of color.

Alexis Amezcua: I just had to realize that not every place is going to be so open and openly accepting of that—at such a young age. Because California is very diverse and we call it a very liberal state, even though it pretty much isn't. But, Arkansas is a very conservative state so everything that is normal here, is not normal there. There's people who were born and raised in Arkansas and probably never went out of state before. In



that state or in that city there's only like African-Americans and you don't see any other cultures, like Latino, unless they're in a Mexican restaurant, or Asian-American, unless they were in a Chinese restaurant, nail salon or owning a beauty supply. You literally did not see anybody else besides African-American and White people. So, people didn't recognize what other people looked like unless it was on TV. And if they saw it on TV, they recognized it as exotic or foreign.

Liliana Ramírez: Many people in Arkansas assumed Alexis was African-American because of the color tone of her skin. She felt like she did not have enough characteristics of either race. Arkansas natives judged her accent and texture of hair.

Alexis Amezcua: I didn't talk the same—my dialect is different, people from there speak very very slow. If I would wear my hair curly it would be a shock to them because people don't wear their hair like that out there. It is usually always straight or in braids. I try to wear my hair curly all the time. I have type four hair, which is very coarse and curly hair—I have a lot of defined curls. In Arkansas a lot of people perm their hair to have it straight. Back then my hair was super long, pretty much to my waist. So, they'll see curly hair—if I wear my hair curly, they would be like, "oh my god, why is your hair that curly?" They are just not used to that there. If I had my hair super straight, they'd see it super long—they would be like, "o.m.g. your hair is so long, you have good hair." They'll touch my hair, and be like, "that's good hair." They're not used to that because their hair is permed—a lot of breakage happens, so their hair is shorter.

Liliana Ramírez: Alexis believes that being Afro-Latinx has its pros and its cons. She likes the fact that she gets to experience two different cultures which she will pass down to her future children. The only con about being mixed is that she doesn't feel like she's enough of either race.

Alexis Amezcua: The artist Miguel says in a song: "He's too dark for the Mexicans, and not Black enough for his Black culture." I like to completely feel that because sometimes you may not be Black enough to represent the Black community, or the Black community will shut you down because you're not Black enough. You don't have a lot of that culture with you that you grew up with, like they did. For example, you didn't grow up like them—you don't know a certain movie, or eat a certain food, talk like they do. You didn't have that one scar. Like everyone falls and has a scar on their knee. Same thing with the Mexican community—like all my cousins and my dad has the TB shot scar in their arms. One

“SOMETIMES YOU MAY NOT BE BLACK ENOUGH TO REPRESENT THE BLACK COMMUNITY WILL SHUT YOU DOWN BECAUSE YOU’RE NOT BLACK ENOUGH.”



of my friends asked me to show her the TB shot or you’re not Mexican. I’m like, “what?—I don’t need one.” If you don’t have a certain aspect from either of the cultures, I believe those cultures feel like I’m not good enough for them.

Liliana Ramírez: Alexis’ friends accepted her for who she is—they didn’t judge her based on her race or color of skin.

Alexis Amezcua: I have friends from third grade all the way to eleventh grade—they’re okay with it, they don’t really care. I’m still friends with them now. They are okay with it. My friends out here (California) are okay with it too. (Being Afro-Latina) if I say something, they be like, “ahh, you do that too?” They were so shocked. I think the people out here are more shocked that I’m Mexican than people in Arkansas because there’s a big population of Afro-Latinas here. But I guess they just don’t see it or they don’t want to believe it because my skin is so dark, I guess?

Liliana Ramírez: She faces criticism from the



internet trolls when they tell her she’s not enough of a Mexican or African-American to join the conversation.

Alexis Amezcua: On Twitter or TikTok people are like, “you look Black, you can’t be us, you’re not invited to the carne asada.” I’m like, “okay?—but I’m already there, I don’t know what to tell you guys.” They respond by saying, “your skin is too dark for this.” I’m like, “that’s fine, you do know that there are Black Mexicans and there are people who are darker skin that are Hispanic and Latinos.” (For) example, people who are from Honduras. I believe they have really really dark beautiful skin and they’re still considered latino-Hispanics. It doesn’t bother me anymore that people try to fight with me because of my skin color. I just be like, “you sound racist,” and it’ll back peddle. And they’ll be like, “I need to learn.” Calling Hispanics racist—they want to learn because they don’t want to be labeled as a racist person.

Liliana Ramírez: Alexis is a proud Afro-Latina and will continue to be herself even if other people do not accept her. She embraces both of her cultural roots.

Alexis Amezcua: We’re making our own culture and we’re trying to get it out there. It is something to be proud of, so, it’s like having your own nationality.



Poetry Has the Power to Heal



Natasha Carrizosa: “But I wasn’t Black enough for the Black kids—and I wasn’t Mexican enough for the Mexican kids. So, growing up both Black and Brown was difficult to navigate—not to mention being raised on the Southside of Fort Worth, being poor, sometimes getting groceries from the church. There was struggle and there was poverty—and back then, I didn’t know that I was writing my way out of some of these things.”

Melody Soto: Her friends call her Natty, an acronym for “Natural And True To Yourself.” Natasha Carrizosa—an award-winning poet, creative writing instructor, published author, and spoken word artist, discovered the immense power words can possess in elementary school.

Natasha Carrizosa: “Poetry is how I began, or what I consider to be in my blood, or who I am. I am a poet first. All of the spaces that I go into begin with the word.

I wrote the first poem ever when I was in 5th grade. There was this little güerita—little white girl—in my class named Amy who wrote a limerick. And I said to myself: ‘I want to do that.’ I remember thinking: ‘If she can do it, I can do it.’ So, I wrote this poem about friends because I didn’t have any—and I literally ran home. I was so excited about what I wrote. And I told my mom: ‘Momma, I wrote a poem.’ She was in the kitchen,

and she said: ‘Your father writes poems.’ And I said: ‘Daddy writes poems? Daddy is a roofer. Daddy can barely speak English. Daddy writes poems?’ And she said: ‘No—your real father.’

(I) didn’t have a relationship with my real father. I knew he had the same last name as me, ‘Carrizosa.’ I knew he lived in the same city as me. But that was probably the first time that maybe I heard of another poet—and I don’t think I’ve ever said that. But it intrigued me. So, I started writing—and I just kept writing.”

Melody Soto: Born in Texas to an African-American mother and a Mexican father, the creative writer has spent decades exploring her self-described MexiAfricana identity in her work.

The poem “3600 Block of Willing” paints a vivid picture of the multicultural upbringing she and her brothers—Gordo, Pana, Pelos and Isaac—were exposed to.

In the kitchen, Natasha often played the role of sous-chef while her mother recreated vibrant recipes, and an eclectic mix of music—from classical to rock and salsa—blasted in the background.

Natasha Carrizosa: “3600 Block of Willing is not written down anywhere, even though I thought

“I WASN’T BLACK ENOUGH FOR THE KIDS AND I WASN’T MEXICAN ENOUGH FOR THE MEXICAN KIDS.”

it was—and I think I like it like that. The first time we got a house—or moved into a house—I was a junior in high school. And it was this little white house—the address was 3636 Willing. And when I sat down to write this poem, I thought about the numbers and the words and what that house still means to me.”

Melody Soto: The commencement of elementary school signified another pivotal moment in Natasha’s life. It was during this period that she began to perceive that her own hair texture and skin color were noticeably different from those of others around her. Within a segregated neighborhood, composed of primarily Black and Brown communities, Natasha felt that she didn’t fit into any particular group.

Natasha Carrizosa: “My best friend and my tia—my everything—is Hadji. Her name is Angela. I’m four years younger than Hadji. We were raised like that. So, when I started school I was living with my grandmother Florene—my Black grandmother. I first probably knew it with how my grandmother combed our hair, or brushed our hair, for school the next day. She would brush Hadji’s hair and put it up, and then I wanted to be like Hadji. And she did my hair, but when I woke up the next morning, it didn’t look the same.

And then when I went to school, and my mother dropped me off, I cried because none of the kids looked like me—and I was scared. As long as I was home I was safe, but when I was out, it was different.”

Melody Soto: But feeling out of place, only intensified for Natasha because insults and racist remarks from classmates became constant. And as her poetry chronicles, the bullying she encountered marked her entire grade school experience.

Natasha Carrizosa: “I remember I had a crush on this Brown boy named George, and we were running in front of De Zavala Elementary School, and he calls me the N-word. And I think by that time I was in third grade—but at the same school.

And I don’t know how to react to that. I don’t know how to react to that. And I just stop and I say: ‘I’m Mexican, too!’ And then there’s this kind of unknown shame (that) washed over me. That’s when I was made to feel different. And then middle school had its same. And then high school had its same.

I had a lot of different experiences that I just tried to, you know, swallow.”

Melody Soto: Scan through the volume of Natasha’s written works and it won’t be difficult to discern that the poet frequently alludes or makes direct references to her late mother. Born in Arizona, Elaine Duran learned Spanish as a child and taught Natasha’s biological father and adoptive dad how to navigate the English language. Natasha credits her mother—her muse and defender—with fostering an environment where she could embrace her multilayered roots.

Natasha Carrizosa: “My mother is everything—everything. My mother left the Earth some years ago. Fierce protector of me and my brothers. I don’t even say my mom is a lioness—my mom is a lion.

She was there when they would be speaking Spanish in the grocery store talking about this Black woman and these kids, and she would respond with fire in Spanish. And I witnessed that.

And I saw her with her students. And I saw her being a mother, and wife, and sister, and daughter. She is my blueprint—then and now.

There are times when I feel lost, but I just remember. She would say all the time, the best thing about her was me. I’m her only daughter—and I threw that in a poem, too. But yeah, she’s



ever present. And a force. And the first thing that I wanted to say is she is God—to me.”

Melody Soto: Numerous childhood experiences have left a lasting imprint on Natasha, but the multifaceted creative contemplates on two particular occurrences often.

Natasha Carrizosa: “There are many moments that got to me.

One, one moment that I can’t erase from my mind—and Imma try to divide myself—I was like (in) kindergarten, right after, you know, going to school and figuring out that I was different, or my family was different. And we had just got this brand-new color TV. My mom was ironing and was watching *Roots* by Aldous Huxley. I don’t know if you’re familiar with that movie, but there’s a scene in there where the White slave master is beating this slave named Kunta Kinte. And he is beating him until he submits and says his name is Toby—this is what he wants to happen. Well, when he finally says Toby, my mom takes the iron and she throws it into the brand-new color TV. And I’m sitting there wondering—in shock. And that’s all I remember. But as I grew—and as I grow—I understand.

The other part was—I’m in high school, and I don’t have a tribe. I’m in the foyer of this school, and all of the groups are together—popular Black kids that I really wanted to be with, Mexican kids that I really wanted to be with. Rich White kids not so much. Anyway, school is about to start, and everybody is there, and this girl calls me a pepperbelly—(a) Black girl (who) looks like me calls me a pepperbelly. And everybody laughs. And (there’s) more laughing, and joking.

I don’t know what the word means. I just know what it made me feel—and it made me feel like that hot iron in the TV. It made me hot in the face; it made me enraged.

Anyway, I go home and I ask my mom: ‘Mom what’s a pepperbelly?’ And she just goes back to the range: ‘Who called you that? Who called you that?’ And I didn’t tell her all of the stuff I was called growing up, but when that happened she was like: ‘Who called you that?’ And, I don’t even remember her explaining to me what it was—but I got it. I was (like): ‘Oh, that’s not good.’

This is what it made me think of. So, in the South, when you have C-H-I-L-E, that’s chile—like ‘child.’ But in Spanish, C-H-I-L-E is chile. So, I wrote this poem called *Pepperbelly*.

Melody Soto: Although trauma has caused deep wounds within Natasha, the artist recognized early

“IN HEALING MYSELF, WITH WORDS, MAYBE OTHERS WILL KNOW THEY HAVE THE SAME POWER TOO.”

on that tapping into her creativity to manifest her personal poems has aided with alleviating the pain. These days, she drafts many of her compositions on the back porch of her Houston home. She says she writes it all down to get it all out.

Natasha Carrizosa: “This back porch, it becomes my sacred space. And it opens some doors, and opens like a portal to examining everything about me, all parts of me—my mind, my spirit—everything. Even when I write now—and I’ve been all over the place—I’ve written a lot of things, performed (in) a lot of different places, but when I sit and write, it is always for me. It is always for me. I never think about: ‘How is this going to sound?’ or, ‘Will people get this?’ It has always been for me and it has changed my life, and I think changed the life of others.”

Melody Soto: The first poem Natasha performed for an audience is titled *MexiAfricana*. Natasha also identifies as a *MexiAfricana*. She says that an encounter with author Willie Perdomo sparked the realization that this term best represents her. Also one of her most popular poems, *MexiAfricana*, proudly commemorates her heritage.

Natasha Carrizosa: “Willie Perdomo, he had this poem called *Nigger Reecan Blues* in this book called *Where a Nickel Costs a Dime*. And when I read that book, I was like: ‘Wow, I haven’t seen English and Spanish, and culture and music, and rice and beans—not like, I haven’t seen that.’ And I reached out to him—you know, to tell him about his poem, and he said: ‘I’ve never met a *MexiAfricana* before.’ And it was then, I was like: ‘Oh, that’s what I am.’”

Melody Soto: As a creative writing teacher, Natasha often works with youth. As poetry has transformed her life, she wishes those that encounter her work to take one key message with them.

Natasha Carrizosa: “In healing myself, with words, maybe others will know they have the same power, too.

I just get messages from everybody—that might

be trying to find their voice, or celebrate themselves, or define themselves for who they are. I tell them: ‘You don’t need me.’ They don’t need me—to write. They don’t need me. They just need the words.”



¡Soy Afrochingona!



Scarlet Estrada: “La gente todavía no sabe que los afromexicanos existimos. Es muy poquita la población que lo acepta y lo reconoce.”

Melody Soto: Silenciadas. Marginadas. Borradas.

Las poblaciones con herencia africana en México no se han ido—se encuentran muy presentes, pero la falta de aceptación hacia ellas a nivel social contribuye a una invisibilidad que perdura. Es difícil negar las diversas tradiciones e influencias africanas que han dejado huella en el patrimonio cultural del país—especialmente dentro de ámbitos como la gastronomía, la danza y la música. Sin embargo, estas aportaciones son raramente celebradas.

Al igual que otros temas sociales, es complejo diseccionar la discriminación que enfrentan las comunidades afrodescendientes—el problema está profundamente arraigado en la realidad mexicana y es frecuentemente fortalecido por un conjunto de factores, incluyendo la falta de representación en los medios de comunicación o las injusticias ecológicas que algunas comunidades enfrentan.

Así mismo, es complejo abordar la identidad afromexicana colectiva porque cada experiencia es única, está conformada de múltiples capas y existe en continua evolución.

Melody Soto: Desde su cocina en la Ciudad de México, Scarlet, ensayista y conductora del

pódcast “AfroChingonas”, compartió el proceso personal que la llevó a afirmar su identidad afromexicana, por qué surgió su proyecto auditivo—el cual transmite en su tercera temporada—, su conexión con el color rojo y la resonancia que tiene la cantante Jenny Rivera en su vida.

Scarlet Estrada: “No sé, me gusta mucho Jenny Rivera porque—aunque suene—me empodera. Me hace sentir poderosa escucharla. A mi me gusta identificarme mucho con esta imagen de la cabrona. Como de ‘me vale que digan que no me quieren, que soy lo peor o yo confío en mí—y me amo, por eso soy así.’ Por eso me gusta mucho.”

Melody Soto: “Tu nombre es Scarlet. El color rojo se asocia con pasión o con el amor o quizá alguien con mucho corazón. ¿Cómo te defines y que significa el rojo para ti?”

Scarlet Estrada: “De hecho, creo que es un color que me representa bastante en muchos sentidos. Significa como fuego y soy sagitario—espera es que está pasando el del pan. Creo que ya pasó—es muy ‘Mexican culture.’ Sagitario es un signo de fuego y además pues sí me considero una persona pasional, incluso, intensa. Sí, sí me representa.”

Melody Soto: “Quería empezar por ahí porque a veces los términos raciales son muy generales y no captan la esencia del individuo.”

Scarlet Estrada: “Sí, sí totalmente.”

Melody Soto: A través de un lente antropológico-social, Scarlet investiga temas que incluyen la apropiación cultural, el feminismo y racismo. Dentro del sistema atrincherado que oprime la voz negra en México, se encuentran la propagación del concepto del mestizaje y la discriminación interiorizada. En la redacción titulada Afro-mexicans (Re)exist: A Brief History of Afromexicanidad, Scarlet les da acercamiento a estas nociones. A lo largo de su formación personal, ella ha sido testigo de una auto exclusión racial constante en la que participan seres cercanos a ella.

Scarlet Estrada: “Yo vengo de una familia que no se autoascribe como afromexicana y esto pues se debe al contexto en el que vivimos—en un país como México que debido a sus políticas de nacionalismo borro la presencia histórica, cultural y social de las poblaciones negras en México. Entonces, pues la gente no ubica todavía de pronto que hay población negra en México, que hubo presencia y ahorita hay todavía presencia. En este contexto pues mi familia se desarrolló. Mi abuelo es un hombre afrodescendiente—aunque no se anuncia de tal forma, pero yo lo logro ver. El es de Michoacán, de una zona que se llama Tierra Caliente que está cerca de la playa. El migra a la Ciudad de México como a los 19 años, 18 años. Estando aquí en la Ciudad de México comienza a tener familia y pues yo soy parte de su familia. Justo crezco carente de esta noción de que soy afrodescendiente.”

“LA GENTE NO UBICA TODAVÍA DE PRONTO QUE HAY POBLACIÓN NEGRA EN MÉXICO, QUE HUBO PRESENCIA Y AHORITA HAY TODAVÍA PRESENCIA.”

Melody Soto: “Me familiaricé con tu trabajo literario mediante tu ensayo Afro-mexicans (Re) exist. Me llamó mucho la atención cómo inicias esa pieza contando que fuiste haciendo preguntas sobre tu identidad y herencia afrodescendiente porque desconocidos cuestionaban tu fisionomía.”

Scarlet Estrada: “Era una cuestión que la gente me hacía notar constantemente. Recuerdo mucho que desde que era chiquita, teníamos—tenemos—una vecina que es de Veracruz y [me

decía], ‘tú pareces jarocho, eres de allá’ y cosas así. Era constante, pero pues no le había tomado sentido. También así de pronto me encontraba con gente que me decía esos comentarios por mi aspecto físico. La gente ya me había señalado por mi aspecto fisionómico pero yo no sabía cómo nombrarme, justo porque, te digo, nací despojada de la identidad—de esta identidad afro. Entonces yo decía—‘pero es que, ¿soy o no soy?’ Como estudié antropología de pronto entiendo que la cultura es entramado de tradiciones, de costumbres, de normas—etcétera—qué pues quizá yo no tengo. Yo no tengo, en cuento a la noción quizá de una afromexicanidad—entre comillas—queriendo un poco, como, malamente englobar el significado de afromexicano. Entonces yo en mi proceso de identidad yo decía, ‘pero no tengo la cultura,’ o algo así, porque no crecí en esos espacios—por un lado. Y por el otro: ‘mi familia quizá no tiene este proceso.’ Pues aparte de eso, estaba este constante señalamiento. Pues como que fue una decisión mía y reconocer justo este proceso que está pasando también mi familia y que está pasando el país, ¿no?—comprender la complejidad de las poblaciones afro en México. Y porque de mi proceso, el porqué de yo no considerarme afrodescendiente pero que la gente lo señale y sea allí algo importante para empezar a repensarme y tomar la decisión de resignificar a aceptar mis raíces—aceptar mi ancestralidad.”

Melody Soto: La construcción de identidad de cada ser es un procedimiento multifacético y de largo trayecto. Para Scarlet, su fase universitaria fue especialmente clave en su desarrollo individual porque le permitió analizar materias relevantes a la historia afrodescendiente, y la expuso a espacios sociales donde conoció a individuos con experiencias similares.

Scarlet Estrada: “Creo que es el encuentro con otras y otros y otros en los que yo me veo reflejada y veo mi historia. Es cuando, justo, puedo nombrar la afrodescendencia—también el racismo—el nombrarme a mí misma. Esta etapa en la que pues comienzas a conocer ya por ti misma, sin tanto la óptica o la vigilancia de los padres. Y que también al entrar a la universidad es como una onda de que empiezas a conocer más gente—gente de otros países. Y a la par de eso, empiezas a leer teorías, a acercarte quizá más a esta historia que no te cuentan en la primaria o en la secundaria—o incluso en la universidad, ¿no? Todo eso influyó bastante. Recuerdo mucho que escuche—de mi primer año de la universidad fue cuando empecé a notar un poco más la lucha por el reconocimiento afro en México. Recuerdo mucho que me tope con una pancarta—una propaganda—que hablaba cerca de reconocer a los héroes nacionales negros.

Entre ellos está [José María] Morelos. No se si sea cierto, porque no es algo que yo haya confirmado en cuanto a árbol genealógico, pero en mi familia se dice que somos descendientes de Morelos. Y cuando me enteré que Morales era negro yo dije, 'a pues obviamente, entonces todo va marchando.' Yo creo que si no hubiera entrado a la universidad o no hubiera tenido este acceso, quizá me hubiera enterado hasta muchísimo después de que Morelos era negro. En primaria—en educación básica—no es algo que cuenten. No es algo en lo que tengamos un fácil acceso."

Melody Soto: "También en el mismo ensayo abordas el tema del mito del mestizaje. El mestizaje es una idea que se inculca en las escuelas. Es problemático, ya que, en su promoción hace invisible a poblaciones indígenas y negras."

Scarlet Estrada: "Pues justo este nacionalismo, es una teoría—por así decirla—que al final se convirtió en algo social, ya que lo que buscaba era crear una identidad con la que todos los mexicanos se sintieran identificados—valga la redundancia. [Para que] todos los Mexicanos dijeran, 'por esto somos mexicanos y todos somos iguales.' [Es una] cosa que es grave porque se toman en cuenta solamente dos raíces, quedando la raíz negra totalmente borrada de la noción del mestizaje—cuando también estuvo presente. Incluso, hubo un momento en el siglo dieciséis y diecisiete en el que incluso las poblaciones negras y afrodescendientes rebasaban en número de población a la población europea y criolla. Entonces, es curioso que hayan borrado la participación de las poblaciones negras en esta construcción de la identidad nacional. Por otro lado, si eres mexicano es lo que te enseñan en la primaria—literal. Te dicen, 'el mexicano viene de los indígenas y de los españoles. Los españoles fueron quienes llegaron a colonizar—y entre comillas—ha hacer más avanzado al pueblo, y los indígenas pues eran los nativos que ya vivían aquí.' Pero en ningún momento te dicen, '¿sabes que? también hubo población negra que llegó a México en calidad de esclava y otra población negra que llegó a México como seres libres'—libres de la esclavitud, también. Entonces, allí hay esta invisibilización de la población afro, que también es una invisibilización, que ahorita, que se ha luchado a tal grado que ahorita ya se han logrado varios avances—entre los cuales está el reconocimiento en la constitución, a nivel nacional en el 2020. Justo eso se expresa en las leyes políticas, en la creación de ciertos espacios, en atención, en presupuesto—sin embargo, creo que no solamente se queda allí—tiene que bajar justo a la sociedad."

Melody Soto: Durante el día a día de Scarlet,

“LA GENTE YA ME HABÍA SEÑALADO POR MI ASPECTO FISIONÓMICO PERO YO NO SABÍA CÓMO NOMBRARME.”

ocurre tan comúnmente que alguien se le aproxime e interrogue si es extranjera—o no, que ya no le sorprenden estas interacciones. Aunque le causan gracia, dice que recientemente ha contemplado los orígenes de esta percepción, ya que no existe una sola imagen de cómo debería aparentar físicamente un ciudadano mexicano. Justamente, unas horas antes de esta entrevista, Scarlet vivió una experiencia similar.

Scarlet Estrada: "De hecho, hoy fui a Chapultepec y compré un agua. Yo como tenía mucha sed pues me bajé el cubrebocas, abrí el agua y le di un sorbo así en frente al señor que me estaba vendiendo el agua. Primero se me había quedado viendo y luego como que volvió con su mirada—así como una mirada curiosa. Me dijo: 'oye, ¿si eres de aquí?' Y yo le contesté: 'sí, soy de aquí de la Ciudad de México'—y me empecé a reír. Y me dice: 'Ay, es que tus rasgos no parecen de aquí—de México.' No dije más porque ya estoy acostumbrada. Seguí mi camino. Reflexioné en que es muy chistoso. La gente piensa que el mexicano—o tiene esta idea del mexicano—[que] es justo más como una persona blanco-mestiza y no como una persona indígena, racializada, racializade o afro. Es curioso que incluso siendo una persona racializada—porque yo se que la persona que me vendió el agua era una persona racializada—también es mexicano, ¿no? Es curioso que tenga este ideal en la cabeza de que el mexicano prototípico—por así decirlo, no se si sea la palabra correcta—como que el mexicano típico es de aspectos un poco blanco-europeos. Se que eso se debe justo a esta construcción de una identidad nacional, que justo es resultado de esta teoría nacionalista que hubo en Mexico, que hizo pensar eso—que el mexicano, todos somos iguales. Es homogenizador esta idea de tipo de mexicano—que todos somos así o aspiramos a ser así, y que al final esconde un racismo que resulta siendo estructurante en nuestra vida cotidiana."

Melody Soto: El podcast "AfroChingonas" resalta las voces diversas de la comunidad

afrodescendiente. Conducido por Scarlet y sus compañeras, el proyecto inició el verano de 2020.

Scarlet Estrada: "'AfroChingonas' surgió a partir de la mala experiencia que tuvimos en una colectiva, que justo se armó para que no te silenciaran, ¿no? Si de por si ya vivimos en un mundo que nos silencia o no nos escucha o tenemos que gritar para que nos escuchen, al menos esa colectiva se esperaba que no fuera un lugar así. Al final, no se libró de ser un lugar así. Como solución o respuesta a este trago amargo que vivimos surgió 'AfroChingonas'—con la necesidad de decir algo, de expresarnos, donde podamos ser cada una libremente."

Melody Soto: Por medio de la plataforma, las integrantes abordan temas contemporáneos de amplia gama. En un episodio reciente analizaron el concepto cultural de ser cancelado; en otro, se proclamaron antifeministas.

Scarlet Estrada: "Si tenemos este episodio donde decimos que no somos feministas por diferentes razones. Creo que esa es otra cosa muy importante dentro de nosotras—como siempre hablar desde nuestra experiencia. No estamos diciendo verdades absolutas, porque también nosotras somos seres que están en un proceso constante, ¿no? Quizá mi proceso—mi construcción—me lleva a que tal vez en unos meses diga: 'a en realidad si soy feminista.' Y no significa que esté mal o que por eso necesito estar cancelada o algo por el estilo, simplemente es y pues ya, ¿no? Sin embargo, a veces como que yo misma me pregunto, cómo en situaciones violentas que nos atraviesan, pues, si siento que hay que actuar pero no actuar como de punitivista, carcelaria, castigadora, colonial, sino más bien buscar la solución de diversas formas—en este mismo sentido de romper con esto mismo que nos oprime y no reproducirlo al final, ¿no?"

Melody Soto: "Por cierto, se me hace muy valiente porque son muy directas—me encanta eso."

Scarlet Estrada: "Sí, también."

Melody Soto: "¿Cuáles han sido de tus episodios preferidos?"

Scarlet Estrada: "Este año empezamos donde hablamos del amor propio, del autosabotaje también—de todo eso. A mi en lo personal, ahorita como que me está atravesando mucho porque es en el proceso en el que estoy. También hay otro donde hablamos sobre la gordofobia y sobre todo esto, y me gusta[n] los dos episodios de putología y 'pintaditas'—que fue uno de los primeros episodios que sacamos.

'Pintaditas' surge de una publicación y como de una reflexión también conjunta—de un escrito que hizo Marbella sobre el maquillaje. Abordamos justo que muchas feministas como radicales o liberales—ya ni se ni que corriente a veces—dicen que el maquillaje es como una cárcel, porque al final te estás arreglando para el consumo de la mirada masculina o la privación de la mirada masculina. Y pues nosotras creemos que no es así—o no necesariamente. Y si es así pues tampoco es malo ni tiene que ser cancelado, ¿no? Abordamos justo esto del maquillaje como



una forma también de posicionarse políticamente también—sea como una forma de arte, como estos diferentes significados del maquillaje y todo esto."

Melody Soto: Con tres temporadas, el podcast va evolucionando y acaparado la atención de audiencias internacionales. En febrero 2021, las afrochingonas fueron invitadas a participar en el Festival Afro-Latinx del Museo de Arte Latinoamericano en Long Beach, California. Su contribución al evento incluyó grabar un episodio en vivo desde la Ciudad de México. Todo indica que el proyecto auditivo está funcionando como una herramienta de enseñanza a públicos que no comparten la identidad negra, y a la vez, es una fuente vital de empoderamiento.

Scarlet Estrada: "Marbella dice una frase que me gusta mucho, que dice: 'porque separadas somos semillas, pero juntas somos un campo florido.'"

Am I Black Enough?



Nicole Favors: So growing up, I lived in North Hollywood for some time. I spent a majority of my toddler years in North Hollywood. And then as I shifted to middle school, I moved to Santa Monica, which was really new. And it was kind of a big change from being out in the Valley—and then, you know, seeing what life was like out in Santa Monica.

So, my dad is actually from Ohio—and so it's two completely different places. My dad is from Ohio in a small city called Marion. And my mom, she was born in Mexico and she was born in Romita, Guanajuato—and she came over here when she was younger. And then her and my dad both met in L.A.—which is really, really crazy, you know, considering they came from like two different places. But yeah, I think it's every—like when they told me about the story, it's like, how they met, and, like, the building in L.A.—I'm like, “whoa.” Like it was really crazy that my mom was there and then, just like my dad happened to be there. And you know everything—and so, like, me being here now I'm like, “oh that's how I was created because of that.”

Diana Romero: Nicole opens up about how middle school is where she began to feel different from her peers.

Nicole Favors: (In) middle school I started off by going to Walter Reed Middle School, which is in Studio City. I didn't stay there for long but, while I was there, I think, just, I was really able to like, you know, understand that I was different. But I didn't

really understand what different meant for me. And I think it really became really noticed. I just like really started to understand that when—you know, my choice of making friends, it was really, almost like, different to other people.

Diana Romero: Nicole had friends from both of her cultures—but she did feel like she leaned to one side a little more than the other.

Nicole Favors: I would have friends who were like Mexican, Hispanic, and then I would have friends who were African-American. But I always felt, like automatically, like I had to make friends with African-Americans. Or, that was like the first people that I felt like, you know, like, that we're like kind of close to me in a sense. But then, it was really hard to, like, have both, you know? I know the Mexican culture like from food—we eat—you know, things that we do. You know, (we have) certain traditions and everything. But it was hard to feel like I could be accepted by one. Or, it was like, I had to be accepted by one or the other, you know? I couldn't have both.

Diana Romero: She would get questioned about who she was and how she identified herself. It progressively got worse when someone would ask her to choose which one she was more a part of.

Nicole Favors: I automatically then started to strip away from my Mexican background. And like, you know, that part that identified with myself. And I automatically felt like I had to give that up in order to make friends with certain people. And

to feel like I was able to fit in. And all the time, I actually experienced this quite so many times, like people would be like, “so are you Mexican? Or, are you Black, are you African-American? Like which one do you identify more with?” And it would just really strike me, and I would think about this. I'm like, “well, how are you going to make me choose?” And then I go back and I think about you know, like the experiences that I had and like time that I spent, you know, with my grandparents, you know, my Mexican grandparents. Oh my gosh, it's like, I really can't say that I'm one or the other, because I feel like both of them, you know? They make me who I am, you know?

Diana Romero: Nicole gave insight on how she would get called out for not being Mexican enough and Black enough.

“I... STARTED TO STRIP AWAY FROM MY MEXICAN BACKGROUND... I AUTOMATICALLY FELT LIKE I HAD TO GIVE THAT UP IN ORDER TO MAKE FRIENDS WITH CERTAIN PEOPLE.”

Nicole Favors: That actually happened several times. I was like told like, “oh, you're not Mexican enough to hang out with us, to do certain stuff with us.” And then, at the same time, it was like, “Do I kind of listen and take into what they're saying?” And then I kind of like started to doubt, you know? Like, “who”—and like kind of really feel insecure about where I stand with that. And I think there were more times, where I was where it was like, “oh, you're not Black enough to fit in or like certain things that we do.” So it almost made me kind of want to, you know, step back and be like, “okay, so there's certain things that I can and cannot do.” And I think one thing that makes me really think of about how they question really ties into braids. As of recently I was thinking about getting braids on my hair. And one of the things I think about actually is like, “Am I Black enough to get braids?” “Am I,” you know, “am I okay to wear braids?” Because I think growing up like it really almost, you know, left, I don't want to say,

like, an imprint, but I do. As to, like, the way that I do things now and sometimes, you know, thinking before I do them when I should feel okay to do either or, you know? Braiding my hair is totally fine, like I'm a part of that, like I belong.

Diana Romero: She talks about how she gets stared at a lot when she is with her mom. She feels the need to act more Mexican to prove that she belongs there.

Nicole Favors: I will commonly, like, get stared at. And I feel like I'm almost obligated—I feel the urge to speak Spanish to feel like, “okay I fit in here, too.”

Diana Romero: Nicole discusses her experience with growing up having Afro hair with a Mexican mom who didn't know how to treat it.

Nicole Favors: When I was younger, with my mom being Mexican-Hispanic, she just thought, you know, let her hair out. You know, like that's how it usually is—that's what she did with her hair. So, a majority of the time my hair is just like poofed out. Because she just didn't know how to deal with, you know, like the hair being so thick and curly. When I was younger I had, like, almost no hairstyles.

Diana Romero: Nicole goes on to further explain that her hair has always been a constant struggle for her.

Nicole Favors: I think, actually well not even think like, one of the things I've struggled with a majority of the time is my hair. My hair at one point, it was super puffed out. It was, almost, it was really long. It legit went to, almost ... I want to say, like my mid-back when it was straightened, right? And people would come up to me in school and be like, “Oh, is that your hair? Can I touch it? Can I feel it?” And I was like, “Well what on Earth would make you think that my hair isn't real?!”

Diana Romero: Her hair became a big issue to the point where she made a huge decision.

Nicole Favors: I struggled with that also in middle school, and because of that, I actually shaved my whole entire hair off. I cut it off because, I was like, “I just can't stand people asking me all these questions.” And, like, the stares that I would get it was just... It was just I—I was like, “enough is enough.” Like, you know what, I don't want my hair to, you know, identify who I am, you know? And I cut it off. And I think people looked at me differently. They're like, “oh, so like you don't have your hair anymore?” They're like, “why not?—it's beautiful.” I'm like, “well, we all have different definitions of what beauty is.”

And, for me it was never like, “oh my gosh, my hair’s like a golden prize or my hair is everything to me.” I’m like, “no—it’s just hair.”

Diana Romero: Nicole has wanted to have braided hair, but feeling like she can’t, always stops her. She gives out a perfect example that happened to her, as to why she is still too timid to braid her hair.

Nicole Favors: And one thing that actually I want to bring a topic on—I was actually at the time, I think it was last year, I was going—I went to this store, or like this, this place where they do braids. And this is a whole new shop. I’ve never been here and my moms like, “oh, like let’s go in—let’s look at the prices and see how much they charge for the style you want.”

I’m like, “okay, yeah, let’s just get an idea,” you know? At that time I was also kind of like one foot in, one foot out. “Should I get braids? Should I not?” We go to the store and all the women in there are African-American. And they start looking at me with my mom entering the store, right? So, all eyes are on us—everybody’s looking at us and we go up to the lady and as we’re passing by, you know, the main lady who’s doing the hair and everything. One of the girls that was there whispers, like, to the other girl, like, “oh, what is she even doing here?” And I just—then, like, you know, it was in the back of my mind—I was like, “okay, I’m here for the braids. I’m not gonna even focus on that.” And she’s like, “oh, can you show me a picture of what you want?” The next person (who) was probably going to get braided, she was sitting there, she just, like, eyes me up and down and then looks at my mom. And it’s just so crazy, because I feel like through the eye contact like even, you know, even though she didn’t have to say anything it’s still, you know, I still could understand what she was trying to say with her eyes. And she tells us a price, and she gives us a card. And then we leave because I just didn’t feel right—I didn’t feel like I could be there and I didn’t feel comfortable. And that experience also kind of left, like, an imprint. So like, me even wanting to get braids from that time—as to what happened, I was like, “what am I doing? Do I even—like, can I even do this? Is this something that I can do? Am I allowed to do it?” You know, like, “what will other people think when they see me on the street?” You know?

Diana Romero: She also worries about what others are going to say when people see her in a new hairstyle with her Mexican mother.

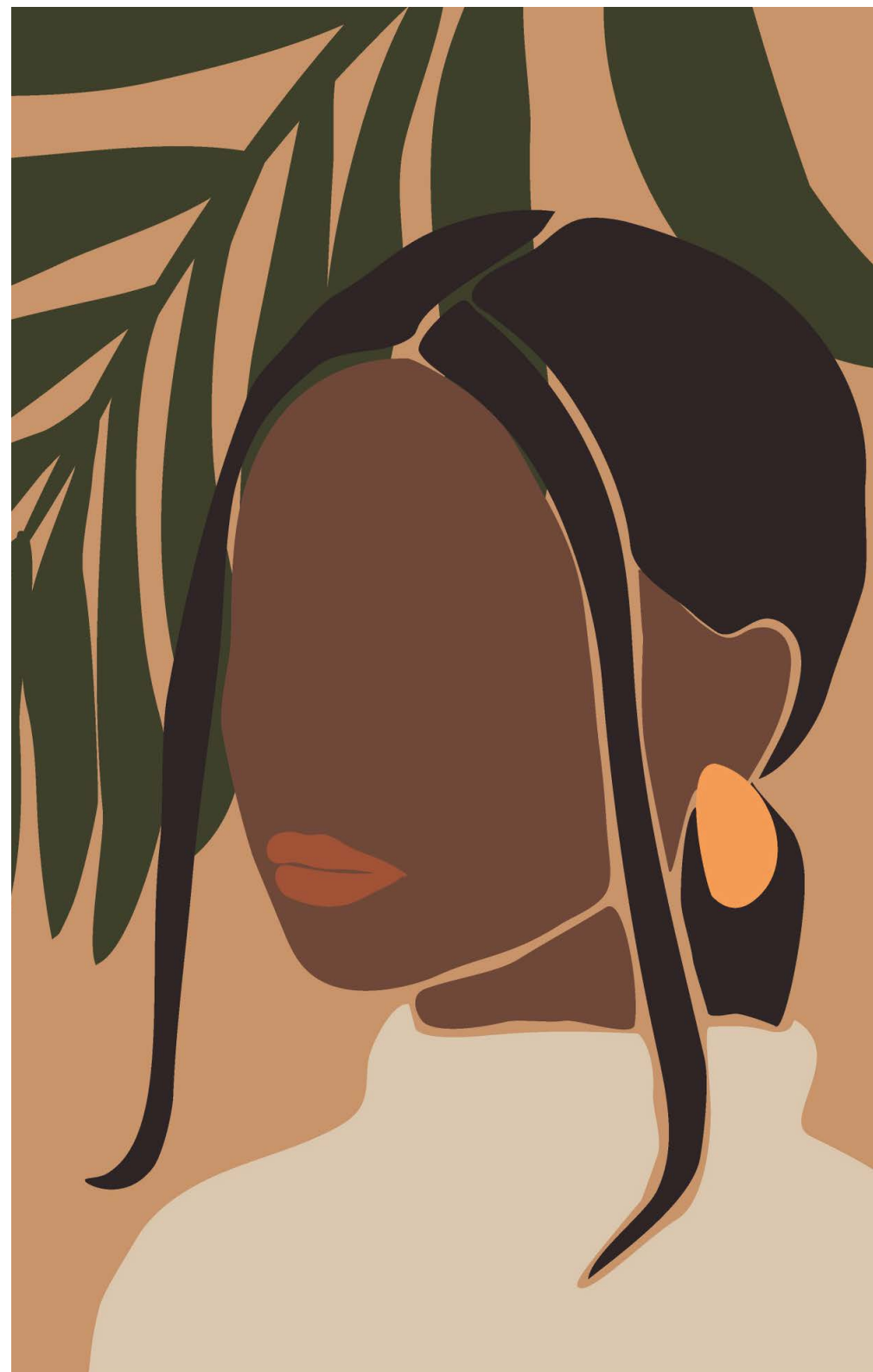
Nicole Favors: With, like, you know, if they see me with my mom, you know, and I had braids on—like, are they going to think that I, you know,

“I ACTUALLY SHAVED MY WHOLE ENTIRE HAIR OFF. I CUT IT OFF BECAUSE, I WAS LIKE: ““I JUST CAN’T STAND PEOPLE ASKING ME ALL THESE QUESTIONS.”

I’m just trying to fit in? Or like trying to do stuff, you know, that’s related to their culture. But at the same time, I can, you know? Like, its—I have the permission to do so. But people just don’t know that unless they talk to me.

Diana Romero: Despite Nicole’s struggles of being bi-racial, she felt like it was necessary to go through these experiences to be who she is now.

Nicole Favors: I think it took time, like, I think, even with the experiences and everything, I wouldn’t be here today... without that. And I wouldn’t feel more comfortable with myself if I didn’t do those things, you know?



AfroLatina Representation Matters



Pamely Gómez: People always ask me where I get my name and I think it's like a Dominican thing. We love mashing names together. My mom wanted to name me Emily and my dad Pamela, so they were like, "why don't we just put the names together?"

Jazmin Navarrete: Pamely's parents moved to the United States from the Dominican Republic and established residency in Yonkers, New York—a diverse city with large Latinx and African-American populations.

Pamely Gómez: My parents, they got married in '92. And my mom—as she was explaining to me—the reason why she came to the U.S., she just felt stuck in D.R., as like every immigrant. They just know there's better opportunities than what they have. So, she got a student visa and she came over here to the U.S. to study, but se le llenaron los ojos, of like all the good opportunities that she could do and she got scared and she didn't do her studies. And then eventually my dad came here to the States—and that's when they had me in '96.

They arrived here in Yonkers and since then we've stayed here in Yonkers, obviously, hopping different houses. I think we've moved four times since we've been here, but I think this is just where we've planted the seed and continue to grow. I know there were talks we would move to a different state, somewhere warmer, but I think

no one wants to leave Yonkers—no one wants to leave New York. This is where we've grown our roots and I think it's just best to stay here.

It's really diverse—well, by diverse, I feel like there is a huge population of Hispanics and Latinx people and huge population of the Black community here, as well. So, I feel like growing up, I grew up in the bubble—that everyone got kind of along and everyone understood everyone. So, I feel like my community was very inclusive. So, I didn't really think much of it because it was my reality. I grew up in an environment where everybody had the same resources, everybody had the same kind of access to things.

Me leaving Yonkers and going out, that's when I kind of realized that actually not everybody has the same access to things. I was deprived of a lot of stuff—and the people in my community were deprived from a lot of stuff. And that's where I kind of went through my identity journey—when I found out all of that. But, in general, in Yonkers I feel like things were inclusive.

Jazmin Navarrete: The diversity of Yonkers made Pamely feel she was raised in an inclusive community.

Pamely Gómez: I think Hispanic and Latinx families, I feel like they do everything together—it's like a norm. It's like if you're doing something, you have to let everyone know that this is going

to happen, and everyone needs to be included. And I feel like if a family member has a problem everybody jumps to like solve it. And even if a little secret you're trying to hide, everyone will know. There was no issue within the environment that I was in. I think that when I was taken out of the environment that I was in, then that's when I kind of realized there are issues. And I think we tend to normalize it a lot—It's what were used to and what we grew up doing. I think now, as I'm 25 years old, I'm unlearning 25 years of myself. And kind of reshaping the way I thought things would be and reshaping my thinking and my attitude towards things. But in the moment, when I was growing up, it just felt like, "yep, we're all going through this" and "this is everybody's reality."

Jazmin Navarrete: Spanish is the only language spoken in Pamely's home as a symbol of their Dominican culture.

“WHEN I GOT TAKEN OUT OF MY COMMUNITY AND PLACED IN ANOTHER WHERE I FELT LIKE I WAS ISOLATED, IT KIND OF FORCED ME TO REALLY DIG DEEP INTO WHO I WAS.”

Pamely Gómez: My mom tells me all the time, when I have kids, she wants to make sure that the culture is still alive. And then I tell her, "then how are you going to learn English, Mom?" I think mostly we speak a lot of Spanglish in the house, so they can learn a few words and I could continue practicing my Spanish, but normally it's mostly Spanish.

Jazmin Navarrete: Pamely's connection to her Dominican roots became stronger when she had a chance to visit the island.

Pamely Gómez: I feel like going back to the motherland is always so refreshing. I feel like, since I live in New York City, you're not used to too much nature and the beauty of having everything so natural. It's just another breath of fresh air that you cannot describe. When I went back, when I was in sophomore year, we went

for a wedding and it was for three days. And my mom was like, "we're going to explore everything in three days." So, we went to Jarabacoa, we went to Santiago, we went to other places too. But it was just embracing nature and seeing how life is so different from there. I also visited where my mom grew up, and I got to see the life that she was living. And we kind of spoke more about that, and how poor the family was—and what their house kind of looked like. It was a beautiful experience in those little three days and I wish it was more. But I got to see kind of where my parents grew up and really learn about their upbringing and why it kind of forced them to come here to the U.S."

Jazmin Navarrete: Since she grew up in a Dominican family, Pamely feels strongly connected to her culture.

Pamely Gómez: My parents are always telling me, "when you have kids make sure you teach them this or make sure you teach them that." I'm very big on it and I feel like Dominicans are like party animals so we love to dance including me, like, I love me some bachata, merengue y salsa. So, I'm always like in it—I'm just really bad at cooking, so I haven't really done much there. So, I'm trying to see how I can learn, but my mom, she just gets super impatient with me, so I'm trying to see if I can figure out ways that I can do recipes and learn how to do them and passing them down for generation after generation, but it's been an uphill battle with my mom.

Since they immigrated from the Dominican Republic, it's what they know and believe and breathe in each and every day. It's like they grew up in that culture and they continue to live life around that culture. I mean obviously there's some enhancements here and there because obviously they've come to the U.S. and things have changed. They've kind of passed down what they've learned to me, and obviously I'm gonna pass down some stuff they've taught me to my kids if I have them, obviously making little tweaks cus I'm like, "why did we do it this way?—we could have done it differently." But obviously, they probably tweaked some stuff when they grew up. So, little by little, I think just knowing that you're Dominican and knowing the roots you came from is really important. And sometimes I don't include it into my life cus there's some aspects of it that I'm just like, "that doesn't really go with what I like doing." But yeah, they tend to always bring down their teachings to me and my little brother.

Jazmin Navarrete: Pamely's emerging identity as Afro-Latina, however, made her think of the Dominican Republic beyond its European influences.

Pamely Gómez: I feel like being an Afro-Latina there is a lot of stuff that people don't know. I feel like it's being normalized now, and I think there is a lot of westernized kind of thinking that goes behind it that people were afraid to be identified as Afro-Latinas and so I feel like in my family in particular, saying that I'm an Afro-Latina is kind of a taboo and I think it's because of the way they grew up and it was the westernized mentality of how features are supposed to be looking like and how skin complexion is supposed to look like or how you're supposed to behave. So, I think the way my parents kind of taught me the Dominican culture was kind of westernized and I don't think I have that African kind of history or knowledge of why things are such. I mean there's some music that we listened to that have like these African beats to them and they have like a history behind them, but it's just like they don't want to express more of it because they don't want to be dig deeper into it, but, it's just like, this is what people in ancient world kind of listened to, but never really go into the nitty gritty of the history. So, I feel like I kind of missed out on that, but on the super official level, obviously, things were taught in terms of the food, the music, the language we speak and like the things that we wear was obviously shown to me but kind of the history of why things are like this was not.

Jazmin Navarrete: Going into her senior year of high school, Pamely realized she was not prepared for college.

Pamely Gómez: I feel like me growing up, I saw it as like the rite of passage, like everyone is going to go to college eventually, but there is a lot of preparation and a lot of stuff that you were supposed to do in high school that a lot of people just wasn't aware of and I got to that realization the summer of me going into my senior year so I did not prep for my SATs, I did not prep for any college essay, I did not prep on what schools I wanted to go to. I got into like an early age crisis, and I was really scared that I wasn't going to make the dream in my head of going to college true. So, I started a club here in Yonkers, Latinos Por Educación, with my mom actually cus she was like "I gave you all that you had to grow up, but there's some things that I lack, like knowledge, to really help you become the woman that you need to be here in the United States." Because of the lack of knowing how to speak English and her lack of like finances she couldn't really support much of the stuff that I needed to get done to prepare for this time so she was like "I know this is super late, but I'm going to try and help you now." So, we started this club and we really raised a lot of voice around the Hispanic community. What's really stopping Latinos and Hispanics from going to college? And that kind of really exposed

me to a lot of stuff that I could do, like advocacy work. So, then I went to a college in the Bronx, it's called Lehman College. I went there because I didn't know what college I wanted to go to. I went there just to find myself in terms of where do I want to be when I grow up. Eventually I found out that I really loved dealing with people and talking to people and I was like maybe I should do HR. So, I was doing human resources at my school, but it didn't support it. And I found a school that would do it better so that's when I applied to Cornell University and I got in. It was there that I realized that I lost who I was. And it was mostly because it's a PWI (predominantly White institution). And I was around a community where Hispanics and Blacks were literally the minority, like .001 percent of the school. Growing up in Yonkers, here, I was always exposed to a cohost of communities, cultures, ethnicities, and we all got along. But when I got to Cornell, it was like super segregated. Like the Black community would be in the Black community, the Hispanic community would be in the Hispanic community, the Whites would be the Whites, and Asians would be with the Asian. It was never like a mix—and since I was so used to being in a mix, it was so hard for me to pick where I wanted to belong and who I wanted to be with and then like I would always be hanging around with like the Blacks and African kids, but then I would also be hanging around with the Hispanics and I was just a mix. And they were like, "well, who are you going to belong to, are you gonna belong to the Blacks or are you going to belong to the Hispanics," and I'm like, "well, I'm both so why can't I do both?" But it was just a whole thing and I feel like the school in general—especially the minority students—everybody had an identity crisis there, like am I Black enough to be Black, am I Hispanic enough to be a Hispanic, and I'm like, "why can't I be both?" So, that's when I kind of found the term of an Afro-Latina and I started doing more research on it and I was like, "well that's me—I am both." And people kind of didn't really understand it much and my family kind of doesn't understand it much. And I kind of have that back-and-forth with them, but that's where I kind of finally understood that there is a term for me and there is an identity for me and I am glad that I was taken out of what I thought was yeah a regular Hispanic girl or a regular Latinx girl, but when I got taken out of my community and placed in another where I felt like I was isolated, it kind of forced me to really dig deep into who I was and that's where this term came to be.

Jazmin Navarrete: Pamely's journey into Cornell University was unexpected.

Pamely Gómez: When I was at Lehman, I was literally hopping every major possible. I first got in

there as undeclared and then I was like you know what maybe I should be a doctor and then I went to this premed thing and I was like I can't do this cus the amount of years that you have to take to be a doctor and the amount of debt you have to be in to go through it's not ideal. So, then I got out of that, but I was just jumping around so much then I went to my academic advisor and I was like I don't know what I wanna do and she was like we're opening a program where you double major in math and Econ who knows if that's what you like, and I was like yeah, I like math but I don't think I like it that much. It turned out I was one of the few girls that was in that double major program so I felt like oh wow I can really make a difference and really stand for this representation that I absolutely love and kind of show other people that they could come in to this program as well and I was kicking ass, like I was doing great.

So, my academic advisor since I was really close to her and I was always in her office constantly just like talking through things she told me to attend this international women's summit hosted by Bloomberg in the city, and I got invited. So, I went to the train and I got on to go into the city and the train broke down so then I ended up arriving at the summit an hour late and I had already missed like all the talks that I wanted to go to and they were ending with like a big lunch. During that I was also thinking that maybe I should transfer schools and talking about that HR stuff that I told you that I liked, we were exploring schools, so Cornell was at the top of my radar, but I didn't think that I was ready to apply or I didn't think I belonged in that place cus it was just it's too prestigious, I don't think I belong in an Ivy League, but I ended up arriving at the event an hour late like I said and they were having the lunch and I was just like you know what I'm just gonna pretend like I was here this whole time so I decided to sit in the table that was in the middle sat next to this one woman that was just talking so much about what she does at Bloomberg, and about what I wanna do, so I was telling her that I really like HR, but I don't know what schools or programs offer it and she was like, "Oh my God have you considered Cornell?" And I was like "oh yeah, I have but I don't think I can apply there." And she was like, "why not?" and she was like, "you know what, my dad actually graduated from Cornell and maybe you guys should connect." and I was like "I don't think I want to talk to your dad but it's fine," and she was like no no no she was like "give me your number, give me your email, and we can set something up." And I was like okay. I got home and my mom was asking me about how the event went and I was like "yeah, I sat next to this, una loca, that she was just there talking so much to me, she wants me to meet her dad and she was like well that was crazy and I was

like yeah and apparently her dad called me that night and he was just like my daughter doesn't stop talking about you and I'm like well one, probably your daughter's crazy or you're crazy.

We ended up talking and he was like why don't you meet me out for like coffee or lunch and we can talk more about what do you want to do with your career and where do you want to go. I was super scared so I told my mom "Mom this White man wants me to talk to him and his daughter and have coffee." And she was like absolutely not she was like no this is like human trafficking or something like that and I'm like yeah, but like something in my spirit was telling me like Pam you should definitely go. So, I emailed him and I was like hey, we can totally meet, but I wanted to be in a public setting cus I really don't know who you are, I really don't know who your daughter is and this just seems super weird and he's like, yea we could do it in a public setting, my daughter's going to come make sure that everything is fine. So, I ended up going and meeting him at a coffee shop in the city and we talked about my career and where I want to go and what do I see myself doing. Mostly I'm really excited about diversity and inclusion efforts. I'm really excited about HR. I'm really excited about representation because I feel like that's really important. So, he was like yeah you should definitely apply to Cornell.

He was like I'm part of a Cornell club here in the city and one of the economists under Obama's cabinet is coming to talk and he graduated from the school that you want to go to in Cornell. It was called the ILR school, Industrial Labor and Relations, and he was like you should totally come and join me and he was like I'll send you a link and the amount of money to go see this man talk, I was like no I'm not going to spend over \$100 to go see a White man talk about Trump and elections and stuff like that. It was during the time where Trump was running against Hillary and all that stuff, so he was like don't worry I'll pay for you. So, he paid for me and I ended up going and he forced me to go talk to this man that works for Obama and I was like I can't speak well. I don't know how I'm going to talk to him. So, I went up and talked to him and he did his presentation or whatever and the man forced me again to go talk to the man he was like just talk to him about what you wanna do where you wanna go. The man that was doing the presentation, his name was Seth Harris, he liked me so much that he invited me and the other two people that I was with, the daughter and the guy that I went to the coffee shop, for dinner. And Seth kinda sat next to me and we're talking more, and he was like you said you wanted to apply to go Cornell right and I was like yeah and he was like tell you what, apply, write an email to the director of admissions, and

CC me on the email, and I'll let you know if you got in. So, I applied. I did the email and lo and behold I got a call from the director of admissions himself saying that I got in and a full ride so I didn't have to pay anything for my studies. So that's how that happened. When things are meant for you, it won't miss you.

Jazmin Navarrete: When she arrived to Cornell, Pameley experienced constant microaggression and racism.

Pameley Gómez: It was like every time they were talk about like slavery or anything that they would say about like the African Diaspora, it was just like, we were tokenated, oh how was your experience or what was your experience. You really find how ignorant people were. There was one class that I attended that it was like a half semester class I was literally .5 credit and I attended it because I needed an elective. And it turned out I was the only person of color in the class. The class I think was about the social economic kind of growth of the future and everything was just super opinionated and I was always trying to figure out how I could be more involved in class. So, I would always raise my hand and ask questions, but the professor would always like downgrade me in a way. I would go and do that you know do the typical kiss ass as usual and he would like really denounce me saying like Oh my question is very

“I FOUND OUT THAT I REALLY TOLERATE A LOT OF STUFF THAT AREN'T OK, AND I ALWAYS ASK MYSELF THAT QUESTION: 'HOW DO I LET THIS SLIDE?'"

irrelevant or I don't know what I'm talking about and he actually failed me in the class. Meanwhile I was getting A's and B's in the class and what I did was that I got the grade I emailed the diversity and inclusion officer. I emailed the president, I emailed everybody and their mom that works in Cornell and I put the grade on there and I was like this man has been discriminating against me this whole entire time and I have witnesses as well. The students were always looking like why is he treating you like that or why is he behaving that way towards you. So, he emailed me back and he

was like I'm considering a regrade, so I jumped from an F to a B plus. It was the story of my life all the time at Cornell like I would always have to work twice as hard to make myself more known and I think that's the kind of what society is when it comes to Black women we always have to work twice as hard for us to really be noticed or have that foot in the door. So, it was always a push and pull. They were times where I was crying to go home and I was telling my mom like I don't wanna be here no more.

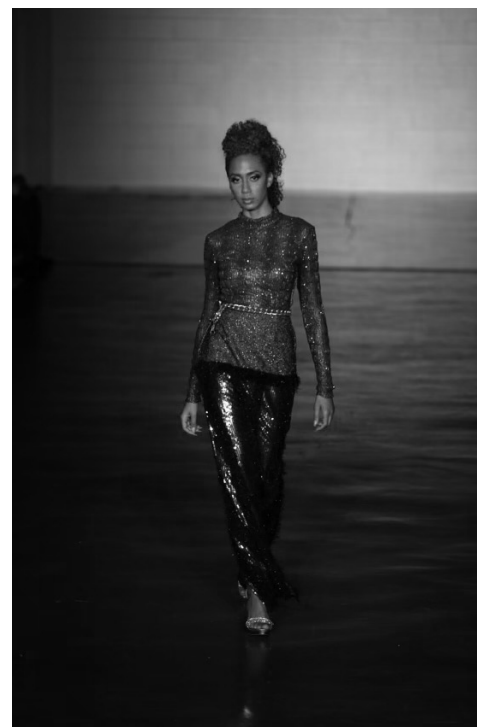
Jazmin Navarrete: Pameley's experiences at Cornell taught her a hard lesson on the need to set boundaries to protect herself from every day micro aggressions.

Pameley Gómez: I found out that I really tolerate a lot of stuff that aren't okay, and I always ask myself that question: "how do I let this slide?" Going to Cornell I think I wasn't used to being thrown in a place where there were so many micro aggressions and kind of dealing with, "do I yell at them? do I, like, say something back? do I just keep it in and keep pushing it?" Like, where do I have those boundaries? Where do I stand my ground? And I think when I was there it really taught me how to set those up. And really kind of forced me to think why wasn't this okay and why did it make me feel this way. Cus growing up when things would what happened I'd be like you know it happens to everybody this is what happens to everybody, but at some point, you reach your bubble, at some point you reach your peak, and you're just like how did I let it slide so I think they're at Cornell, I started to unpack all of that.

Jazmin Navarrete: Her first job after graduation was not what Pameley expected and she struggled, but then things started to change for her.

Pameley Gómez: I ended up landing in a company that was near my school although I hated the community so much and I said I wasn't going to be around it anymore because it was typically White, I landed a job still in the community and still very White. I just felt like I was thrown into a space where I didn't belong basically short and sweet. I was literally the only Hispanic woman, my texture, my complexion, in HR and I was like that is a problem and it just didn't feel like it fit with my personality at all cus I'm very bubbly and very collaborative and the workspace that I was in was just very stereotypical suit and tie, businesses corporate America, with the gray cubicles and just everybody was super quiet and everybody was just old, so I didn't have anybody my age to connect with I just felt like I would work and go home and started all over again there was no like nightlife there was no like after stuff things I could

do there downtown area was literally one street so it was just boring. My mental health went to zero and my face was completely filled with stress pimples so I hated my life and I need it out. So eventually I left and I moved back down here to Yonkers with my parents and I was just like I'm just gonna find myself again because that wasn't it, I know I like HR but it's just like, what an HR that I really like, what I didn't like, and how could I reshape it. You saw my page. I love modeling, I love taking pictures. There was one picture I took the summer before joining this job and I tagged Tyra Banks and Tyra Banks liked it and then she posted it on her page. So, then my phone was ringing, ringing, ringing, when I was at work and I saw that and I became viral in like a day with this picture so I was like wow god maybe that's my sign so that's when I left my job and I came down here and I started doing modeling. And I absolutely loved it. I met so many people. I did New York fashion week, I did Brooklyn fashion week, I was in a whole bunch of music videos, I was flown out to Miami to be part of this reality TV show, I was in a commercial campaign down here in the city. So, I was really moving and grooving but at the same time I was also interviewing for jobs cus I was like I can't be living this type of lifestyle and like not being paid. So I landed in the job that I am now and it's located in Washington D.C. so when I got the offer I moved down to Maryland and I was living there but I moved down there it was February 2020 and then COVID hit



March 2020, so then my mom was like well if this is the last time we're going to see each other I think it's best for you to come up here again and work remotely from home so I got an apartment and then I got out of my apartment to come live with my parents and I've been here ever since and I've been working remotely from the company that I am now in Washington D.C. and now they're gonna be opening an office in New York so I'm gonna be working out of the office now.

Jazmin Navarrete: Pameley plans to continue working on modeling and also working on her music.

Pameley Gómez: I would love to cus when I moved down to D.C. obviously there's not much of a creative community down there and I was trying to figure out ways of how I was gonna pay the cost of me traveling from D.C. to New York constantly, but now since I'm gonna be staying in New York I have the facility to do that, but then COVID's here so I mean there's ways that I could do it if I'm really hungry to do it now, but I just want to be super safe cus there's just like with the fashion world, with the entertainment world, it's just a lot of people you have to meet with and it's just very tough, but I'm building on it like I have friends that were gonna actually have a photo shoot this weekend that I'm super excited with so things are moving.

I've been singing since I was five. I start singing at church with my dad since then that's really been a huge part of my identity and it's just now that I'm making music and bringing it out, I think I kind of convince myself that it doesn't have to be perfect to be music and it's kind of the first time that I'm bringing it out to the world.

Jazmin Navarrete: On her Instagram bio, Pameley wrote, "Representation is everything." Something that is important not only on her personal life, but also in her work.

Pameley Gómez: Representation it's definitely important and my job right now I'm a recruiter and my title is talent acquisition specialist. I'm always bringing in talent into the company and that's when I kind of found what I wanted to do in HR. I love putting people on, I love networking with a whole bunch of people, and talking through what do you want to do, where do you see yourself going. What I find fascinating and interesting is that how people of color, and Hispanics and Latinx really attracted to other Hispanic and Latinx, so when they see that I'm recruiting, I get more people that are from my type of background come to me and talk more so I'm seeing that presentation is a really huge factor when it comes to recruiting. So, when I'm like

interviewing people I will like talking to people of diverse communities I think it's much more of an understanding like oh she gets me and I see her and if she's working there, I probably could work there too. I'm constantly advocating in my job I spearheaded, well one of the people that spearheaded, we call it the DEBI chapter, it's called Diversity Equity Belonging and Inclusion and I'm really trying to build up a programmatic piece of how we can incorporate that into our company and how we can really stretch out what we do into the community. So, I'm always trying to figure out how I can put in some of my knowledge to really help students and adults like us to really reach their full potential. I'm always constantly talking about how this can affect us and what are ways that we can build up that allyship.

Jazmin Navarrete: Pameley believes there is not enough representation and inclusivity in the modeling world.

Pameley Gómez: There isn't none. I feel like you have this stereotypical westernized woman figure and kind of what they look like. I'm in nowhere near that height that they have. I'm 5'6 and they're always like we're looking for women that are like 5'9 and above. I have the size, size zero, but I don't have the height. I've seen it a lot of people in the modeling industry really lose who they are and want to be shaped the way that social media thinks this is what models look like right you're always trying to change your appearance and how do you look like to accommodate what people are looking for and I'm like why don't you just embrace your own beauty why can't what you see be enough. So, I've been part of a lot of collectives and initiatives. I was part of this initiative called Melange, which they embrace kind of every walk of life. We did a campaign with the human rights campaign. I'm really embracing coming from a space of love and understanding and really embracing everybody's bodies and everybody's identity and I think it's very important as we continue to go on in our journey in this universe because a lot has changed, but a lot hasn't changed so moving that needle and talking more into it's really important. I kind of do modeling to really show my face and show were here and we wanna make a change I'm not solely doing it because you know oh I am pretty so I want to do this and I want to do that, but no I wanna have like a narrative or kinda have a conversation around like, why my hair is important, and why is my skin important, and why is it important to have it on magazine for girls to see, and why is it important to be on social media for other people to see, and really uplifting us right because I feel like sometimes when there's a lot of stereotypes around like what we do and we kind a go against ourselves too. There's so many

clashes between like Black women against Black women, or Hispanic women against Hispanic women so it's just like building that community internally as well, is very important. So, I'm all up for it and it's just like how do we continue that conversation and how could that really be brought out more.

Jazmin Navarrete: Pameley shared some advice for young Afro-Latinas who are still struggling to define themselves and pursue their careers.

Pameley Gómez: Never stop believing in you. I feel like sometimes we're thrown in a society where you feel like you don't belong and that's okay. And I think that's beautiful. I think that's unique, like my name. My name is unique—no one has it and you take ownership of it, right? If you're different, I don't think you should be changing yourself to mold yourself into what other people believe you should be because if that will change your authenticity, that will change who you are at the core and then you'll lose yourself and then you'll end up in a place where you're just like what the F happened, like how did I get here? And then you have to retrace back so alleviate yourself from that struggle by constantly believing in yourself and making sure that you put yourself first at times and being true to you because obviously people sometimes lie to themselves, "no, this is okay." But is it really okay and how is it affecting you? So stay true to yourself.



She's Using Her Platform to Represent Diversity



Jordan Henry: I was very confused growing up... like what my ethnicity was or which one to identify as. Because growing up my mom was like, "well you have to identify as Black because the guy is more dominant—it's supposed to go by what your husband is." And also, where I'm from my mom was like, "you're a minority you get more opportunities." So, I just identified as Black, but it was also very confusing because people would look at me and say, "you're very light-complexioned so how are you (Black)?" And a lot of questions always came up when I was a little girl.

Elizabeth Campos: At home Jordan noticed the difference between her extended families in some of the most day-to-day things. Food was a huge indicator of cultural differences followed by music.

Jordan Henry: I would have to say the music because you have my dad listening to like hip-hop music and then you have mom who just listens to like fully Latin music. And it's like okay... which one do I pick here? You kinda have to pick whichever one you want. And so that was definitely the main difference. And I would also have to say the language, because my mom like... I lived with my grandma at the time and she spoke full Spanish. So I had to kinda learn the language. And kinda learn to speak it. At the time I wasn't a very native speaker and I (still speak) very conversational Spanish. It's one of those things were I don't know it fully. I had to kinda learn when I was younger, especially in that area—if you do not know Spanish, they will eat you alive.

Elizabeth Campos: Jordan interacted more with her Mexican extended family than her Black family, mostly because of where her families lived. For the most part inside her home, she felt comfortable. Jordan's parents let her do what she wanted with her appearance, within reason. Because they wanted her to feel happy and confident however she interpreted that. But her classmates and school experiences weren't as forgiving.

Jordan Henry: I actually had a really bad experience with school for many years growing up. I was actually the only mixed girl in my whole entire school at every single school I went to... until I was about... no—every single school, up until high school. I was the only one. And it was just very tough. Because when I was younger, I was teased often, and it was very confusing to me because I had big curly hair. My hair is wet right now so you can't see the bigness, it's bigger than this. But I had to move schools because people would tease me. I always felt alone, it was the... I wouldn't wish that on my worst enemy. It's one of those things where you just feel so alone, and no one understands you.

Elizabeth Campos: After years of straightening her hair, five years ago Jordan decided to go natural. For anyone listening who doesn't know what that means—wearing your natural hair is about more than a style. It's a choice to embrace a part of you that has been stigmatized in the United States and Latin America to mean unkept,



non-professional, and even ugly. In California, a law exists protecting people in the workplace from being discriminated against—for wearing natural hair. It's called the Crown Act and it exists because discrimination in the professional world surrounding hair is a huge deal. Jordan is an aspiring journalist and she recognized how important something like her hair is. She calls it her crown and shared how long it took her to love it. Traveling was one of the things that really helped Jordan love all of herself.

Jordan Henry: It took me a long time. It took me to move to California to really find myself. I was very confused. Because like I said, in my community there's really no mixed people. So, it's one of those things where I had no one to talk to; no one understood me. And now that I'm older I have friends that kinda understand me. That's the nice thing about living in a state like California. It's that there's so many people that are so many different ethnicities. And people get scared to move. Like I moved here alone at 18. I think my advice is just move. Have those experiences. Learn things about the world, those cultures, ethnicities, religions, everything. That's my main take away from everything. Just to learn. And that's what I'm striving for myself every day, just to learn as much as I can about different cultures.

Elizabeth Campos: Edlin Veras, co-author of "Out of the Shadows, into the Dark: Ethnoracial Dissonance and Identity Formation among Afro-Latinxs" shared a similar experience. His family is from La Republica Dominicana, they immigrated to New York, he briefly lived in New Hampshire then in Miami. As a young adult he moved to Atlanta Georgia for college and that sparked the paper he co-authored with Elizabeth Hordge-Freeman.

Edlin Veras: Moving from the northeast to the south, deep south Miami to the deep South in a different sense, to Atlanta, Georgia.

I noticed how my racialization in those spaces was different. Given the social context I was in. Now I'm at the University of South Florida in Tampa which has a very interesting history with the Caribbean as well. When we consider (the) large Cuban populations that came through cigar companies and factories. And then a large Afro-Cuban population who segregated, lived with African-Americans and other Black ethnic groups who by law were kinda relegated to these spaces.

That's kinda what gave birth to this paper. Conversations between my mentor and I about these different racial dynamics. And clearly like prof said we have, we know that Afro-Latinos or Black Latinos, Black Latin Americans have existed forever, right? And had an impact all around the world—and in the United States in particular, for a very long time. So, we went out to investigate, what is it that these people—what is it that this particular group is experiencing? And how can we understand their identity formation given different social historic context. Given different nationalities, countries of origin so on and so forth.

"I HAD TO MOVE SCHOOLS BECAUSE PEOPLE WOULD TEASE ME. I ALWAYS FELT ALONE... I WOULDN'T WISH THAT ON MY WORST ENEMY."

Elizabeth Campos: A person's intersectionality is all the pieces and experiences that make up who they are—their privilege, and their struggles. A lot of who Edlin and Jordan are and what they aspire to do has to do with their cultural identity, and everything they've experienced because of it.

Jordan shared that when she was pursuing acting she was being typecast and, once again, feelings of not being enough for one culture or the other arose.

This wasn't the first time I heard something along the lines of, "when you're mixed, people watch you and they catch stuff." Rebecca Romo, of

the Department of Sociology at University of California, Santa Barbara called it cultural policing. She referred to this policing as people knit picking parts of someone's identity to try and place them in what they believe to be stereotypical of one race or ethnicity.

The sad part is this policing is done mostly by people belonging to the backgrounds they police. For example, your tia might say, "mija es que las Mexicanas no se visten así. Eso es de las negras." And although the comment isn't mal intended this creates the idea that you are more of something and not enough of another because of speech, clothing, skin color, music taste, and things that are out of your control like your phenotype. Instead of uplifting mixed identities it demands people choose one of the parts that make them whole.



In Jordan's case the policing hasn't stopped, but she learned something vital to how she carries herself now—others opinions of her don't matter.

Jordan Henry: I've gotten called countless things. Like, "oh you don't act like a Black person." My response is, "how does a Black person act? How do you act Black though?" How do you do that?" And then a lot of the times I get—because sometimes my accent will come out when I say certain words, and a lot of times people will be like, "oh, I hear your little Mexican accent there." And it's like... "okay?" It's like a lot of the time people find it so interesting when in reality it's just a normal thing. Like sometimes people are like, "oh, it's so exotic," and it's like "no." I'm just a regular person.

Elizabeth Campos: Jordan said it wasn't easy but after years of personal growth she can now be her most authentic self without worry about being enough for anyone else.

“WEARING YOUR NATURAL HAIR IS ABOUT MORE THAN A STYLE. IT'S A CHOICE TO EMBRACE A PART OF YOU THAT HAS BEEN STIGMATIZED IN THE U.S. AND LATIN AMERICA.”

Jordan Henry: So, I definitely want to represent both communities. Being a mixed women it's like I—I always tell people I'm mixed of two different races that are the most oppressed in America. And so, what better than to use that to my advantage. As well as, you know, trying to help out my community. And also report on that because there's a lot of good things that are happening within both communities. And a lot of the time what you see in the media—our communities are not painted in the best light. So, I want to be able to show our communities in the best light. A lot of the reporting I do always has to be on people of color. My emphasis is mostly on people of color, and also social media and tech. That's kind what my main focus is on.

Elizabeth Campos: Jordan, has taken everything she experienced as a reason to do better and ask others to do the same. Despite her cultural identity being treated as something too confusing to be proud of in her early life, there's only one thing she'd change about her upbringing.

Jordan Henry: Honestly, my mom... she did not know how to do my hair at all... because my mom is, you know, Hispanic. She didn't know how to do my hair period. If I would change something about my upbringing it would be that. I wish she knew how to do more styles with my hair because it was just painful.



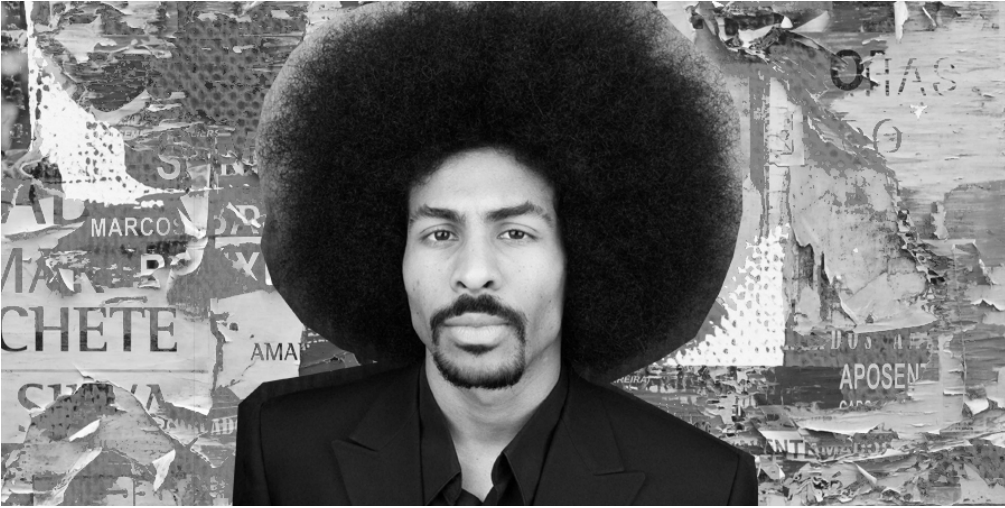


Girl's portrait, San Basilio de Palenque, ca. 1976



Older woman portrait, San Basilio de Palenque, ca. 1976

Thriving Outside of Racial Molds



Sean Hill: I grew up in L.A.—I was born in L.A., raised most of my life in Inglewood, California. I was born to a Colombian mother from Bogota, Colombia. And my dad was originally from Harlem, New York, with family that traces back to St. Kitts and the Caribbean.

Kimberly García: Hill rejoiced in both cultures, he spent time with his Colombian side of the family, as well as with his African-American side, he equally enjoyed the food and music, both cultures has to offer.

Sean Hill: I had mainly Black and Latin neighbors, for sure, mostly, and, that kind of neighborhood feeling of just everyone looking out for each other. Like, to this day, even my neighbors still, you know, make sure that, if we parked on the wrong side of the block, they look out for us. So, it's been really nice to have that inclusivity feeling there—I'd say, even during the time of, gosh, when Rodney King officers got acquitted back in the '90s. And things got a little like, you know, just a little crazy everywhere. Um, I still remember a lot of, a lot of solidarity—a lot of people like understanding the plight that was going on and, and there was more discussions of race in police brutality, even back then. And, and I remember, yeah, I remember coming together with a lot of people. And, gosh, I'm, you know, I'm also living in a neighborhood where, you know, every now and again, we'll hear about a drive by every now and again. Or, you know, someone that got, you know, their home got broken into, but then I hear

that's pretty commonplace—now, in a lot of areas in L.A., I think. I think growing up life for me was as diverse as I made it to be, even though I wasn't aware of, of race or culture in a way, you know? Like a lot of kids were growing up. At a certain point, I think I, I did notice the factions, the Black kids were always by the cafeteria or the the lag kids were right on the quad on the grass area just hanging out there. I was always the kid like that could travel between all these different worlds. And then I still wanted to hang out and play basketball the most, though, you know? I was just always on the basketball court. And just having fun with the guys over there who (were) playing ball. I was on the high school swim team. And even then, I was probably one of like three or four Black students that were on the high school swim team at the time I went to Palisades High School, right? And that was a Charter High School. You know, my parents wanted to make sure that I had a good education and also less, you know—nothing bad to happen. So even then, it was like, one or two school shootings that happened there. And fights broke out every now and again. And I did meet a racist teacher there. So even then, even then, you know, we're like, just doing our best there.

Kimberly García: Despite his inclusive environment, Hill faced microaggressions from others simply for being half African-American.

Sean Hill: Yeah, it's, it's moments sometimes where I don't know, if they're connected to race

or not, or if they're connected to just someone's, um, like, stubbornness, or, or their own kind of privilege that they have, right? And I mean that in the sense of when, you know, if I get interrupted or talked over, right, things like that, that happened...

You know, and that kind of dismissal sometimes would happen. When I would speak with certain White people of certain ages or... I remember saying to someone, like, you know, you know I'm like 37 years old, right? And letting them know, like I've had experience in my life—that I may sound young or look young to some people but I've had a wealth of experience in this world.

And I remember talking about race with one friend of mine, one musician friend of mine. And he was like, "oh... wait, how old are you again? Oh, okay. Yeah, sorry about that." And I was like, "oh, so now you're gonna respect my opinions? Okay, got it. Got it. Okay, good to know." So some people are even ageist without being aware of it. Right? And, it's hard to separate those kind of things—in the middle of an argument or the middle of a debate. Um, you know, the kind of moments where all the toughest microaggressions, I think, are—are when someone's asked me a question about my culture, or about, you know, even why some Black people use the N-word, for example.

And then I'm answering this man, and he was from another country who's foreign, he was trying to get a grasp of it. And then after I explained it, to him—the full the full scope of it—and how far back it goes, the kind of freedom of it now to even have that, that word, to be able to own it, and all that kind of stuff. Not everyone uses it all. Like I went into the whole story about the N-word. And he kind of still kept persisting on why he thinks Black people love to use it, or why he thinks it's so used by everyone—and then almost getting to that place where he kind of wanted to use it, you know? He would talk about that, like, "so I use it in this song" or whatever. "Is that—that's okay, come on, right? Come on, come on, it has to be." And that kind of—those kind of microaggressions that, that start off frustrating, or comical, sometimes even—But then when you realize that they're not listening to you or taking you in or respecting your, even your entire experience that you just shared with them so intimately—but it's still not accepted it. That's where the microaggressions start building up, you know, and they start hurting... I don't know.

...I don't know if I would consider it a microaggression, I guess, but there's times where I'd say, like even a run in with an officer—they said a macro description, and I had to be put in the

back of a police car for maybe ten minutes or so. And they went through my car, they went through my van, that I was using—my mom's van, and just went through it all. I don't remember if they asked to go through it actually, or if that was an actual illegal search or not. Or if I did say, "okay, you can look through it." To be honest, I don't remember. But I remember at the end of it... a light-skinned Black-looking officer that said, "sorry about that Brother." You know, these things happened some time and he was trying to be consoling at the end of it. But then, you know, it didn't feel good to not be approached with that same consideration—or that same... "brother" comment at the beginning of it—You know, that "guilty before proven innocent," never feels good. So... I mean, it's kind of bigger than a microaggression. Right? But it was still, it was one of those smaller things that I can pick up on and notice after the fact, you know?... I could probably list a few more if I really think think hard about it.

Kimberly García: It was in grade school, where Hill first discovered what it meant to be Afro-Latino, and faced stereotypes about his hair for the first time.

Sean Hill: Yeah, there was like those little pokes and jabs at for sure in elementary school—about my hair. Yeah, about my hair. Like I had a bigger I—I had an afro also when I was in elementary school—it wasn't anywhere this size, by the way. And I remember being made fun of for that. And then there were times where, like, yeah, I could get praised for it in the same day. Sometimes, you know, people would like it—some people wouldn't.

Kimberly García: Even in safe spaces, negative comments were still made about Hill's hair.

Sean Hill: I think, yeah, whenever the the family does it, it's the—the—the—the hardest. So to this day, mi abuelita would like not like my hair. She just doesn't. She doesn't understand it. She's like,

"I DON'T THINK I FULLY EMBRACED MY HAIR UNTIL COLLEGE... I DIDN'T KNOW THE FULL CONTEXT OF WHAT MY AFRO MEANT TO SO MANY PEOPLE."

“why is it—why is it so big? Why do you—okay, let’s just do that.” And it’s really sweet. I’ll make fun of a joke. I think of a joke to make fun of back and you know, we laugh about it. But thankfully, it doesn’t feel as personal when she makes fun of like my uncle’s like hair or something or his beard and she just goes in—my abuelita. Yeah, she’s hardcore. She’s just, she’ll make fun of you—no matter what you are, no matter what you look like. Yeah, I think I could say that for sure.

Kimberly García: Hill later learn the significance of his hair and began to embrace it.

Sean Hill: I don’t think I fully embraced my hair until college right? Because I didn’t. I didn’t know the history behind—I didn’t know the full context of what my afro meant to so many people. And, and growing up, I even I had a bald head actually for most of my high school life. Because I was on the swim team, like I said, so it just made sense to be bald and are like, “yeah, I’m just being aerodynamic,” you know? And it was pretty great. And even now, again, every now and again, I still kind of miss a good breeze on my head, you know, just seems so magical that breeze. I was in front of a Barnes and Noble, I was parked in the car. And this, this, this Black woman came up to me on a bicycle, like she was or she was getting her bicycle or something. And she she approached me and said, “you know, young man, I have to ask, like, what made you decide to grow your hair out like that?” And I told her the same thing I told you—“for a play,” you know, I’m in college, right? And she says, “well, I just, I just want to make sure you know that it’s very special, that you have your hair out like that. And it means a lot to a lot of people. So I just wanted to appreciate you for that.” And I was like, “oh, okay.” I kind of didn’t know what to do with that, you know, and, and ever since I kept growing it out, I would get more responses like that.

Kimberly García: Hill recalls facing an identity crisis, while trying to balance his Colombian background, as well as his African American culture.

Sean Hill: You know, my mom would speak Spanish every now and again, but not often. And, and the thing is also my brother, the first five years that he was born, they were living in New York with my, with my grandmother, right? And she spoke only Spanish. And even to this day, she speaks mostly only Spanish with maybe English, you know, she could understand basic English stuff. So he grew up speaking Spanish. And, and I kept trying to learn Spanish in high school and took two—three years of high school Spanish, another year of college Spanish. I still plan on going to Colombia and like living there

“I HAVE THE GENETICS, BUT I DON’T HAVE THE LANGUAGE... THAT WOULD THROW ME FOR A LOOP... I WOULD FEEL BAD ABOUT THAT, OR NOT FEEL INCLUDED.”

for a little bit to even immerse myself and get Spanish, you know, because I really want to get that under my belt for sure. And, and be able to speak to my grandmother, hopefully, you know, sooner than later. And have fuller conversations with her, but um, yeah, it was mostly English at my home, for sure. Because that was definitely part of that phase I told you about earlier when I was in high school, right? And I went through that specifically with that feeling of lack with the language, you know... So many people at the time spoke Spanish and, you know, had this, you know, beautiful secret club, like... code language that they could use. And, and I have the genetics, but I don’t have the language, you know, and that would throw me for a loop for a while for a number of years, I would feel bad about that, or not feel included on certain things. Or, you know, I’d have to ask my mom all the time. “Okay, what did they say? What do they say? What did they say? What did they say?” ... That reliance—it was tough to deal with it was—it made me feel kind of either weaker, or not as... there’s some shame in there for sure. Like, how come I can’t pick up this language quicker? How come it’s not sticking? You know, I’d be harder on myself. I’d be super proud when I did get a couple sentences down. And I’d be like, “yeah, you know, the dude is scared that you know.” And I started picking up like little words that I could use, and it was more than just like a spoiler, right? And, you know, I could conjugate a verb, you know, and it was, it was great, it was great. And then, you know, then I get on myself, if I’m not practicing enough, you know, from my man, I feel like I’m letting people down or something weird in my head, you know, and, and I get it, I get it now, because there is a lot of pride in language, there’s a lot of pride there. And thankfully, I’ve met so many other people that were in similar situations like me, where their parents were just working all the time. They, they, they didn’t have time to speak Spanish at home, or, you know, they couldn’t take those, you know, elective courses, because they had to work and, you know, make money for their family

and help out in that way, right? So, you know, I’ve heard all those kind of stories. And it gave me a lot more patience, it gave me a lot more self love for myself, you know?... Being part of a culture doesn’t mean, you have to check off all these boxes, you know?

Kimberly García: For Hill, the connection to his culture meant more than just the language.

Sean Hill: And every time I went to, you know, even a march for like the, for the DACA March, or if I wanted to, you know, closing down the ICE detention camps, like, I still knew I was part of the cause, like, I still know, I was in solidarity, you know, and I still felt that kind of that kind of connection that that mattered more to me, than if we’re connecting through language, you know, and it not to completely downplay it, of course, because, you know, I could say if I don’t like the similar sports team as you, that doesn’t mean we can’t talk right like we just, I like tennis, you like baseball, right, whatever. And we’d still can still enjoy each other’s company. enjoy each other’s time and hang out and still bond, right? So I started trying to kind of like look at language in that way, and see all the different ways that I could bond with someone besides that, and, and it was beautiful. It was amazing. Um, it really opened up my heart and opened up my mind a lot more

Kimberly García: Hill is an amazing poet who used his art form as an outlet to get in touch with his most authentic self.

Sean Hill: If I did not have poetry. By my side, ever since I was in middle school, I started writing, I would be a drastically different person, for sure. Unless, I mean, unless I had some other outlet that was equally infinite. As I think poetry is, I don’t know, I don’t know, I would be a lot more heartbreak, I’d be a lot more fractured, I’d be a lot more just misunderstood. Probably I’d, I’d have to hold in so much more probably. So with poetry for me. I mean, I still remember the day when I had my first breakup. And not my first breakup, it was my second breakup, it was like my first real girlfriend really, like I knew what a girlfriend was, you know, and I wasn’t afraid to hold her hand, you know, it was like a real actual relationship, right. And I remember getting to a place where I was still really messed up about and crying about it and messed up and, and I remember just, I started to write, I started to just write, and just see where it took me. And I kid you not three, four or five pages in. As soon as I wrote that last line, I felt this clarity, I felt this, this positive emptiness. Like I was clear, like, I was like, free of that pain, you know, I felt like I understood that relationship better. And what happened and why went wrong. After I wrote all that out. It I

almost saw poetry then as as a type of blueprint for the human mind, for the human heart, that we could, we could write these, this kind of map or this kind of trail, to figure out why we’re feeling what we’re feeling, why we’re going through what we’re going through, and then we can look at it again, and make sense of who we are and make sense of everything that happened, you know, um, you know, that kind of self reflection, there’s, there’s been nothing like it to me in the world that combines critical thinking, and, and critical emotional intelligence, and then makes your imagination better every time you use it. You know, it’s, it’s such a special art form to me,

Kimberly García: In the future, he’ll plans to incorporate both his Colombian culture as well as his African American culture into a family of his own,

Sean Hill: I would definitely have them learn about everyone, but at the same time, yeah, that that cultural route, or that, that kind of, I’d make sure that sacred feeling of, of their, their ancestry was there and felt as well for sure. And, and the kind of the kind of history that we have as a people as well, and the kind of things we’ve overcome, you know, it’s always special to me to say and stand out. You know, they call it a beautiful struggle, you know, in the civil rights, movement, and in, in living, it’s just in the Black community, especially I’ve heard it the most, that is to live a life of pain and oppression. And this constant kind of feeling of attack or fear sometimes, but then to still make this life as beautiful as humanly possible to that whole process is really special to me. And, I would for sure, pass it on.

IN SEARCH OF A SPACE FOR BELONGING



Arryana Jackson: Growing up there were a few mixed kids—I think if it was off the top of my head, I can maybe say there was like two or three, if that. Yeah, not very many. But yeah, I was the first mixed with Black in my family. And then in my little town, definitely, I was one of few, definitely one of few in terms of the like biracial students and things like that.

Bryan Arévalo: This dismay would later affect the way she would see herself. The environment she was in affected her involvement with other children creating identity issues for Arry as she got older. Eventually, she would overcome these but it would never change the way she once felt.

Arryana Jackson: So, where I grew up it was mostly Hispanic, specifically Mexican, so there weren't a lot of kids who looked like me per se. And what I mean by that is like, there was no like mixed kids and this is when being a mixed kid wasn't as common as it is now. Like my little sis, like, there's, biracial children everywhere, but for me it was a little less common. So, I definitely had some identity issues because most of my friends and the environment I was around was either—it was like Mexican or Hispanic. And so, I would say... yes, like for sure, I had some identity issues of figuring out like what I was. And I had some issues with accepting who I was because I wasn't like the majority that I was surrounded by.

Bryan Arévalo: Everyone in Arry's family has a multicultural background—a “blended family.”

As Arry describes it, everyone in her family has a different ethnic background. But as blended as Arry and her family are, Arry felt different. She was the first Black mixed child in her family, which caused her feeling of exclusivity. Arry would also oftentimes compare her own parents to those of her peers' parents.

Arryana Jackson: I think like for my family specifically, like, again, we're so blended, like it's crazy. But I would look at my parents and I would say like, “I don't really look like either of them,” because my dad is darker skinned. I'm very not, I don't want to say very white, but I am lighter. And then my mom is super-duper white. So, when you, when people would see me with my parents, if I was, if I wasn't with both of my parents together, it would always be like, “how, how did this happen?”... Obviously now as an adult, I definitely don't get those stares or questions that (are) often asked. And I'm glad it is 2021. So, I'm, I'm hoping I don't get those questions anymore. But like, I would look at my parents and be like, man, like, “I don't—I don't look like them.” And then I'd see my friends and I'm like, “man, they look like their parents” because both of their parents were the same racial and ethnic background.

So... I would always compare and I would be like, “why don't I look like my family?” Because also I could go along with the fact that I am the first Black kid in my family—I really am mostly close to my mom's side. So, I would stick out even

“I HAD SOME ISSUES WITH ACCEPTING WHO I WAS BECAUSE I WASN'T LIKE THE MAJORITY.”

more and like my older two sisters, they're not Black. So, I have older sisters. They're just not, they're not Black... I spent the first ten years of my life before my little sisters were born, just kind of standing out. So, if you see family pictures of us, especially if it's just me and my mom and my sisters, I stick out like a sore thumb because I'm the only, like, I'm the only Brown one in the photo. So yeah... there was a lot of comparing, in terms of like, well, (what) my friend's parents looked like versus what my parents looked like.

And I wouldn't necessarily look at it in a negative light. I think there were times where I did just because I was tired of getting asked questions of like, “oh, is this actually, your dad? Is this actually your mom.?” But, yeah, well, a lot of comparing, a lot of—and even like you asking me that question, like, as I'm thinking about it, like, yeah—like, I did compare a lot. But there's—what my parents look like versus what other people's parents look like. And, there were times where it was like... “what if—I wish just like one, like one racial ethnic background, like what if I was just Puerto Rican? And what if I was just Black?” Like, what would it be like? In a way kind of easier because I wouldn't get all these questions and I wouldn't have these identity issues. And then, when I—when me and my whole family speak specifically to my mom's side, when we take pictures, I don't stick out.

Bryan Arévalo: In Newark, Arry also never felt Black or Latin enough for one group of friends. She would deal with issues of race, adding to her sense of belonging.

Arryana Jackson: And I still feel like I face that as an adult. Like, as a kid, I didn't know what group to hang out with.

Like... I don't know if I'm Black enough to hang out with the Black kids at my school, but I don't know if I'm—obviously there's like, there's like, no, Puerto Rican's in my town. Like my family's probably like the only one within like a 30-mile radius. But I was like—for my Hispanic side, like, I don't know if I fit in enough with them, because I don't speak Spanish.

I'm not super immersed in the culture. And I'm also not Mexican, which was predominantly what

my school was. ...If you were Hispanic—most (of the) majority of my school—you were Mexican. And so, for me, it's like, I don't really fit in with them because yeah, I'm Hispanic, but I'm also Black. I also don't speak Spanish and I'm also not Mexican.

And so, it would definitely be like an in-between kind of thing—and with my friend group specifically. ...My best friend, she's Filipino. And then my friend group in high school, they were kind of a mixture of everything—mostly just Mexican and Filipino would be probably the majority of my friend group.

And so, I stood out again and it kind of was like, no matter which group I choose, whether I choose a more mixed friend group where we're just kind of a mixing pot full of everything—or if I can lean more towards my Black side or lean more towards my Hispanic side—I didn't. There was a part of me that didn't fit in (any) single group.

So yeah, it was, again, it was a whole like identity thing. Because I was mostly around friends and a community that was mostly like Mexican. I would like to try to convince myself that like, I have—but yeah, I am Mexican. Like I would like to try to make myself like, be that because I didn't know what else to be, because I didn't fit in with anything.

So yeah, there's definitely a lot of identity issues in terms of who I felt like I could hang out with and who I felt like I couldn't. And then as an adult, it's kind of the same because it reflects—I don't think it's as intense as an adult, but when you have these like kind of biases or thoughts in your head of like who you—where you belong—it carries on into your adult world, into your adult life.

So even as an adult, I'm still trying to find like, where do I kind of like fit in. But in reality, it's like, I can fit in wherever. I can go to any—I can go to any of these three categories of groups, whether people are mixture of everything or Hispanic, I can go to any of these groups and still get along.

Because at the end of the day, I'm a part—there's a part of me in every single one. But, I do think sometimes like, there's this negative notion towards like biracial kids and like, kind of like, “oh... they don't know how to like pick one,” or sometimes we're not, we're looked at as, not enough of one race or ethnicity.

So yeah, it's been, it's been, it's been a rollercoaster the past 21 years and I'm sure it's going to be a roller coaster for the next 21 years.

I would say like, it's more like, it's definitely like an

emotional roller coaster cause it's... essentially just coming down to like, where do you belong? And then like if you belong to some kind of thing.

Bryan Arévalo: With her walls up and having no sense of belonging, Arry would often reject or exclude herself to save the trouble of fitting in with one group of people.

Arryana Jackson: There were some times where, like, I just wouldn't even try to fit in with one of my racial, ethnic backgrounds more than the other, because I was like, "I'm going to get turned away." Or "they're not going to accept me," or they're going to be like, "you're not enough. You're not Black enough. You're not good enough. You're not this enough." So, I kind of just chose to kind of be like, well, I'm just not going to pick a side. I'm just going to kind of be in the middle and with being in the middle. And of course, with my, where I live and things like that, most of my friends ended up being either Filipino or Mexican-American.

Bryan Arévalo: Due to Arry's lighter complexion, people saw Arry as Black. People would never typically know that Arry was Puerto Rican if she never explicitly explained that part of her to them. People would often praise her for being different. However, in her family it was the opposite. Her distant family members would often make comments to Arry for being Puerto Rican and having Black roots. Since Arry was the first Black child in her family, her distant family members would often make comments based on her skin or used natural evil terms of endearment to make her feel different as a child.

Arryana Jackson: Like sometimes from maybe my, like from my Hispanic side, my mom's side of the family, they would like, again, first, first mixed one. So, it's like, I'm the first thing they see when they look at me is that, "oh, that kid is—that child's Black."

So, on my mom's side, obviously like my mom's siblings, my grandpa, my grandma, and all them that they were like, whatever, I get my family's very blended. So that being biracial was never really an issue on my mom's side of the family. But when you started getting to like the cousins and, more like distant family, that's when they would, like, I wouldn't necessarily say that it was like racist things, but just things that like, you probably shouldn't say to someone, so they would call me like, they would call me like, Oh, their Black princess.

And on my mom's side, it's like a distant, like distant family. They would call me, their Black princesses and things like that. They're like, Oh,

she's so beautiful, like, she's such a beautiful Black girl. And obviously this was one side in Spanish, but it was kind of like, why can't I just be like, beautiful, why can't I just be a princess?

Why do I have, what is Black up to be in front of it? And sometimes I felt like, cause on my mom's side my Puerto Rican side does have some like African in it. Like there was some more African influence. And so like, sometimes I was like, that's not really an excuse to refer to me as Black or anything else, but there's more, there's more to me than that.'

Bryan Arévalo: Arry would learn to embrace her culture and her skin color while fighting the microaggressions that people would throw at her. Now as a Black woman, Arry has encountered racism in her day-to-day life. She shares an anecdote of a time that she was accused of stealing a candy at a Ralphs, just days before our interview.

Arryana Jackson: It's also, because I am looked at more as being Black, most of the racism, microaggressions, or oppression I have faced or will face will be mostly Fords. Meeting and, just an instant instance. The other day I went to CVS, got some candy I had in my purse, candy was sticking out of my purse.

And I had the receipt and I went to Ralph's, which is right next door because Ralphs and CVS are right next to each other. Ralph's didn't have the candy. I wanted only CVS had it. So, I was like, okay, we'll go to CVS first, put the candy in my bag then I'll go to Ralph's. And the candy was sticking out of my bag a little bit.

And when I was at Ralph's, this was like a couple days ago when I was out one of the security guards, he came up to me and kept the candy sitting on my purse, but I had a cart. I had a hand



basket. So, it's like, if I bought it at Ralph's, why do I put it in my purse? I put it in my hand basket right.

And a security guard came up to me and he was like, "Oh, excuse me. Ma'am do you need a cart?" And I was like, I conflict. And he pretty much was saying like, Oh, I see the candy in your purse. And he thought it was stealing. He thought it was stealing from the store. And when I wasn't, I don't, I've never stolen a day in my life.

And like so, I. He asked me if he could see the receipt. And so, it's cases like that where I'm like, I don't, I don't know if I was, if I wasn't Black, when I really go through these things.

Bryan Arévalo: She also shared an instance in which a woman made a racist remark to Arry at the gym.

Arryana Jackson: I've gone through instances where I was at a gym. And there was this you in gym locker rooms, as you might know, you're not really supposed to use your phone, but I was just responding to a quick text.

There was nobody else in the locker room. And then this woman, she was actually in the store, she came out the bathroom, she was fully closed. She was not undressed or anything. I was just sending a quick text. And essentially it came down to a point where she was her and I were arguing. Cause she was like, you need to put your phone away.

And almost like, it is a way I'm putting it away right now. Just responding to a text. I wasn't, I didn't have my camera out. And she was like, I saw you with your camera. I'm like, no, I didn't. And then she, at the end of the story, I pretty much all she said was people, your people can't read. And I was like, yeah.

So, it's again, most, most of the time. When I do go through any type of racism, oppression, microaggressions, it's solely off of my Black side, not my Hispanic because people don't see it. They only see my Blackness, which I've never been uncomfortable with, but there are situations where it does become uncomfortable because it's like I haven't honed it down to make someone else feel comfort.

Bryan Arévalo: As strong as Arry may be, it is still unfortunate how strong she must remain because of the racial injustices that occur in the entire world today. She would share a few tips that her father has given her in order to prepare for an encounter with a cop. Those powerful words resonated throughout the entire

interview. Although Arry has gone through many racial issues now, she tries to focus on her well-being and tries to smile even in her darkest circumstances.

Arryana Jackson: I Smile. Because like, it's more so like you get prepared for these things, you like, like. You know, ever since I was a kid, my dad would sit down and have comps and be like, this is like how to handle it.

You know, kind of like how to deal with the worries one-on-one, like for the course that every, probably not every, but probably most Black children have to have with their parents or with a guardian or somebody who, who understands this goes. So, like for me, like when I drive my proof of insurance is in my little sunglasses compartment above my head.

So, I don't have to reach for my glove compartment. My license is always right by my gearshift. So, then I don't have to reach into my purse to grab my license out of my wallet. And my, my license is always out. You know, I have my phone on a little like damn thing that connects to your air conditioning vents.

Yeah. I have one of those. I have my phone there, so then if I ever get pulled over, I can press record right away. So, I don't have to reach for anything and like hurry up, find my phone, things like that. It's just got a wow. Unfortunately, the way of the world.

Bryan Arévalo: On a positive note, Arry enjoys celebrating her Spanish culture, especially when it comes to eating. She claims that she is closer to her mother's side of the family and grew up eating and making cultural dishes. A few foods would include Farina, Arroz con Dulces and a shaved ice called Piraguas.

Arryana Jackson: So, we would eat a lot of light. Oh, gosh, I don't it's okay. So, it's called Farina, which essentially is like literally cream of wheat. Like it's nothing crazy. Like it's just cream of wheat. I think it's the most amazing thing I've ever had in my life. Like when I would go as a kid, sometimes we would go to Puerto Rico.

They would put raisins in it and like Brown sugar. And it was like the best breakfast I've ever had in my life. So, every time my grandpa would go back to Puerto Rico because he would go pretty often obviously pre COVID and things like that. So, I would always tell him, like, can you give me a box of Farina, which I literally could get in the States?

Like, I could literally get a box of cream of wheat, but I'm like, no, it has to say Farina up. It doesn't

say that then. Like I'm not eating it. Let's see. What's some other things? It's called Arroz con Dulces. So essentially, it's just like Puerto Rican rice very similar to like Mexican rice or Spanish rice. It's just not like you, we put chickpeas in it and Sometimes my will is like my grandma, my grandpa likes the bottom of it.

Like the bottom of the possibly he's like this big, like metal pot. Right. And if you cook it for too long, then obviously they will burn on the bottom once the water evaporates. And so, my grandpa likes that part. He likes when the bottom is burned and he'll eat it. And so, like I, I kind of like it too low key.

I don't like it when it's super burned, but just like a little bit, it's like so good. And then especially if you mix it with like the soft rice at the top, how was a really good dish kind of thing, trying to think what else? Oh, it's more like a dessert when we go on the Island, but it's called Piragua and it's literally a snow cone.

Like all these fancy words. You see like the Piragua man with his little bell and like walking down the beach. And so, I would always, like, there're so many pictures of me as a kid, like next to the Thiago guy, like just smiling like snow in my head. Yeah. I looked at him like a God. Like I knew he was torn down on those. Thank you so much for your service or like changed my life. I think pretty much like most of them, like I can come up with that I would eat as a kid. I know that they like, there's a lot of, like, I don't know the names of them specifically, but there's probably like guava pastries that they would sell on the Island that I would get a lot or like guava I literally was just like, just guava that's like, like jelly kind of, and my grandpa would eat that.

I'm not the biggest fan of it, but he would eat it. But yeah, it definitely ate a lot of those.

Bryan Arévalo: Seeing that she is a fan of her Spanish culture, it only brings about the question if she personally would feel more connected to her mom's family since she is closer to them, and if her hair plays another factor in exclusivity since it is naturally curlier.

Arryana Jackson: Yeah. That's a really good question. I think hair is such a big, like identity thing, especially within a Black woman. You know, it's literally a part of us, it's something that society uses in a way to define us. Whether that be, you can take that as good or bad, but, for me specifically, like I changed my hair.

Like, I changed clothes. I, I'm, my hairstyle is always, is always different. So, I do, I changed my

“I JUST WOULDN'T EVEN TRY TO FIT IN... BECAUSE I WAS LIKE, 'I'M GOING TO GET TURNED AWAY.'”

hair a lot. But with that being said, depending on how my hair is kind of defines how I get treated sometimes by either community.

My hair is defined as “4c”, which is one of the most courses, hair textures that someone could have with her to an extent. Obviously there's course more coarse hair than mine, but to make it simpler.

Yeah. I have very coarse hair. So, because of that, a lot of times I'm like my hair is blacker. Like my hair is blacker. Yeah. It's not mixed. It's not, it's not mixed at all. My hair's blacker. And so, would that being said, because I didn't like my hair, I went through a whole, like. To simplify identity, crisis. So, when it's not in braids, it's not in Quist. It's not straightened, curled, whatever it may be. When it shoots out, I feel so vulnerable. Like. We looked at myself and I'm like, hi, like, this is like me, like, like this there's no extensions. There's no, like, especially if I don't have makeup on too, like there's no lashes on, my, this just my, you could see me at the scars on my face, you can see the unevenness of my hair, the thickness, the quaint, the oiliness, and you just feel very vulnerable.

And I'm learning to try to allow myself to have my hair out like that. But I do get nervous. I do. I get very nervous when I just have it out because I don't want to be judged or looked at a certain way.

Bryan Arévalo: For now, Arry is continuing to radiate positivity and learn to accept herself for who she is, one day at a time. She also finds that she is learning to embrace both cultures, even though it is difficult since there is not such a thing as being enough for one culture.

Arryana Jackson: I think like there's times where I tell myself, like I can literally like have my hair, Afro it out fist in the air saying yes, being a one activist, being a part of all these clubs and organizations that are more racial and ethically based. And I still sometimes feel like it won't be enough, and the same thing goes for my Hispanic side, I can, wave my flag around, have a little tiny flag hanging from my car.

You know, try to speak Spanish when I can, listen to Spanish music, things like that. And I still feel like it will never be enough. So, I think now again, as I am getting older and more comfortable with it, I kind of like it, I don't really have enough for either side. You know, I am enough regardless.

And, it's more so just finding those, those people or those groups of people that don't care, what you look like, what you are, the food you eat, the languages you speak. You know, it's because if I. I've realized that no matter how much I try to fit in or be enough, I'll always, it will never be, it will never be enough.

So yeah, I kind of, I'm just like, whatever, I'm just going to, I embrace, I raised both sides as much as I can.

Bryan Arévalo: Ultimately, she encourages herself and others to continue to do research on different cultures. Not just as someone who has multiple cultures in her family, but as an educated individual.

Arryana Jackson: You have to listen to research and all these things. So, for me, I am, I am no expert on either side of my identities and, I try to learn the best I can and I'm trying to keep up, but there's always going to be something I need to learn or something that I may be did in the past that I shouldn't be doing now, things like that.

And so, for me, it's like, I'm learning, but I'm also using my experiences at the same time with what I write and what I decide to market and things like that. I do, I do take my identities and how I implement them into my almost career field now. Very seriously, I think. And I think it should be because, it's, why would you, why would you read a story about a community written by somebody who knows nothing about it?

So, it's, I'm very, like, I'm very keen on getting to know more about my community. So then when I write about my communities, I know what I'm talking about and I don't sound arrogant or whatnot because at the end of the day, going back to the very beginning of this, interview or conversation we're having, I didn't grow up around very many people who were like me, both identities, like both my Black side and my Puerto Rican side.

I didn't have a lot of people around me like that. So, as I've gotten older, I've immersed myself into both of these communities and have tried to learn as much as I can absorb as much as I can, because usually what a kid would absorb when they're, three, four years old and into their, grade school I'm absorbing when I'm 16, 17, 18 years old,

because I didn't have, I didn't have anything else.

So, it's definitely. It can be a challenge sometimes when it comes to writing and things like that. You know, because I think sometimes what happens is, if I, as a Black woman and write a story about the Black community, people automatically think, Oh, she's an expert. She knows exactly what she's talking about.

Bryan Arévalo: For now, Arry will continue to educate herself and work towards her degree in Journalism with an emphasis on PR. She credits her knowledge on the higher education system and maturing as a young woman.

Arryana Jackson: It's a lot easier. And so, instead of me, like putting in, putting in straight hair extensions, so I fit in or toned it down. So, I'm not as Black, like, whatever that even means, things like that. Like, I don't even, I don't even do it anymore or, making myself more likely to put it into easier terms.

Like when I'm like with my Hispanic side, I'm like, oh my gosh, I have to tone it up. So, then I see, I see I'm authentic with my Black side. I'm like, oh my God, I have to turn it up. So, I'm like Blacker, like, what does that even mean? And so like, I don't even do that anymore. I'm like, this is me. This is how I speak.

This is how I carry myself. You know, if one side or specific people from one side don't want to accept me because of the way I grew up or how I, how I display myself, then, that's okay.

Bryan Arévalo: She continues to identify with her Black side based on her skin but respects both sides equally while sharing her taste in music in reggaeton and her fathers classic music. She stated that if she decides to have kids and start a family in the future, she would like to teach her kids about the cultures and traditions of her family, but would not let those things define them.

Arryana Jackson: Cause my family so mixed. Like I can, if I have kids with no matter what ethnicity the man I have kids with I definitely like think that I'm going to teach them these things, but at the same time, I'll just let them know like make it what you want. Like you don't have to follow. There are no rules to like being Puerto Rican 101—being Black 101 because, let's just say I have kids with a white man. For example, my kids will be very small percentage of both of these identities, which I do want them to know about. But I also want to emphasize that there's more to them.

Raised on Pupusas and Hip-Hop



Devin Nazar Cager: My full name is Devin Nazar Cager. Nazar is from my mom's side and Cager is from my dad's side. I'm half Black, half Salvadoran. I'm 23.

Camille Lehmann: During our talk, Devin gave us some insight on his life and how he grew up. We went into detail of what it was like growing up with a Salvadoran mother and not having his father or his father's African-American culture present.

Devin Nazar Cager: Okay, so I grew up in L.A.—San Fernando Valley. Um, I went to private school for most of my young life, you know, from kindergarten all the way through high school. It was Catholic school, so I guess I was kind of religious at first. And yeah, I grew up with my mom and my grandparents—in our grandpa and my grandma's house. And she had a daycare there. Yeah, we all live there.

I grew up eating Salvadoran food, for sure. And my grandma always cooked that stuff, you know, pupusas—all kinds of stuff, breakfast, like tomatoes and onions and stuff. But I also had like burgers... All kinds of food honestly.

Camille Lehmann: At home, Devin never felt different, his grandparents always made him feel welcomed. He grew up listening to a wide variety of music—in Spanish and English. He says that at family parties he would always hear Spanish

songs and never really liked them until now. Since he's gotten older, he's become more appreciative of Spanish music because it reminds him of his culture.

He also picked up his mother's choice of music and grew up listening to a lot of hip-hop music as well. He mentioned that he felt like his mom was trying to teach him a little about his African-American culture but that she also just liked hip-hop in general.

Devin Nazar Cager: I grew up listening to a lot of hip-hop, like Kanye West and stuff. My mom played that a lot in the car—when we would drive around and that's the kind of music that she liked. And she was the one that I really kind of got my music taste from, I guess.

Camille Lehmann: Growing up in San Fernando Valley in Los Angeles, California was a good thing for Devin because he never felt out of place. The San Fernando Valley is very diverse so growing up, he never really felt excluded because of his skin color or hair.

Devin Nazar Cager: Um, I never felt like I was different from everyone else. I feel like I was included, I don't know. I think, because of where we live like in L.A. I think it's such a mixture of cultures, but no one really has been kind of excluding me unless it was middle school. But in middle school, I think it was just like kid stuff.

“I NEVER FELT LIKE I WAS DIFFERENT FROM EVERYONE ELSE... I THINK BECAUSE OF WHERE WE LIVE... IT'S SUCH A MIXTURE OF CULTURES.”

It wasn't because they were actually racist. You know?

Camille Lehmann: While growing up living with his Salvadoran grandparents, Devin learned how to speak Spanish and spoke to his mother in English. He mentioned that he only grew up with his mother's side of the family and that his father's side was never present in his life.

Devin shared with me that he had only met his father once in his life and that it wasn't the best experience for him. Since he never knew much from him and his grandparents and mother were not too fond of his father, he never had the desire to meet him. He went into detail about the day he met his father for the first time when he was about 7 or 8 years old.

Devin Nazar Cager: I think he was living in Sacramento and he wanted to come and meet me. I think it was like, I don't know how old I was—I think it was like, seven or eight, somewhere around there. And it was the first time I met him. Me and my mom pulled up at some hotel where he was staying. And yeah... from my perspective, I think my mom too, he was just being a little weird. He wanted to take pictures of us and he said, “oh, I have these presidents for you.” And I just felt like (he was) kind of hyperactive. And just I guess maybe he was just excited. But I didn't like it. And I just wanted my mom. I kept telling my mom, “let's go, let's go.” And she's like, “wait just, try and talk to him—try and see how he is”... And I really didn't like him that much. And I got into the car and I kept telling my mom, “let's go.” And then he got into the car and he was like, “no you guys don't leave, don't leave.” But I was like—I didn't want to talk to him, really. Yeah, we ended up convincing him to go, and then we just left. We stayed for, like ten minutes—not even that long,

Camille Lehmann: After about ten minutes of seeing his father for the first time, Devin and his mother left because he was uncomfortable.

Devin Nazar Cager: I just wasn't comfortable. I

was kind of freaked out by the whole thing. It was just weird to me. And that was like, the one and only time I met him in person.

Camille Lehmann: After years of not speaking to his father, Devin mentioned that they later rekindled when he was in high school. He mentioned they chatted about basketball since his father was a player.

Devin Nazar Cager: In high school, he wanted to—he kind of tried to get in touch with me through Facebook. And I did talk to him for a little bit over Facebook messages just about life and basketball. He played basketball, too. So that was when I was like a freshman. And I was playing, I was on the team. And I just wanted to ask him how I could like get better because I wanted to play more on the team and stuff. And he kind of helped me. He said I should workout a lot more and I'm like a freshman—so I didn't really work out or like to work out that much.

Camille Lehmann: Even though Devin didn't feel comfortable when he encountered his father for the first time, he still feels that he missed out on a part of his culture. When he was younger it was harder for him to be fully aware about both cultures because he was missing the other half. He explained to me that it was a bit difficult for him growing up with his father not present in his life. Till this day Devin sometimes feels like he's missing a piece of himself or his identity.

Devin Nazar Cager: You know, it's always weird, especially with your friends and like people in your class know about that kind of stuff. And they kind of make fun of you for that. And you just know, like, you see other kids with their dads—with their both parents, and like, damn, like, I wish I had my dad around or something like that. You know? Yeah, I always felt like that. I still feel like you know, I wish I had kind of that Black culture more around. You know, when I was growing up even now, yeah. Or... a father figure—I mean, I had my grandpa, I still have my grandpa and I kind of consider him that, male figure to look up to. And he was—I feel like he was a good grandpa and like a good guy for me. But yeah, I did.

I mean, now I accept it, you know? And it doesn't bother me like that—like how you see—but as a kid, for sure. You know, you want your dad especially as a like a boy, you know? You want your dad around, like—toss the ball. At this point, I've accepted who I am—and I like where I am.

Camille Lehmann: Growing up with one parent must be difficult for the child but also for the single parent. Devin's mother had to go through this experience alone and also had to explain to

Devin about his other half.

When did you even find out that your father was Black? How did that even happen?

Devin Nazar Cager: I think from an early age, she always told me. Or, I would ask her, you know. I felt like I could ask her and she would bring out—she had like this folder. I think she saved for me—when I was born like, my dad in the newspaper. Because for his high school, he was like a really good basketball player. So she would show me those and she would show me about him. And I think that's how I knew, through my mom telling me about him...

Camille Lehmann: Since Devin's father left his mother when she got pregnant, his Salvadoran side wasn't a big fan of him. Devin mentioned that he grew up not hearing great things about his father due to the fact that he just walked away.

Devin Nazar Cager: My grandparents would talk bad about him, and my mom, I guess my mom, too. And my grandpa would be like, "oh, you don't need him around." You know, "you don't need him, he left you—he left all of us." So, "he's not good enough. He's just like dirt." You know? Yeah, I don't—I don't know. I think he just didn't want to, you know, be in charge of a kid. I don't think he was ready. Or, he just didn't want to. So my mom moved to L.A. from Modesto. And he stayed there. My mom was 22. So I think you have to be around that age.

Camille Lehmann: After Devin opened up about the things he heard as a young child, I asked him if his grandparents' or mothers' perspective triggered him into getting the mindset of not wanting him around, or simply not wanting to meet him.

Devin Nazar Cager: I think there's a part of me that, you know, doesn't really, because I feel like I don't need him anymore. And that at this point—so, why would I really talk to him? But I don't know. Maybe it would help me grow just knowing what his point of view was because maybe there was some other stuff that was going on—and I'm just seeing one side of the story.

Camille Lehmann: Overall, Devin mentioned that he believes his dad was simply not ready to be a father and that he understands him, because he's 23 now. But because he didn't have a dad growing up, he said that at this point he would want to stay there for his (own) kids. As Devin matured, he was able to put himself in his father's shoes a little bit. He thinks that since he's grown he might want to meet his father again in the future.

Devin Nazar Cager: I think I will give him a chance. But I just don't know how he's going to act, or how he's going to be and it's going to suck for me not to like him. And from what I remember, which was so long ago, it's kind of unfair to keep the same mindset, I guess, but I don't know. He was kind of weird back then. So I don't know probably gonna be weird again. Or maybe he's gonna be cool. But I guess, I guess I am curious to see... so maybe.

Camille Lehmann: We then continued to talk about his childhood and his environment throughout school. When Devin explained his life in school, he mentioned that he never cared about race and hung out with kids from many different races.

Devin Nazar Cager: In middle school, kindergarten through middle school, I was like the only Black kid there. So I mostly hung out with Honestly, I feel like everyone, well, not everybody, but like, I didn't really care about race. You know, I just think I was who I thought was cool. And it was mostly Filipino kids at my school and middle school. So that's who I really hung out with.

Yeah, I feel like it was. I think it's just like, especially because I was the only Black kid there. I think it was kind of weird to kind of let something easy to make fun of and kind of feel left out for.

Camille Lehmann: He mentioned that since he was the only Black kid in middle school, sometimes he would get picked on or made fun of but he always believed that it was little kid things and never felt like they were being racist towards him. In highschool, there were more races and Devin hung out with the Black kids on sports teams and then the Latinos when he got off sports.

Devin Nazar Cager: So and at first I hung out with, like, the sports teams, like a lot, a lot of Black kids on the football team and stuff like that. And some of the Latinos, too. But um like, as I grew older, I kind of stopped playing sports, and I kind of gravitated more towards some Latinos. But again, there were other people in our group that were of different races. And I just and I wasn't like purposely gravitating towards more Latinos. I think there was a good amount of Latinos at my high school. So yeah, just fell into a certain group. And they happen to be majority Latino.

Camille Lehmann: Growing up Devin mentioned that he would get statements like you're not Black enough? Or you're not Latino enough?

Devin Nazar Cager: It was never Latino. It was always like, you're not Black. You know,

“YOU SEE OTHER KIDS WITH THEIR DADS— WITH THEIR BOTH PARENTS, AND LIKE, DAMN... I WISH I HAD MY DAD AROUND.”

like, you're not actually Black. I guess because they were just like, they would be around my family and like who I am. And I guess I'm not stereotypically Black, I guess, you know. and I speak Spanish too. So they tried to like, I would hate when people tell me that too. Because it's like, You're so dumb. That's how I would like feel about them. But yeah, people would always say that to me.

Camille Lehmann: Although he speaks Spanish and feels more connected to his Salvadoran roots, he mentioned that people usually classify him as Black because of his skin color and hair. He never felt ashamed of being black and always accepted who he was, even though sometimes he would get made fun of because of his hair.

Devin Nazar Cager: I'm pretty sure like that everyone saw me or still sees me as Black majority Black, so they get to know me and then you know, they realize that I can speak Spanish and then I'm half Latino. But I think when people first see me, they see me as Black. I think people I think just in general, a stranger, probably think I'm Black. Yeah. I mean, if they've heard me, maybe they would have known that I'm mixed.

Camille Lehmann: For people that are mixed it becomes a bit challenging when filling out papers and figuring out what to identify as. I asked him what he identified as on paper for college applications and important paperwork.

Devin Nazar Cager: Um, well usually on that kind of stuff there's no mix. So I always kind of put like other race. And then there's another one that asked like, ethnicity, Hispanic or Latino. So I put that, so I put other race and Hispanic or Latino.

Camille Lehmann: Devin was always in a bubble in the San Fernando Valley and didn't know what it was like to be living in areas that aren't as diverse. After graduating high school he moved to Santa Barbara to attend university at UCSB. His experience there was much different than living in the SFV.

Devin Nazar Cager: I feel like Santa Barbara,

especially like universities, where the majority of white people. And I think that was a shock to me because from where I'm from, I really didn't have that many white friends. And I mean, there was white people at my high school, but I really didn't hang out with them as much. So coming here, was kind of weird, because everyone's white and I felt kind of, I just felt like a minority. I didn't even it wasn't even because I was Black or mixed or whatever. It was just because I was different than everyone else. But in my house, there's some people that it's like half and half. It's kind of nice. So I kind of felt kind of included, because it was kind of mixed in my house.

Camille Lehmann: This new environment in college and in Santa Barbara in general, changed the way Devin views himself. Attending the University of Santa Barbara opened Devin to new experiences and realizations which helped him discover himself a bit more.

Devin Nazar Cager: Um honestly, I feel like it kind of made me prouder of who I am. Because I feel like I'm different. And in a good way, you know? Yeah. Kind of stands out a little bit.

Like I said, you know, there was times when I was made fun of when I was younger, but I feel like I've grown a lot and more mature now. I'm kind of an adult now. So I understand who I am. And I know that I can change myself and I don't really want to change myself, you know?

Camille Lehmann: Devin then shared some advice for people struggling with their Afro-Latinx identity or that are growing up mixed with split parents who only know one culture. Something very important to Devin is that time heals and the more you learn to accept who you are the happier you will be.

Devin Nazar Cager: Yeah, I think that they should just accept who they are and be proud of who they are. Um and that it's always going to get better. Because as you get older, you accept yourself and you learn to accept yourself and you just try to understand people better than like, the people that you grew up with and stuff like that. And, you know, not having a dad was I feel like for a bit a big part of my life and like it brought sadness to me, but in that, like as I got older, you know, it didn't. It doesn't bother me as much anymore. We kind of get over it and kind of move on, you know?

As a Blaxican, I was Told to Pick a Side



Millie del Oro: Hi my name is Millie, I'm 24 years old and I currently live in Los Angeles, California. So, as you already know I am Afro-Latina—I am Black and Mexican. So, I know being Afro-Latinx can come with different backgrounds, different mixes or maybe no mixes at all. But for me, I am a mix of two different cultures. So my dad is Black, he was born and raised in Arkansas—so middle of nowhere in the South. And then my mom is Mexican—she was born and raised in Tijuana, Mexico.

Tracy Mejia: Millie's mother came to the U.S. when she was 20 to attend college.

Millie del Oro: She came to the U.S. when she was about 20, to further pursue her higher education in college. Luckily, growing up, she already learned English. So that is a requirement from where she came from, that really helped her transition into coming to school out here—even though of course it was different.

Tracy Mejia: Millie likes to tell the story of how her mom met her dad and how they got together.

Millie del Oro: She married pretty young—not with my dad. Ever since she first got married she always stayed in the U.S. Years later, two marriages later—and from moving all around the world because her first husband was in the military—comes my father. They met at

a Jamaican night kind-of-club in San Diego. I wouldn't say they hit it off at first. My dad is Southern. Southern people have this weird thing where they stare at people and they don't say anything—they are just kind of awkward and make you uncomfortable. So he kind of did that to her—it was very uncomfortable.

She saw this guy staring at her. He never came up to her, he never said anything. Further going on, she would go to parties with her cousin/aunt (they are around the same age)—and she would always see that guy.

So my dad was always at those little parties and little functions. And she was like, "oh, here's this guy again." And my aunt would make fun of her like, "oh, there's your boyfriend." And she would be like, "shut up, he doesn't even talk." But eventually he asked her out and they've been dating ever since.

Tracy Mejia: Millie's parents' relationship started with some obstacles when it came to the different culture and race between each other's family. She will explain how each parent had a difficult time being accepted within the family.

Millie de Oro: I feel like their backstory is pretty cool—but I would say it was hard for them. I'm not sure when it was when they started dating or once they got married—just because my dad

is Black, my mom is Mexican. They come from two completely different cultures and different countries. There was a little bit of tension from both sides, from both of the parents. On my mom side, my grandma didn't feel like my dad was—not saying he wasn't a good fit cause he was a really good man. He helped my mom take care of her three first children, who weren't even his kids. But just because of the color of his skin my grandma would say things like, "oh, don't let him sleep on our pillows because he'll leave them dirty"—things like that because my dad is like darker skin tone.

So yeah, certain things like that. The invasion of a different culture coming in—things like that.

And from my dad's side—his mom didn't feel like my mom was a good fit, just because she wasn't Southern, you know? Southern people have very small ideals of how people should be—how they should be brought up and my mom was very very young.

She got married at 20 in her first marriage. So she never really got the chance to really be young and live her life even growing up. So her first two years of being a mother, she will still go to the club with her friends. She was in her 20s and hang out and do her thing. She loved dancing so being married never stopped her from doing that.

My dad's mom really didn't think that she was a good fit and she was in a different culture so obviously she wasn't raised to have proper mother ideals, things of that nature.

So, little bit rocky, but it wasn't too long. I'm probably the reason why they got over that because growing up with both sides, like, there was never any issues (about) my race within my family—which made me really really really happy. Because unfortunately, sometimes people of different cultures make people do get those negative comments from family members or don't feel as comfortable in their own skin, like in their own homes.

Tracy Mejia: Millie continues the story by explaining how she grew up moving from a big city to a little town and how her being Blaxican affected her living there.

Millie del Oro: So with that being said growing up, I did grow up in the South, so I grew up in Arkansas—in my dad's hometown and there everyone is either Black or White. There's no other mixes, there's no Latin people, no Asian people—nothing outside of Black and White.

My family being so mixed already and also having

very strong Latin roots, it was so awkward and weird first moving to the town and seeing how different people are—not only from a diversity standpoint since it wasn't really that diverse but also just how they're upbringings are and how little they knew of the outside world.

I would say it was really hard and weird, I talked like this when I first moved out there because we were originally from San Diego. I didn't have a southern accent, I couldn't understand them so much and they couldn't understand me, which surprises me.

Tracy Mejia: Millie states how hard it was when she moved to Arkansas and tried to fit in with the people and she continues to explain it.

Millie del Oro: There were a lot of things I had to learn in order to fit in. People use to say things to me, I went to a predominantly Black school, so

“MY CLASSMATES WOULD SAY THINGS LIKE: ‘DO YOU EVEN SPEAK ENGLISH? ARE YOU ACTUALLY BLACK? YOU NEED TO PICK A SIDE.’”

You don't really know Spanish.” Basically just saying, talking about how fake the idea between two different cultures was, really trying to make me more Black—I guess you can say.

That was really hard for me because at home I was who I was. I have parents who come from two completely different cultures, but neither one of them tells me, “oh you need to act more like me or you need to change who you are”—none of that kind of stuff. And we bonded with both sides of our families and they would come over and we would go over to their homes; like going to families reunion and things like that. There was never an issue with our races either.

Just going to the outside world, going to school and things like that, and my race being an issue was really weird to me. I honestly didn't understand it. That was just something I had to learn over time, that someone doesn't come from a different background then they might not understand and you might have to take a moment to educate them.

Tracy Mejia: In high school, Millie had a roommate who at first wasn't familiar with someone being mixed and Millie's mother talked to her roommate.

Millie del Oro: I feel like in high school I had to learn to not take it so personal because it is really just like a learning thing. So for my last two years of high school, 11th and 12th grade, I went to a boarding school and it was still in Arkansas but there was a lot of diversity there. We had a lot of different ethnic groups which made me happy about that, not feeling like I was the only different person in the state of Arkansas other than Black and White.

That was pretty cool but my first year I did have a Black roommate who was from one of those small towns where everyone was either Black or White. So the same thing kind of happened. My middle school experience kind of repeated itself but it was a little bit more intense because we were in high school and you know high schoolers are mean sometimes.

So coming from an all-Black household and also being heavily into religion and being a preacher's daughter, she had a lot of ideals that were, I won't say, way different from my upbringing but she didn't really allow room for different backgrounds and different traditions and different upbringings.

She was one of the people who again would tell me that I need to pick a side, I need to act more

“I DON'T LIKE WHEN PEOPLE QUESTION WHICH SIDE I PREFER... IF I PICK ONE OVER THE OTHER, I'M PICKING ONE PARENT OVER THE OTHER—AND THAT'S JUST NOT ME.”

Black, I needed to stop trying to speak Spanish because I have relatives who only speaks Spanish so of course I speaking Spanish to them when they call me on the phone, things like that with my grandmother.

That made no sense to me because in my head I'm thinking this is how I've always been raised, this is literally what my life has been for all of my existence and I have someone here telling me that I need to change it—doesn't make any sense.

My mom had a like a sit-down talk with me about it, just letting me know that “hey, she's never probably interacted with a Latin person,” let alone a mixed person and different upbringings. Her partner might have her a little more centered into their world since they are pretty religious and very ideal in the southern roots. So they don't have a lot of outside people coming in or traditions. “So, we're just going to educate her and let her know like, hey they're a lot of people in the world.”

So my mom also had a talk with her and ever since then things changed, she never tried to tell me to change who I was anymore. She actually tried things from my Latin culture that she really liked. A whole 360 happened. I was mind blown that a conversation can really do that.

Tracy Mejia: It has been a journey for Millie when it comes to her being confident in who she is, and she doesn't pick sides in which culture she prefers.

Millie del Oro: Definitely has been a learning experience but I say I feel like entering college into now, I've been very very confident about who I am, being Afro-Latinx, all the way. I don't know if anyone has told me since then that I should act more of one side than the other, but if they do I don't care, cause that doesn't make any sense.

I was raised with both parents, so I have a close

relationship with both. I'm mixed, I'm proud of it, I'm proud of being Black and Latina, Afro-Latinx and I love teaching people about being different within the same cultures pretty much.

At home, there wasn't much of like higher culture. I would say food-wise, my mom would do all the cooking so most of the food we ate was either Italian or Mexican. My dad does not know how to cook to save his life, so I didn't really eat a lot of southern food even though being in the south. So with that aspect, it was more so on my Latin side.

Tracy Mejia: Millie goes on to explain how her mom wanted her and her siblings to be American more than being one of the cultures.

Millie del Oro: My mom didn't teach us that growing up because she didn't want us to, I want to say in a sense feel as American as possible and just give us a different experience than she had growing up. So we really were just American kids who happen to be culturally different. There was no like set in stone ways with having to be one way or another at home.

There was a cultural thing that both of my parents taught us but they never pushed us to adapt more of this side or adapt to more of that side.

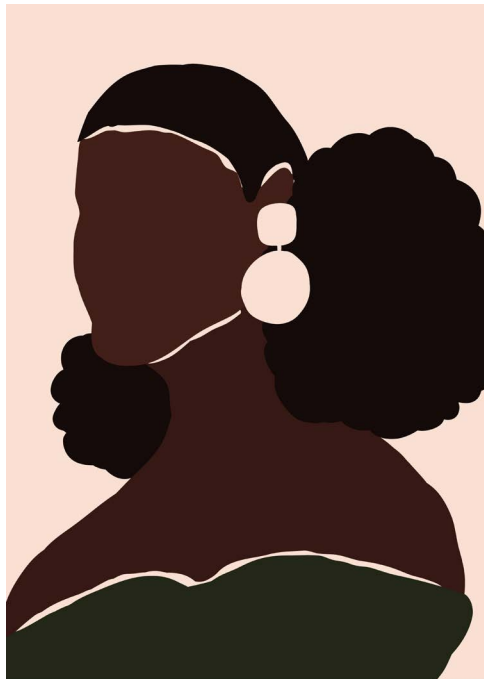
Tracy Mejia: Millie felt like she was allowed to find herself and wasn't adapted to be one culture

or the other. As you grow you learn more about yourself and your mixed cultures, she continues to say how she feels now.

Millie del Oro: I will say growing up in middle school I did try to fit in more. So I did learn how to use a bonnet and the slang and watching different shows that my classmates would watch and listened to the music they would listen to. I guess that helped me feel stronger in my Black side for one but also just fit-in in general because me being me, a mixed kid from out of town was not helping my situation in fitting in at all.

My parents didn't raise me to be just one thing, they allowed me to find myself being mixed. They will actually encourage me in being different and it's okay if you don't look like one kind or the other.

There's no rule book on how to be comfortable with yourself, you really have to learn how to do that for yourself and watch videos and follow certain people that look like you. They do help because those were the things I had to do to get where I am today but honestly it does come from within. That power comes from within you and just knowing that you're perfect the way you are. If you're different that's amazing because you have something that no one else has and just share that with the world.



Advocating for AfroLatinidad



Amanda Pericles: My name is Amanda Pericles. I am she/her pronouns and I am currently 28 years old, living in Rhode Island, Massachusetts. And I identify as a Dominican-American.

Cynthia Gonzalez: Amanda was raised in a Latino household, with many others that looked like her, and she identifies as Hispanic.

Amanda Pericles: I think especially for my home life, we went to church a lot and stuff and it's a Spanish-speaking church. So like all of us identify as Hispanic—like first and foremost. I think my identity was mostly rooted in that. So that may have contributed to other people seeing me as Dominican or Hispanic before being like Black. It is hard to answer but I would assume probably the former, just because that is how I identified, as well.

Cynthia Gonzalez: Growing up, Amanda recalls experiencing some microaggressions but not overt racism.

Amanda Pericles: In terms of like outright discrimination... It was something that I didn't necessarily like either—I didn't notice, or I didn't really experience it much because of where I am I think, in the East Coast. Up north so as opposed to like some of the more blatant discrimination and racism that you might find in other places up hear sometimes it is more passive or it's in

the form of microaggression. Obviously for some people they do experience that but, that I can recall, it was more like comments about my hair or like my curly hair or things like that. Or like... being articulate or things like that. And then as an adult, I think like, for example, the first time I heard someone use the N-word directed towards my group of friends. Was like when was that maybe like three years ago out and about. I feel like it was mostly in the form of microaggression. Or like things that I wasn't really noticing. Like now as an adult who identifies in a certain way that is completely different from the identification that I used when I was younger. I'm on the lookout for those things so maybe they were present and I just didn't notice them. But yeah I feel like it's different especially since I am up north. And because of the way I identified. And also because of my privilege. I'm lighter skinned and I have looser curls. So in terms of being around my family and stuff it was like I got the morena comments, but it wasn't terrible in terms of like you're ugly because of this, or like don't go out in this one, kind of a thing. It wasn't that.

Cynthia Gonzalez: Amanda explains her journey with her hair from her childhood, when she experienced conflicting messages about how to do her hair.

Amanda Pericles: I have curly hair and then growing up I was around, a different, you know, a

bunch of different kids. Whether they were Black, White, whatever. But in like the majority of my life which was like church and stuff and being home my life was kind of split between Guatemalans and Dominicans. And so I had like really strong macho thick hair, as they would say. And I wore my hair curly. As a kid my mom would always have it in braids. It took two people to even do it at the salon. I started getting it relaxed when I was ten. So that was a shift in my thing and then some new friends came to church and their hair was like that looser kind of thin curly hair, as opposed to like my thick poof. So I think like growing up as a teenager for sure was when I became aware of the differences even within the curly hair. Like I wanted the looser curls that I can just put some gel in it. And it would be chill as opposed to my hair which like is a big thing that I had to take care of. So but at the same time we had other friends who were Black but like from non-Spanish speaking countries and because of the way that I was raised and stuff and all the anti-Blackness and all those things that I had internalized. I thought that I was better because I had better hair and stuff like that. So I was stuck in the middle of like wanting that type of curly hair but also like feeling like I was better than other people because or like prettier because I had this hair that I could straighten whenever I wanted to. It was beautiful and it wasn't like weird when I blow dried it. It didn't look like I had just blow dried it. I could get it pin straight compared to other people. You know and I could flip between the two, well not really because I straighten my hair all the time. So yeah so again I was straightening my hair all the time.

Cynthia Gonzalez: It was not until college that Amanda established a better relationship with her crown and her own Black identity.

Amanda Pericles: I stopped relaxing it eventually. And when I got to college was when I started to wear it out—like curly and not straightening it as much. I think that is kind of what jump started or was the catalyst for my like racial identification like changes as an adult. So I started wearing my hair naturally and then just being in college, and being in a different environment. You know, like I was hanging out with a certain type of people. And I was like asking myself these questions about like who I was and where I felt at home—where I felt accepted and where I didn't feel accepted. Or differences that I felt with different demographics. And I just kind of realized that I was Black and it wasn't like I was a special Black because I was Dominican like I was just Black, you know. So I think the hair bit in particular was like kind of one of the big things that I always say was the catalyst for my identity and kind of changing my redirect around how I identify. So after that in college you

know I was wearing my hair curly all the time. And now as an adult who is 28 is like a big part of identity. I just chopped it off the other day. Or like a couple months ago for like the first time in forever. It's the shortest it has ever been. It is very strange, I tell people that it was like my crown that like I had to learn to love. You know so like after years of telling yourself that it is something that you should love and that it is beautiful and that it is your crown. You start to kind of get attacked to it and it becomes a symbol of your beauty right that you had to work so hard to like associate with beauty—and be you.

Cynthia Gonzalez: And now, Amanda is learning how not to let her hair define her femininity, her beauty, or her Blackness.

Amanda Pericles: I had big hair that everyone knew about. I had long big hair that, you know, would sit on top of my head. So then it was like kind of switching it now, right, or like my hair isn't just me—it's not my beauty. It's not what determines whether I am beautiful or not. So I had to like take that jump in to like switch that mindset. You know, hair does not equal femininity. Especially in like our culture where long hair is what is beautiful, right? So that is kinda been the journey. I have had lots of like ebbs and flows with the hair but now it's like, "hair is hair." Yeah, it's beautiful. And especially as a Black woman it is something that defines us and that we take really great pride in—in loving and in learning how to love it. But it is also, like, So that is kind of where I am now.

“[HAIR] DOESN'T DEFINE WHO I AM AND IT DOESN'T DEFINE WHAT MAKES ME FEMININE OR A WOMAN OR BEAUTIFUL.”

Cynthia Gonzalez: For Amanda, college became a transformative place that helped her define and continue redefining her identity.

Amanda Pericles: I always say that once you open your eyes to problematic things about yourself or like about the world in general, once your eyes are open to that like they are open to so many other things. Like in college, I had to unlearn colorism or like probably even after college—still thinking certain things. So like in college and after

college I had to unlearn colorism. Like anti-Black things that you know we grow up as Hispanics thinking or Dominicans in particular thinking. And as that goes unlearning misogyny and patriarchal things. And then as you keep going it is like homophobic and transphobic especially someone who grew up in a church who thought all these things, these terrible homophobic or transphobic—all these things. And then after that it's like learning how to not be ableist. And it's like all these things you just keep going. Once you learn one thing it's like hard to not see the oppression. And like the problematic things and thinking that you have, well at least for me it was. So it's like something that continues the evolving learning process. From college to now I am a completely different person like if you go back to I started college in 2010 like me now compared to then. All those things that I just mentioned were deeply ingrained in my thinking. Like slut shaming and like sexual like freedom and like all these things like all those things were part of who I was and what I was taught and what I was thinking at the time. After college it just like went out the window—so, one by one, but slowly.

Cynthia Gonzalez: No soy ni de aquí ni de allá is a phrase that is very meaningful to many. In Amanda's case, as a first generation American, she feels she belongs to this country.

Amanda Pericles: I feel like my stance or like my experience with that phrase ni de aquí, ni de allá is a little bit different, especially since I feel like I am more Americanized than most people and not tied to Dominican culture. But it still kind of does apply in the stereotypical sense, especially now that Afro-Latinidad is popular. Where, you know, you see women like me. Especially ones that have a little bit more pretty privilege, quote on quote, or like the hair—lighter skin or whatever. Not feeling accepted by—too Latina for the Blacks, and too Black for the Latinas—so it's like in that sense. That is kind of what I felt or what I felt growing up. So in terms of ni de aquí, ni de allá as a Dominican-American born here, I probably would feel, too, de aca. If I went to D.R., even among my friends that I grew up with, like their parents either don't speak that much English, or like you know they speak majority Spanish at home. More like they grew up even though we were a very strict conservative like upbringing like, now they still listen to all the music. Or like they talk slang and like I'm like I don't even know what that means. Like if you ask me what that was I wouldn't even know so like yeah I feel like there definitely is something where I feel like I am a little bit more American than others. I feel it sometimes I'm like I wish I were in tune with it you know. So, yeah I definitely do feel it sometimes.

Cynthia Gonzalez: Many people have privilege and are not aware of it but Amanda is. But her privilege was not her inspiration to start advocating for Afro-Latinidad and finding a community to learn from and to share experiences with.

Amanda Pericles: So again there I go not knowing and not understanding the privileges that I have. So it was something that had to come to learn and like actively think about like, "oh, am I taking up space for people who have been doing this work for like years," right, who don't get put on a pedestal—who aren't called for the interviews or who aren't put on the podcast or put on the magazines, you know? So it wasn't something that I thought about. It was more of a like a personal thing for me, that I wanted to kind of just discover and explore just like publicly, you know? That kind of turned into like me learning from these people that I just talked about who have been doing the work, right? And then because you know I might be more palatable or things like that, then I get called or I get chosen for certain things and then even then it still took me years to realize... I had that privilege. That sometimes I had to take a step back, you know? So it definitely wasn't something that I even consciously was thinking about. Like o.m.g. I have this privilege let me use it for good. I was just like being selfish and was like, "hey, I want to think about these things publicly for myself." And then it kind of turned into an avenue to just share with others. And like educate others as well. So now definitely I do take that into account. Like I do have privilege, like,



Cynthia Gonzalez: Amanda is a hard working mother to a little girl. Her daughter is also part of Afro-Latinas. She explains how she is going to raise her daughter the best way that she can and instill teachings that were not offered to her and teach her about her roots and privileges.

“I HAVE A PLATFORM SO I TRY TO DISSEMINATE AS MUCH INFORMATION AS POSSIBLE AND BE AS MUCH OF AN ADVOCATE FOR PEOPLE AS I CAN.”

Amanda Pericles: I was raised in New England. I didn't really go out much you know I was raised by parents who valued respectability politics. And my partner was also raised in the same denomination church but in the South. But also caribbean parents who deeply valued respectability politics and speaking proper and going to school, because that makes you better than other people or that puts you in a better position. So it is gonna be like a fine balance of like giving her all the opportunities to get forward in life while teaching her that you know it doesn't make you better than another person. And also understanding the privileges she has right. So like you have this privilege of like potentially going to school or like going to a private school for college of for even high school maybe. Or you have two parents at home or we have this income or you know even know, I don't know what she is going to look like when she grows up. But she is you know she's a pretty baby she didn't come out with my hair. She has straight hair right now that is like starting to curl so I'm like I don't even know what you're gonna look like. You know so I think that it is going to be hard. I feel like every parent probably is like what do I even do. Kind of like what I am thinking all the time like how do I do these things. And I think that we just start with responsive parenting and like careful and gentle parenting so like starting with her emotional needs first and knowing that she can always come to me for her emotional needs. And then you know just telling her how the world works in whatever way you tell children you know. So that is like a really hard question to answer but definitely I think about it all the time. And even

now we are moving you know to down south and you know are we gonna be there the whole time. Is she going to go to school there. I just read an article literally about in that same state a boy got put go like arrested or whatever for picking a flower from somebody's yard. And I was like omg you know thinking about those things. Where you are is definitely hard to kind of navigate but yeah. It is a really hard question to answer.

Cynthia Gonzalez: Amanda reflects about her experience and how everything boils down to one thing...

Amanda Pericles: I would always just say to live everyday just trying to be a better person. And like doing introspective work. Whether you're a non-Black Mexican, whether you're a Black Mexican. Whether you're a Black person that is not Hispanic you know it is always about just like living each day trying to be a better person for me. And doing that introspective and thinking about why you think certain things. Where you learn them from and whether they're harmful to other people. And how you can just be a better advocate for others. And like a better place that is welcoming to others. You know as a person you know so yeah read books, google is free. Do your research and listen to people. Yeah just try to be a better person everyday. That is my main advice.



Music Helped Me Discover My Authentic Self



Amaya Taylor: I grew up in Lawndale, California. And I feel like growing up in Lawndale, I was around many Latinos and, growing up, I spent a lot of time with my Latino side of the family. I identify as a Latina woman and for my race, I identify as a Black woman. There was also Asian-Americans. It wasn't until high school where I was around African-Americans. It did get more diverse as I entered high school. So, I was around Pacific Islanders as well—a community with a lot of minorities.

Yasmine Cárdenas: Amaya's experience growing up in Lawndale was starkly different because her mother is Latina and her father is African-American from California. Growing up, Amaya did feel like her experiences were different due to her parents' races.

Amaya Taylor: My mom is from Nicaragua. I believe she was born in Bluefields and then my dad is from Los Angeles, California. And he went to school in Gardena. And then my mom came to California when she was about five years old and she grew up in Southeast L.A. I definitely did feel like my parents had a different relationship than my peers because of their race. But I just feel like my experiences were different. Because sometimes I couldn't relate to what my peers would go through in their households. I'll be like, "oh, mine's a little different, you know, I can't relate to that."

Yasmine Cárdenas: As a child Amaya had found friends that she was able to connect with due to their shared cultural background. She explains that her friend groups have remained the same in regards to the ethnicity of her peers.

Amaya Taylor: I feel like I gravitated more strongly with the Latinos. And now I would say my peer group has been consistent, I stick and have more Latino friends. And I do feel like it's based off of experiences as well, because I grew up around my Latina side of the family. I'm able to relate to them a little more as far as like, you know, language and culture, foods, family traditions.

Yasmine Cárdenas: Despite finding friends she felt like she could relate to, Amaya did feel "rejection" from both sides of her peer groups. Amaya also experienced several microaggressions—a term used to describe brief and commonplace daily interactions, where people intentionally or unintentionally communicate negative attitudes toward marginalized groups.

Amaya Taylor: I definitely did feel rejected by both sides. By my Black peers—I feel like they weren't accepting of me because they would feel like, "oh, you're Whitewashed," or, "oh, you know, you talk like a Mexican." And it was just very like, "oh, I'm not trying to, you know, this is who I am

“PEOPLE WOULD ASSUME MY PERSONALITY BASED OFF OF HOW I LOOK AND I WOULD JUST PROVE THEM WRONG.”

and what I'm used to." And then from my Latino peers I feel like they also rejected me at times because they were like, "oh, you know, you're very dark—you're too dark." "My parents don't like Black people. They say bad things about Black people." And I just would kind of not know how to react. In the back of my mind, I was like, "well, I'm Black, too, so you're kind of referring to me as well." And sometimes they'll tell me things like, "oh, you're the exception." And it's like, "oh, I'm pretty sure there's other, you know, Black folks out there who are similar to me. I'm not the only exception." But I feel like because of my racial identity, coming from two ethnic backgrounds, it did cause confusion among both groups and even within myself. So I did feel rejection growing up from both sides and also from other races too, growing up. Now, I feel like it's just accepting my own self and the people who accept me are going to gravitate towards me. And that's what really matters. People would assume my personality based off of how I look and I would just prove them wrong, you know, because I feel like it's not always fair to judge someone based off how they look because you don't know their background.

Yasmine Cárdenas: The rejection that Amaya felt from both sides left her, feeling confused within herself. She compared her appearance to her Latina friends, but eventually came to a very important realization.

Amaya Taylor: I would feel that I wasn't as pretty as them because I wasn't, I wasn't as light as them, you know? I would feel like the outcast because most of my friend groups were Latinas so I would feel like, "oh, they are prettier than me. I'm the ugliest one here, because I'm the darkest one here." But I feel like after a while, it's like, you just come to realize that race isn't, isn't something that defines you as a person.

Yasmine Cárdenas: Music played a vital role in Amaya's life. In her house, she was exposed to different genres of music through her mother, father and her mother's side of the family.

Amaya Taylor: Growing up music was huge. I listened to different genres from different places. So my dad was very into hip-hop and old school rap. So I was very into Snoop Dogg, Tupac, Too Short, Eazy-E—you know, a lot of these old school rappers—Ice Cube. And my mom, she would listen to rock en español. I listened to bands like Maná, um, Los Enanitos Verdes, Hombres G, and they would also listen sometimes to the radio. But they would put on like 98.7 and that was like alternative music. It'd be like, Green Day, Linkin Park, you know, a lot of alternative music. I still listen to all of those genres today. Then when I would spend time with, my cousins and my tías from my mom's side of the family, they listened to like reggaeton music, like Ivy Queen, Daddy Yankee, a lot of Bachata—Romeo Santos. So growing up, it was very diverse. And then I also had my own style Yasmine Cárdenas: I feel like everybody's parents went through that alternative phase like my parents, they bought me a boombox one year for Christmas and I got like a Green Day CD and then my parents used to blast No Doubt.

Yasmine Cárdenas: Though she did grow up closer to her Latino side, she did see her father's side of the family, albeit not as often.

Amaya Taylor: My brother doesn't speak Spanish; I'm the one who speaks Spanish. And I feel like a lot of it is due to me being raised with my cousins and my Nana because my Nana didn't speak English very well. She would speak to my cousins and all of us in Spanish. So I was hearing Spanish more. My dad's side of the family, the family we do have contact with it was very small. So my dad's two sisters. And then my dad's dad, which is my grandpa. And then my dad's mom, I was very close to her, my grandma, but she passed away when I was younger. So it was just my two aunts and they're about seven to 12 years older than me. So I would keep in contact with them, but, growing up with my mom's side of the family, I have family that are closer to my age and it's more of us. So it was kind of like, I would spend time with them, but my dad's side of the family, I wouldn't see them very much just because he has little contact with them.

Yasmine Cárdenas: She explains that she noticed how different her hair was from those around her and how that played a role in her identity.

Amaya Taylor: Growing up, because my mom is Latina, she doesn't have my texture of hair, so she was kind of lost, trying to do my hair, and sometimes she'd get frustrated cause she wouldn't know how to do it. Sometimes she just put hair stuff and put my hair in a bun. And I just always felt so insecure because I wanted my hair to be down and long. Like, my peers and it was

just always up. And I was like, I don't want it up. You know? So sometimes I would take it down and I'd come back home. And she's like, "what happened to your hair?" But, yeah, it's definitely a learning experience. I've gone through so many different hair products to this day, trying to figure out what works best for my hair. I even remember one time when I was in fourth grade, I wore my hair down for one of my first times ever. And I had this little bow in it and I kept touching it cause I was just very self conscious about my hair. So I kept touching it, touching it, and my teacher, she said, "Ms. Amaya, I need you to stop touching your hair." I was just like, "okay." But yeah, my hair has always been something that I've been conscious about just because it was different from people growing up. I feel like my hair was just always poofy and everyone's hair was just long and straight and down to there, you know, butt.

Yeah. I've had people in my life tell me like, "oh, you know, you should straighten your hair." But it's never rubbed me the wrong way. But I do feel like they've been curious to see different styles on my hair because my hair is just very curly and I just leave it as is. I feel like they'd been curious to see like, "oh, how would you look with a different hairstyle?" Because I don't straighten my hair often and I know other African-American girls, they have different styles of hair, like they have braids and they have different hair colors. And that is something that I want to try and that I want to experiment with.

Yasmine Cárdenas: Negative experiences that she encountered only added to the internal struggle she had with her hair.

Amaya Taylor: I've had people ask me if they could touch my hair and it's never rubbed me the wrong way. I'm just like, "oh, they're curious." But there has been one experience that was kind of a bad experience. I was in ninth grade and I remember I was walking and I had my headphones in, walking to my next class. And a girl came up from behind me and she yanked on my hair. She pulled it and I took out my headphones and I looked at her and she looked at me and she's like, "oh, I just wanted to see if it was real." And I literally, I just kept walking. I don't even know if I said anything. I was just kind of shocked that she even did that. I don't know why some people, you know, do things like that, like overstepping boundaries. I just felt like it wasn't her position to touch my hair. She wasn't someone who I was close to or someone who I knew personally.

Yasmine Cárdenas: In high school, Amaya had the opportunity to reconnect with a part of herself through being surrounded by a diverse group of peers and playing sports.

“A GIRL CAME UP FROM BEHIND ME AND SHE YANKED ON MY HAIR. SHE PULLED IT AND I TOOK OUT MY HEADPHONES AND I LOOKED AT HER AND SHE LOOKED AT ME AND SHE'S LIKE: ‘OH, I JUST WANTED TO SEE IF IT WAS REAL.’”

Amaya Taylor: I did kind of shy away from my African American side. I kind of in a way, there was a point in time where I wanted to dismiss it. And I was just very upset with myself for how I looked. And I was very insecure for being an African-American woman and it was something that I had to build in me, being okay with how I look and my complexion, my hair texture. I kind of blocked the identity away from myself and it wasn't something that I started engaging with until high school, when I was surrounded by more Black peers. That's when I feel like I really started to embrace, "I am Black too." I was in volleyball when I was in high school and there were a few Black girls in volleyball as well. I started hanging out with them and it just kind of really made me get more in touch with that side of my identity, because I feel like I didn't really have a lot of Black friends growing up. So those were some Black friends that I had that were genuine connections and it felt nice. I just started engaging with more Black peers because they were in my classes. So I was able to get to know them more. And because I was around the more I was nice. And as you said, it felt like I was reconnecting.

Yasmine Cárdenas: Amaya proudly embraces both of her different cultures, but she recognizes that there is no such thing as being "enough."

Amaya Taylor: I'm from here and there, because I feel like I can be from two different places and it'll shape my identity and who I am, because I'm from both of those places. I feel like both of those places play a role in who I am. I feel like people are always going to expect more, you know, I feel like it's never enough. No matter what I do at the end of the day, it's not going to be enough to

satisfy both cultures. It's always going to kind of be like, "Oh, well, she could be more like this or more like that."

Yasmine Cárdenas: Most of us have suffered an identity crisis at some point in our lives. An identity crisis is defined as "a period of uncertainty and confusion in which a person's sense of identity becomes insecure." Amaya has experienced several identity crises, with one of them occurring very early on in her life.

Amaya Taylor: I feel like one of my first identity crises was in middle school. I was just kind of unsure of which identity to live off of, as far as how I looked and my religion and what I believe in. And I feel like it was just a time where I really had to let go of the idea of who I thought I was to find a new person, you know, not a new person, but create a new more authentic version of myself. And also when I was in college, I feel like I had another identity crisis because so many changes were happening and I just had to let go of, you know, what I thought I needed and who I thought I was to be reborn pretty much.

Yasmine Cárdenas: She explains how her view of religion has changed, especially after experiencing an identity crisis at an early point in her life.

Amaya Taylor: Growing up, I identified as Christian because mom and dad kind of identified as Christian not fully devoted, but we would go to church sometimes. I would go to church with my mom a few times. We weren't big on religion, but they would tell me to practice, to pray and thank God. So in middle school I felt very lost in my mind. I was going through an identity crisis. I started to question God and I started to question



my own religion and my faith because I felt as if I was going through really tough times. I started to think to myself, if I'm going through tough times, how can a quote, unquote, 'God' be so great. So I started, diving deep into like, what it meant to be religious and spiritual. For a while, I stepped away from religion. And to this day, I'm not a religious person, but I did get back in touch with what I feel is in my highest good.

Yasmine Cárdenas: Amaya mentioned that she experienced another identity crisis. Her experiences at CSUN would help navigate this time in her life.

Amaya Taylor: I didn't really go in with a strong identity of who I was. I feel like. I thought I knew who I was, but I didn't, because once I got to college, the idea of who I thought I was just started falling apart. And that's when I had my identity crisis and from the classes and experiences that I had at CSUN at the time of my identity crisis, I feel like that gave me a stronger foundation to bounce back from the identity crisis that I was having. I came out of the identity crisis with a stronger foundation of who I was and a reinvention of myself pretty much.

Yasmine Cárdenas: Although Amaya is studying child and adolescent development at CSUN, she has decided to pursue a career making music. It was a decision that she came to after seeing one of her favorite DJs perform at her third music festival.

Amaya Taylor: He gave a speech saying follow your dreams. And it doesn't matter who you are, what you do. If you want something, you can get it. And as he was giving that speech, I wasn't aware that I wanted to make music, but his words were just very encouraging and uplifting. So since that day I've just been getting the ball rolling of actually making music.

Yasmine Cárdenas: Amaya, whose stage name is Amayita, does not have a definitive genre to the music she creates. Music has always played a key role in her life. She explains what artists she admires and how they have inspired her.

Amaya Taylor: I do make electronic trap. I have a few artists who do inspire me and they inspire me from their music and also the way that they present their art. So Hippie Sabotage, those are two brothers and they produce music and I really am inspired by them because they've come a long way and their music is very intimate. It comes from a very sincere place. You can hear it in their lyrics, their words, also Lil Peep. I love Lil Peep, because I feel like he did something very different that not many artists have done and he mixed two different genres of music and mashed them

together, which was alternative rock with trap hip hop music. So he infused those two beats, two genres of music and created his own style of music. And I feel like that's genius. And also I really, really, really love 2Pac, I feel like he's very inspirational just with his words and the way he carried himself. He is a very determined rapper and his raps were about his experiences. He was speaking from what he knew and what he saw around him. And I feel like that's very powerful, that's what art is about or is about how you feel and what you see. of music that was different from all of those. Yasmine Cárdenas: Amaya explains that she has much bigger plans for music career. She wants to find a way to help those around her and give back.

Amaya Taylor: So as a long-term goal, what I really truly want to accomplish is I want to obviously perform my art around the world and DJ around the world. But I do want to use some of the money that I get to travel to different schools in low income areas and fund their schools, fund the classrooms and the school districts. Just to see how is it that these students are learning? What is it that they need in the classrooms? How can we make their learning more efficient? Especially in other countries, not just America. But other countries as well, I just want to check out their schools and work with the students as well and ask the students directly, not just faculty and the adults, but ask the students, what do you want to see in your school? And just help them. But I feel like I could do that on a large scale with the money I bring in from my music.

Yasmine Cárdenas: Music has become an outlet for Amaya to express herself. She hopes that she can be an inspiration to those who listen to her music because at the end of the day, that's what pushes her to keep doing what she loves.

Amaya Taylor: I do feel like I'm being my most authentic self through my music and that's what empowers me to continue to put out music and continue to work on my art. I feel like a lot of what I feel and what I write about are experiences that many people can relate to and can share. And I know sometimes people feel as if they're alone in their journey and in a way we kind of are. But I do feel like we have people there that do go through similar situations, but they're not always going to speak up on it. So I feel like in my music, I really dive deep into those experiences and those thoughts and those feelings. And that's what gets me excited to share with the world, because I know if a million people listened to it, And, you know, they don't really like it there at least will be one. Who's like, you know what I do like that. So I'm writing for that one person, you know? That's like gets me going and keeps me going.

Yasmine Cárdenas: For those who are struggling with their own identity, Amaya offers kind words of encouragement.

Amaya Taylor: I would say that it's okay to struggle. Most of us, if anything, all of us struggle. And I feel like learning about yourself is a lifelong journey. It's not something that is done overnight or something that has a destination, but it's something that you practice every day and you learn more about yourself every day just by living and. Take it easy because I feel like oftentimes we're very hard on ourselves and the pressure from society causes us to be even more harder on ourselves. So I feel like just take your time with living life and wherever you're meant to be, you will get there.



What Is A Latina Supposed To Look Like?



Keisha Monique Sánchez: Yo nació en Bogotá, Colombia, estuve viviendo ahí hasta los cuatro años. A los cuatro años me mudé a Argentina y viví allá por dos años y medio, casi tres. Después volvimos a Bogotá y viví allí un año, más o menos. Después de ahí nos mudamos a lo que se llama Apartado Antioquia, Colombia. Ahí viví un año y después nos volvimos a mudar a Bogotá y ahí viví hasta los quince años, y a los quince nos mudamos a Nueva York. Así que me he movido bastante.

Jhonatan Navarrete: Mudarse a Nueva York a tan temprana edad no le fue difícil a Keisha en cuanto al inglés.

Keisha Monique Sánchez: Movernos a otro país como a Estados Unidos, pues el idioma es diferente. Yo he hablado inglés desde chiquita porque mi abuela es de Upstate, New York—pues mi mamá y mi abuela siempre nos hablaron a mis hermanas y a mí en inglés. Entonces, creo que eso no fue tan fuerte como otra gente porque yo sé que mudarse y no saber inglés es bastante difícil. Entonces, pues yo sabía, obviamente como comunicarme pero igual fue muy difícil porque obviamente el slang, la jerga en New York es muy muy diferente. Jhonatan Navarrete: Sin embargo, Monique tuvo un choque de cultura a la hora que llegó a Nueva York.

Keisha Monique Sánchez: Sí y la cultura creo

que, por ejemplo, hay como bastante mixed en Nueva York por toda la immigration, mucha gente pues llega a New York—everyone who is Caribbean, then you have African-American, Caribbean culture, some Latinx people, mostly Mexican, Hondurans, Salvadoreans, Guatemalans, basically Central America. So, there is not a lot of Latin American—but there is, but not as much, I think—all my friends are from Central America, the ones that are Latinx. So, for me it's like, this is cool because I can experience different cultures.

Jhonatan Navarrete: Actualmente la música juega un papel importante en la vida de muchos jóvenes y Keisha no es la excepción. Ella nos cuenta cómo a su corta edad sus padres influyeron sus gustos musicales, teniendo dos puntos completamente opuestos, el sabor latino y R&B.

Keisha Monique Sánchez: Pues creo que todo el mundo en Latinoamérica escuchamos salsa, merengue, bachata, cumbia. Mi papá siempre nos ponía salsa, en las mañanas salsa, en las tardes salsa, en las noches salsa. Él nos enseñó a bailar a mí y a mis hermanas. Siempre ha sido parte de mí. Es como guao, encontré este género, es como que siempre fue inculcado en mí y en mis hermanas. Yo también crecí escuchando mucho R&B, Blues, like Etta James, Ella Fitzgerald, Alicia Keys, but then I have that other part which is Celia Cruz and Marc Anthony. You know what I

mean? It's a cool mesh of cultures. I enjoyed that growing up. Pues ahora que hago música, pues ahorita estoy haciendo mucho más Latin Pop, I don't know if it would be considered Latin Pop because now everything is so weird. Pero ahora que si hago música y considerando mi training, pues porque mi training siempre ha sido de R&B y Blues, Soul, Jazz. Pero a la misma vez tengo eso que es de mi cultura, de mí que siempre ha estado ahí, pues la parte latina. Entonces, hago como una conexión ahí pues ahorita estoy haciendo música. También tengo una banda con mis hermanas. Mi música individual es más latina, con mis hermanas hacemos una mezcla de latino, un poquito de afro beats and a lot of R&B. Mi hermana Nicole, ella hace mucho—hace mucho R&B.

Jhonatan Navarrete: Así como Keisha nos cuenta su relación con la música y como la ha influido en su vida. También nos cuenta algo que la caracteriza mucho: su cabello.

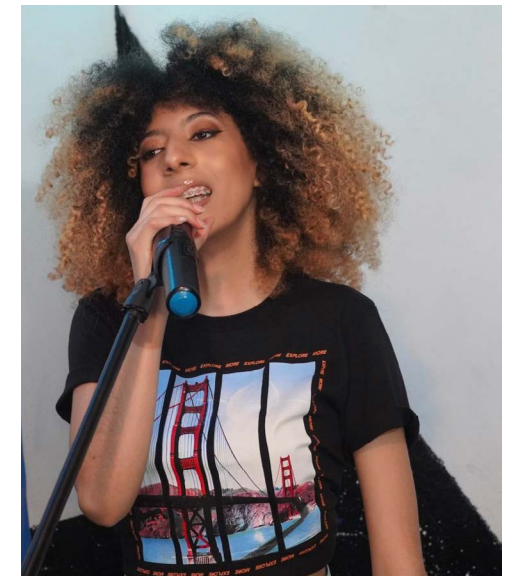
Keisha Monique Sánchez: Es una historia muy interesante. Creo que cuando uno es chiquito, no es muy consciente de las diferencias, pues del tono de piel y todas esas cosas—o sea están

“I ALWAYS HAD IT IN A BUN BECAUSE I WAS EMBARRASSED THAT MY HAIR WOULD GET PUFFY AND PEOPLE WOULD MAKE FUN OF ME.”

presente, pero uno no los ve como una barrera. Por ejemplo, mi papá es Afro Colombiano y mi mamá si es argentina. Pues ella es más... She is White, she is like White Latina and my dad is Afro-Latino. So, I think that difference, that huge difference inside of my own family, creo que eso fue como el shock para mí desde el principio. Oh ok, so my family is not like other families or my dad is not like every other person here.

Jhonatan Navarrete: Besides this, Keisha says she always wanted to straighten her hair but her mom would not let her. Keisha Monique Sánchez: When I was younger, I wanted to have my hair straighten, just like everyone else. I wanted to be like everyone else. I hated my curly hair and my mom and my dad never let me straighten my hair. They were like “tú no te vas a planchar el pelo porque uno te lo vas a dañar y segundo porque quieres aparecerte como todo el mundo.” And

I was like, “it's because everyone has their straighten hair at school.” Pero si, nunca me lo dejaron planchar. O sea, nunca me eché químicos pero lo único que me he hecho es como pintarme el pelo, pero eso fue como a los catorce me lo pinté. La verdad yo tenía el pelo hasta como la cintura, o sea yo tenía esta melena hasta la cintura pero nunca me lo dejaba... I never let my curls loose. I always had it in a bun because I was embarrassed that my hair would get puffy and people would make fun of me cuz you know, kids would be kids. And as I said in my post, once I cut my hair that was like... I didn't do it for a special culture reason. I was like, ok I am tired of my hair being so long, I'll just cut it. I cut it really, really short. It was the big chop or whatever, I think that is what they call it. It was hard because it was a shock for everyone at school. It was like, from Sunday to Monday, “oh Keisha has her hair cut, oh my god!” As I mentioned, I used dance ballet, so at the ballet school, you know you have to have your little bun or whatever and I just came with my hair super short and everyone was like “what the freak!” And I was like, yeah, I cut my hair. Then people did make fun of me because kids would be kids, I guess. I don't know if I would say everyone that made fun of me are racist or not, I don't know. But I know that there will always be microaggressions and if you don't hold people accountable, it will continue to happen. I didn't hold people accountable people because I didn't know my history, I didn't know my culture, I didn't know my roots so I did not know address that. I wish someone would have taught me. My dad always talked about certain things but he never really went into depth about these issues. He never told us, you guys might experience these microaggressions cuz he probably never meant that either. So, once I left school because



I did homeschool for one year, I did 9th grade, homeschool. Then I came to New York and I did 10th grade and I used to have my hair like in part, because I didn't if I could rock like a really afro like a big afro because I was still not really connected to my roots, I guess. But, then towards 11th-12th I started combing my hair in Afro. I don't if there was a connection like this day at this time, I decided you know... It was just kind of like ok, I'm going to wear my hair like this and see what happens. Of course you get stares and stuff but at this point I am just like, yeah I am cool, what about it?

Jhonatan Navarrete: Gracias a su cabello y la historia que Keisha ha vivido, más la educación que está recibiendo en la universidad, Keisha habla de cómo llegó a descubrir su identidad.

Keisha Monique Sánchez: Cuando llegué a New York, de hecho estoy estudiando una clase en la universidad sobre identidades latinas. No solo identidad latina para los latinos, sino cómo nos identifican en Estados Unidos a los que vienen de Latinoamérica o Centroamérica o the caribbeans cuz you know because we have Dominican Republic, Cuba you know. No digo que ha sido como difícil, pero apenas uno llega a Estados Unidos, te quieren label, from off the boat, like you step one foot in US soil and then they label you. Another part is when I say "I am Latina" just "Latina" they are like, well you don't look like a "Latina", so I am like, what does a Latina supposed to look like? You know... So that is why I like the term Afrolatina because it's like, oh Afro-American and Afro-Latin American. It's been a struggle trying to figure it out, but I think this class I am taking now, I am figuring it out.

Jhonatan Navarrete: La dificultad de aprender sobre sus raíces cuando era una niña han despertado el deseo de aprender más sobre ella y su identidad. A pesar de que el sistema educativo no la benefició en estos temas, Keisha busca la manera de estar informada y aprender más de su cultura y así ayudar a más personas que se identifican como ella.



“I KNOW THAT THERE WILL ALWAYS BE MICROAGGRESSIONS AND IF YOU DON'T HOLD PEOPLE ACCOUNTABLE, IT WILL CONTINUE TO HAPPEN.”

Keisha Monique Sánchez: Definitivamente, me hubiese gustado aprender sobre la cultura y la historia de una manera más genuine. Uno no puede cambiar el sistema educativo, pero me hubiera gustado a aprender más con Google, yo misma, researching, lo que estoy haciendo ahora. Pero me hubiera gustado hacerlo antes porque creo que hubiera podido afrontar ese tipo de microaggressions, ayudar a otra gente también. A pesar de que alguien más tuvo una experiencia similar a la mía, tal vez puedo ayudarles a navegar ese tipo de situaciones. Sí me hubiese gustado aprender mucho más hace cinco años, seis años. Pero nunca es tarde y ahora estoy aprendiendo y ahora lo que hago es tratar de mostrarle a la gente que sé que necesitan aprender.

Jhonatan Navarrete: Para finalizar, Keisha nos cuenta sus planes a futuro con respecto a la música y sus proyectos artísticos. A la hora de la entrevista, Keisha se encuentra en Bogotá, Colombia, donde ha decidido reunirse con productores para un nuevo lanzamiento musical. También nos cuenta que está a punto de lanzar dos EP, uno con sus hermanas y otro por ella misma.

Keisha Monique Sánchez: De hecho estoy en Colombia, voy a grabar con un productor que conocí que de hecho es de la misma región de donde es mi papá de acá en Colombia que se llama Choco, Colombia. Pues voy a grabar, estoy pensando en sacar un EP, un EP sola y uno con mi banda, entonces es como el proyecto de este año. En unos cinco años me gustaría estar en el escenario, o sea el escenario es como mi hogar. Yo me monto en el escenario y es como que, this is where I am supposed to be.



After Struggling, I Now Embrace My Heritage



Demetrius Dante Taylor Sánchez Jr.: This area is considered the East Valley. Growing up in the East Valley it is very racist. We grew up in a predominantly Mormon and Mexican area, so it was just a lot of people who were dreamers you know, they were undocumented. A lot of people who are within the church and we kind of were split in the middle. My family was Mexican Mormon which is kind of unheard of, not a lot of people have heard it. Yeah it was an interesting area to grow up in for sure.

Diana Romero: At a young age, Demetrius knew that being bi-racial was tough. He tells me some experiences he has had to deal with within his family and also the community.

Demetrius Dante Taylor Sánchez Jr.: I mean at a very young age, it was, even within our household, you know my mom marrying someone who was Black, it was very like “what?!... and I love my people, but they don’t love me. At least that’s what I’ve experienced. Growing up it was always, “you’re more Mexican than you’re Black,” you know? There was always something being said about our hair, our skin—little microaggressions. Or even just flat out still being racist and then just living your growing up in a predominantly White and Mexican area was very like just... it was known like, “hey you know you’re Black”—and people are going to let you know. But then they would hear us speak Spanish and then they were

like, “wait, so, then you’re Dominican? You’re Puerto Rican?”

“No, I’m Black and Mexican.”

“But you look Black.” It just was very... we kind of grew up with a complex because we knew we were Black but we weren’t really familiar with that side.

Diana Romero: Demetrius’s parents divorced, so he spent his early years with his mom’s side of the family. He goes on to explain that it wasn’t until his pre-teens that he started to hang around more with Black people who encouraged Demetrius to love both sides of himself.

Demetrius Dante Taylor Sánchez Jr.: My parents had divorced, so my Black side was in Vegas, and we grew up with our Mexican side. We grew up with a complex, we didn’t really know who we were not until we kind of got into middle school and we met more people who were Black and they were like, “no, your Black is beautiful,” you know, “yes—you’re Latino but like people will see you as this” and, like “just know it’s beautiful.”

Diana Romero: He often visited his dad in Las Vegas where even there he faced some challenges. He talks about how within the Black community, there are things that make him feel like he wasn’t Black enough.

Demetrius Dante Taylor Sánchez Jr.: Within the Black community there’s colorism, so there’s just racism... it’s just ridiculous. It was very “oh, you guys are light skinned,” you know? “You’re not really Black.” Or, you know, “you guys have good hair.” Or, you know, “you guys enunciate and you speak proper.” So, it was just very—“we weren’t Black enough.” So it’s really hard because we’d go to our Mexican side, and we’re like “oh,” you know, like “this is what we grew up with; this is what we love,” but it was always—we were reminded, “but you don’t look like us.” And then you go to the Black side and it’s like, “well, you don’t look completely, like us.” But yeah, so definitely like, even just growing up with, you know, my dad it was very just a lot of microaggressions from him, not so much my mom—my mom was very much very supportive. She made sure we knew about our history and our culture on both sides.

Diana Romero: Demetrius didn’t just try to assimilate to his own two cultures. Arizona neighbors the state of Utah, the headquarters of the Mormon religion. He tells me how he tried to be part of the Mormon church, before his mother took him and his siblings out.

“THERE WAS ALWAYS SOMETHING BEING SAID ABOUT OUR HAIR, OUR SKIN—LITTLE MICROAGGRESSIONS.”

Demetrius Dante Taylor Sánchez Jr.: I was like “oh, you know what let me, let me try to incorporate myself into that culture.” And I remember it was when my sister and I were—my older sister, we tried to incorporate ourselves into the Mormon culture. And my mom—we were about to get baptized. She was like “no”... And if she wouldn’t have pulled us out when she did—I remember, we were so distraught like what we’re seeing, like all of your friends that you grew up with in our family and our cousins be a part of that culture. And being like kind of not allowed to do that, we were just like “why?” Like “why?”—that’s so messed up, you know? But I’m so glad because they may—they 100 percent when we tried to was like “your Black.” “Mexicans”—like it was just things that they would say like, “oh don’t Mexicans all live together in one house.” And “oh, Black people in this—and that”... Even when we tried it was like you’re still not enough so like that was when it was like no like I should be proud of you know,

who I am and, like my unique situation so.

Diana Romero: He recalls that it was mostly his aunts and uncles who were trying to implement the Mormon faith onto him. But he’s grateful that his mom was able to take him out of it.

Demetrius Dante Taylor Sánchez Jr.: I mean I think it was just them just trying to force feed it onto us as a way of “right of passage” because we never really fit in. So that’s probably why we were like “okay we got to do this.” She just couldn’t deal with how close minded that religion is. And so, she was definitely the black sheep of the family, and just was like no like I want you guys, to be more than that, and to expand your minds so.

Diana Romero: Demetrius is a gay Afro-Latino. He talked about being a triple minority, and how him coming out during high school was most likely the reason why his family pushed Mormonism on him.

Demetrius Dante Taylor Sánchez Jr.: I came out when I was younger. So being gay, Black, Mexican—and I have struggles, with it. I feel like that’s something important and something that I always touch on. It’s just that both cultures are super machismo. And so it was always just like even within the gay community, it was like, “oh, you know you’re Black and Mexican?” Like, “no—we don’t want you.” Then you go to your culture and they’re like “no, but you’re gay.” So it was very like—messed with my head, you know very like, “whoa.” So, I really had to really like I guess build a family—find my family by myself. Yes, I find my culture to be super beautiful and very just like uplifting—it has its faults, on both ends. Yeah that’s kind of been a big part of my life also. Because it was almost like I’m a triple minority, so yeah. And I think that’s one of the reasons why I felt like my family tried to push Mormonism down our throats because they could see it, but we didn’t know.

Diana Romero: Despite the visible hate that Demetrius received from his family over being one of the other race as well as being openly gay, he never stopped getting support from his mother.

Demetrius Dante Taylor Sánchez Jr.: She’s



always been super supportive, like what did you do to deserve this woman? She was like “oh, I could tell—when you were younger.” And I was like “what?” I like, she’s like “yeah.” She took a trip to New York when I... I was like 10, or maybe eight or something, I remember we’re little, and she took this picture of a billboard and it was like, “how to know your son is gay, how to support him.” And I remember, like, when I came out, the night I came out to her, she showed me that picture. She’s like, “I took that picture like 10 years ago.” And I looked at her... So, yeah it was like super sweet. I was like, “oh my God,” like a fucking mess, but yeah.

Diana Romero: Demetrius’s mom was more open-minded and it led him to be who he wanted to be.

Demetrius Dante Taylor Sánchez Jr: Yeah, she’s 100 percent I would say, like the support. How I’ve been able to get through all of this. Learning who I was, giving me the space to express—incorporating art. Art is such a big pillar within our—both within the Black community and the Mexican community, or should you say the Latin community. And just her really like just giving us that free range—forever grateful.

Diana Romero: Growing up in a predominantly White and Mexican neighborhood, Demetrius was someone who didn’t fit the physical characteristics of others. His hair was, and still is, something that others were not accustomed to seeing often. He tells me some of his experiences he’s had to deal with because of his hair.

Demetrius Dante Taylor Sánchez Jr: One hundred percent, when I was younger, growing up in Mesa, it would be in school... kids would just like put their hands on my hair during assemblies and i’m like “what the heck?” I’d like leave and there’d be stuffing my hair, and I’m just like “why can’t I just be me?” like, “why is it so offensive to you guys that are just existing?” I’d even be walking home from school in Mesa and it was pretty common but there was a lot of confederates that lived in the area, and a lot of Neo-Nazis and racists. I’d be walking home from school and I made sure to have my earphones in, but I would just be called the N-word, out of a window—multiple times. It sucks but it just kind of—It made me stronger, because I was just like “damn like me walking on the sidewalk just minding my business, like I’m not even doing anything this offends you?” To this day, even my grandfather like he’s from Linares, is from like deep in Mexico. And he, like, will always just say like very micro-aggressive stuff. My mom had to step in at one point like “that’s not okay, it’s really hurtful you saying that stuff to you know your grandson.” It was always “oh your hair’s so ugly you need to cut it. I like it when it’s shorter.”

Diana Romero: Despite all of the racist remarks he would get from his family and others in his environment, he always wanted to make sure that he kept his hair natural so that younger kids, who may feel the same way he does, would see him and feel less afraid to be themselves.

Demetrius Dante Taylor Sánchez Jr.: Because when I was younger I didn’t really have control of how I wanted my hair. And also because I didn’t see older people, or people that were like me, with my hair. I was like I want to be that person for that 10-year-old me that looks and sees that there’s somebody that is killing it in their job or their profession or whatever it may be, and they look like me.

Diana Romero: Although he wants to inspire young people to love and appreciate their natural hair, Demetrius talks about his negative experience with having his natural hair in his work setting.

Demetrius Dante Taylor Sánchez Jr.: It was actually pretty difficult working in the LA market job market. I was a recruiter in Beverly Hills, I worked in West Hollywood and pretty uppity areas. I got a promotion dangled in front of me, and it was like “well, you need to cut your hair, you know it’s just it’s the clients aren’t going to take you seriously.” and I like looked at her, and I was like “I just got a haircut,” and she was like “Oh well, it’s still not going to cut it,” Still till this day, like, I still hear things it’s very sensitive subject for me, but like that’s why rebel and it’s like you know I know it’s important for me to be out there and be seen and. No matter whatever names and fucking things people are going to call me I’m just like if that offends you’d me just being mean whatever.

Diana Romero: Demetrius lived in Los Angeles before the CoronaVirus Pandemic hit. He had to move back home to Arizona, where he says the environment is getting better for him.

“I’D BE WALKING HOME FROM SCHOOL AND I MADE SURE TO HAVE MY EARPHONES IN, BUT I WOULD JUST BE CALLED THE N-WORD, OUT OF A WINDOW— MULTIPLE TIMES.”

Demetrius Dante Taylor Sánchez Jr.: I’m noticing, it is getting a little bit more liberal. It’s weird and like certain areas I feel more comfortable seeing like “okay there’s Latinos, right I’m cool, Okay there’s Black people, okay I’m cool.”

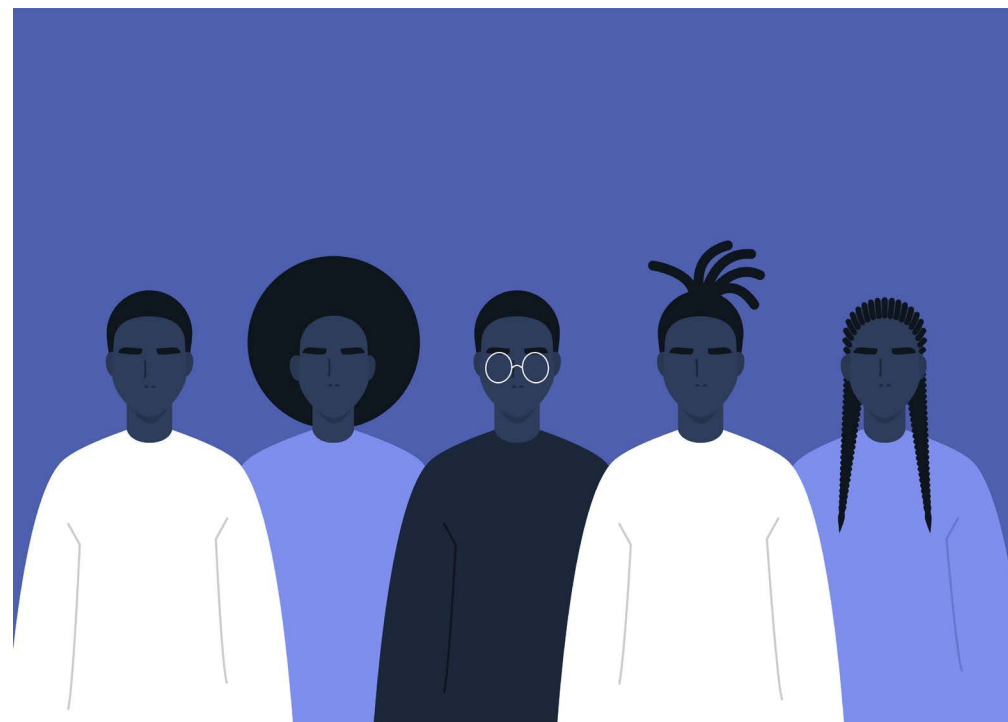
Diana Romero: There are still some places in Arizona where he notices he gets stared a lot because the demographics are predominantly White.

Demetrius Dante Taylor Sánchez Jr.: I hate Scottsdale. Scottsdale would be considered like Beverly Hills area West Hollywood, predominantly White people with money. Very flashy. When I went with my cousin she and I got a gift card from our boss. She loves that area, but she’s Mexican and Filipino so she just looks Latina. But I wore my hair out, and it was like people were like staring and pointing and like taking pictures and I was like “Okay I’m back in Arizona.” It can be overwhelm-

ing, but at the same time, like I do it, because then they get those people who are like “hey I just want to let you know, like, I really appreciate you wearing your hair out,” and like I have Black people, or Afro Latinos whatever they are, come up to me and they’ll like “yo like I wouldn’t have the balls to do that out here.” So it’s very liberating, like a double edged sword sometimes.

Diana Romero: Demetrius continues to have a positive outlook on everything he went through.

Demetrius Dante Taylor Sánchez Jr.: It honestly shaped us into the people who we are now and you know, growing up—being Black and Mexican—it just showed us that we just have just so much culture and so much, just, fucking richness within our background. And a lot of people like, “well, you have to choose”—no, I don’t, because this is who I am. The both of them are who I am. And this is what makes us, us.





Electricity cables hanging between houses, San Basilio de Palenque, 1976

I Didn't Fit In, But That Was Ok



Yannell Serrano: Kernersville is a predominantly White town. So, like you did have Hispanics and Latinos and you also had Black people but it was more predominantly White. So whenever I first moved here, you know just coming from Miami—Miami is more of a melting pot of everything. You see people from all ethnicities and nationalities and race coming here where everything was just—I don't even know how to describe it.

Kimberly Linares: In terms of inclusivity she found it difficult to find people that she could relate to.

Yannell Serrano: I did have a friend that I grew up with in Florida that also moved to the same town as I did so it was nice because we had each other for a good while. You know, it was just people didn't understand or—even with the Hispanic population here. We're from the Caribbean and they're from Central America so there were differences there that they didn't quite understand.

Kimberly Linares: She did not let any differences or remarks interfere or push her away from any of the things that interest her the most.

Yannell Serrano: I've never really fit in with like any type of group, I was always just kind of like there. I guess it's like I never really related to one group more over the other.

Kimberly Linares: Yannell's father was born

in Indiana but grew up in Puerto Rico and her mother was born in Massachusetts but is Dominican.

Kimberly Linares: Living in a town where people don't necessarily understand who she is resulted in acts of discrimination.

Yannell Serrano: My family and I would get stared at a lot at restaurants that we would go out to eat—shopping at Walmart for groceries. For instance, my father one time grocery shopping with my mom, actually, a lady—so like when you are leaving Walmart they ask you for your receipt. And the lady looked at my dad and was like recibo, recibo. Instead of just saying like, can I look at your receipt?

For me personally, there was an instance in high school where I would say it was more condescending—more like a microaggression. I was on the tennis team and one of the mothers would regularly come out. And it was around the time that everyone was getting their license and their cars and everything. Kernersville does have a lot of White people that come from money, or have money, and, you know, my parents and my family, we don't come from money. We don't have a lot of money—like, my parents work. We're a working family. And so the time was rolling around and I already knew, like I wasn't going to be able to get my car at the age of 16, 17—when everybody gets theirs. Because we have to be

on insurance and insurance is expensive—it's not cheap. I did not have a job at that time because my parents didn't want me working just yet, and they wanted me to focus on school. So I didn't have a way to help them out with that either. So I was just like it's whatever—I can wait a couple years, there is still the bus. This is not an issue for me but the mom kept asking me like, "oh, when are you going to get your car, when are you going to get your license." And I told her, "oh, you know I'm not ready for that yet. I'll probably get it in a couple of years." She looked at me and she was like, "why because your family can't afford it?"

“WHEN WE MOVED HERE THEY ACTUALLY WANTED TO PUT ME AND MY SISTERS IN ESL BECAUSE THEY JUST ASSUMED SINCE WE WERE LATINO THAT WE DIDN'T SPEAK ENGLISH.”

Kimberly Linares: The Growth and Development trends provided by the City of Greensboro show that North Carolina contains the sixth largest African-American population and the eleventh largest Hispanic population in the U.S. Despite the growing population of both African-Americans and Latinos, full representation of Afro-Latinos is almost nonexistent in North Carolina. After experiencing discrimination Yannell confided in her mother, as she could not process the hateful comments of a White woman.

Yannell Serrano: My mom has always told me to like stand my ground, she's like if anything like this ever happens again, "you stand up for yourself and you tell her what's up." So in that type of sense like my family has been very open about things like that, that happen. What you should do; what you should say. As—regarding to how I felt about the situation and how that's impacted me, I can say that I am very lucky that I have a family that is very communicative and very open minded and we talk about our feelings and we talk about these things. It is not something that gets swept under the rug.

Kimberly Linares: Yannell has a total of 4 sisters,

two of which are twins who have also experienced racial discrimination.

Yannell Serrano: They were in middle school. I want to say seventh grade, so they were like 12, maybe 13 years old. And with them—so they are lighter skinned, but you know they have curvy bodies, they have curly hair. So when they came over here people were like "what are you? What are you? You're mixed." "No—we're Dominican." But people here don't really know ethnicities and stuff like that. I feel like people here aren't really educated on that... One story that comes to mind was in middle school, was that I want to say they had some issues with some, a group of girls. There was just one specific girl, that I believe that she was Black and basically like they're twins. There weren't really any twins here. I don't really remember the situation too much but from what I remember pretty much the girl was just kind of like bullying them, going after them. A remark that she made was because "you guys are new and you think that you are exotic you think that you are better than me."

Kimberly Linares: Yannell's mixed identity is made present in the dishes cooked at home. She remembers with ease what foods marked her childhood years.

Yannell Serrano: We would mainly eat rice, beans and some type of meat and with that a—like a morro, which is rice and beans mixed together. Plantains was in our diet a lot, like we would make mangu or platanos maduros. Avocados—not the avocados like the small ones, they are really big. I forget what type of avocado they are but it's one known to be found in the Caribbean. Mangu was definitely a big one. Rabo, which is oxtail, that was stuff that we would eat, too. Dessert-wise we would have a little bit of everything. My sister is a baker so she would experiment with stuff like flan, tres leches. Oh my god, there is a drink I'm not a big fan of it but my family loves it, it's called morisonando and it kind of reminds me—I don't know if you've ever had like the orange creamsicle popsicle, that's kind of what it reminds me of because it's orange juice and heavy whipping cream. Don't count me on that because I've never made it before but my family does make it.

Kimberly Linares: Music isn't set to one genre in the Serrano family as they listen to pretty much everything. Reggaeton, bachata, salsa and dembow make part of Latin America's lively music environment.

Yannell Serrano: We would listen to like old bachatas, old merengues, salsa music, reggaeton. I would say that mainly fills our household and continues to fill our household. Very rarely—

we'll have days where we are like "oh, yeah old eighties music" or something like American music.

Kimberly Linares: English is her first language, and is considered bilingual as she grew up speaking both Spanish and English.

Yannell Serrano: Mainly, honestly we would speak Spanglish, if you listen to any of the conversations we're having it's like we start with one and we end with the other. But no, I did not learn English at school. I took Spanish classes because a foreign language was a requirement but when we moved here they actually wanted to put me and my sisters in ESL because they just assumed since we were Latino that we didn't know how to speak English. But, we speak English very well so my mom was able to get us out of.

Kimberly Linares: Yannell has had the chance to connect with her family here in the states. When she lived in Florida her father's side of the family lived there as well so she had the blessing of growing up with her cousins. Her mother's side of the family still resides in Massachusetts.

Yannell Serrano: Since we are in North Carolina, we're literally right smack in the middle of both places. So we would take trips to go visit my mom's family or my dad's, but my dad's family started to move to North Carolina. So we have them here closer which is nice, so now we get to visit my mom's side of the family more frequently.

Kimberly Linares: She has not had the opportunity to visit Puerto Rico or the Dominican Republic.

Yannell Serrano: I have not but I am dying to go. I actually think that we are planning on going to the Dominican Republic in a couple of years because my mom wants us to experience that. She still has some family over there so we're hoping that we will be able to go and visit and eat really good food. As for Puerto Rico, I do know that we also want to plan a visit there sometime in the future.

Kimberly Linares: Hair and its meaning in the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico is of importance as it is a big part of their culture and identity.

Yannell Serrano: My hair has changed a lot. When I was very little my hair was more wavy kind of straight but it was more on the wavier side. It was until that I went through puberty that my hair got really curly and then my sisters and my mom would do relaxing treatments for their hair. So their curls were a little more softer and looser, to make their hair more manageable. I never used

that type of treatment in my hair but through my teenage years, pre-teen years like middle school, end of elementary school, going into middle school and into high school I straightened my hair like every week. So for me having curly hair at that age to me, wasn't beautiful because it wasn't like what the beauty standard is here, Like what's normalized. So I would straighten my hair constantly and my hair became heat damaged. But it wasn't until I want to say three years ago that I realized, like you know what my curls are beautiful. I need to embrace my hair. It's a part of who I am.

Yannell Serrano: I have gone into a journey of trying not to heat damage my hair. I don't straighten it as much. I try to limit actually trying to straighten my hair to three times a year. I do little hair treatments like coconut oil or like avocado mixed with an egg and banana to make sure that my hair is healthy and now I love my curls. I wouldn't give it up for the world. I love them, there definitely a big part of who I am and my identity as being an Afro Latina because that is something that we can not deny. Eventhough, the straight hair is the Beauty standard, but that's European stuff we are not European. So I have to embrace who I am and what that comes with.

Kimberly Linares: Both Puerto Rican and Dominican cultures are quite similar.

"I REALIZED, LIKE, YOU KNOW WHAT? MY CURLS ARE BEAUTIFUL. I NEED TO EMBRACE MY HAIR. IT'S A PART OF WHO I AM."

Yannell Serrano: I identify more Dominican than I would Puerto Rican because I grew up with more of my mom's sentiments and stuff like that. My dad wasn't really like aah Puerto Rican this Puerto Rican that. My mom was more like pushing her side. But, yeah I definitely identify more as Dominican but the cultures are similar already, minor differences, slight differences.

Kimberly Linares: The true meaning of her identity became important to her as questioning of it occurred more frequently.

Yannell Serrano: I think this whole notion of being Afro- Latina or identifying as Afro- Latino,

Afro-Latina is like new but you know it was more or so the sense just like trying to figure out. It really wasn't until that we moved to North Carolina when people would ask me. "Oh what's your race, like what are you?" That was more when you had to identify as like one or the other and I would say "I don't know," because for me it was you say your Dominican and Puerto Rican and in Florida people just "Oh okay, I'm Cuban, oh I'm Venezuelan but here with the majority being White it was like you're either Black or White. So I think moving to a city like this really opened up my eyes to "What are you?" What race are you? What race do you identify with? I wouldn't necessarily say it was something that I struggled with. Outwardly, like with beauty standards and stuff like that in that sense. In that sense I would say yes, I've never like culturally wise. I never really let go of my culture, like I knew that's something that I can't get away from. It's who I am and it's me.

Kimberly Linares: "You're not Latino or Latina enough," is a term that is frequently used toward Latinos when they don't fit or don't fully embody its meaning. It isn't necessarily about speaking spanish, physically looking a certain way or dressing in a particular manner to earn acceptance by a group of people but rather looking far beyond that to understand the true identity of a Latino or Latina.

Yannell Serrano: People aren't really educated on race, and ethnicity and nationality. Like what the differences are. So even to some of my Black friends I've had to explain to them like "Yes, I am



Black. I am just not African American like I don't identify with that culture but I am Afro- Latina and I identify with my culture there. Because, maybe it is just where I am at but if you're Black your African American that's the way that it is perceived or like that is the type of relationship that it is. It is not your from outside of that. On the other side of that its with the Latino, Hispanic population here. It's more like well your not Hispanic enough o Latina enough. I don't know if it is in the sense that because the majority being from Central America that culturally we weren't similar, like similar enough maybe. Or maybe they thought I was too Americanized.

Kimberly Linares: Last year when the murder of George Floyd took place thousands of people from all over the world protested in retaliation to his death caused by officer Derrick Chauvin. This is where the unity and presence of Afro-Latinos was made present.

Yannell Serrano: Honestly, I am not sure how to speak up on it but, the Black Lives Matter just in general is shining light on the issues that Black's face and there are still issues that many have been facing many years. So I think that there is only so much that people can do, the changes need to happen from the inside, just the whole structure it needs to change because this country was built to benefit White Americans simple as that. All of the structures that we have in place now it still does that. The Black and Hispanic communities they are still facing disparities and lots of issues and I think that the protests and things like that they're still shining a light on social media and everything. It's easier to talk about these things, it's easier to educate yourself on these types of topics. So I think it is a great place to start.

Kimberly Linares: Yannell has not found herself struggling with having to conform with class, gender and or race because she was taught to be herself. She is currently a sophomore at North Carolina State University where she is majoring in Fashion and Textile Management with a concentration in Brand management and Marketing.

Yannell Serrano: So NC State is a PWI but what's great about it is that it is such a big school that you find your group of people. They have clubs for everything. They have resources, support centers for anything and everything. It's helped me just be more me I guess like be more comfortable with who I am and speaking out on things and it's led me to find a great group of friends that are very supportive. Even within the College of Textiles, it is a very diverse group of people. We have a lot of international students on that side and the professors there are also very

supportive and they want to see you succeed. So it's definitely helped boost my confidence and just be more comfortable in who I am.

Kimberly Linares: Just like our bodies and mind shift in every stage of life. Yannell's personal experiences have pushed her to evolve within the path of finding her identity.

Yannell Serrano: I am still exploring, people grow, you don't stay one version of yourself for too long and constantly just trying to find out like what are the things that I like, things that I enjoy to do, Who am I? The big question that we all try to figure out in life: Who am I? But yeah, I think being able to get away from a small town and go to college is a privilege to be able to do that and really connect with who I am and my inner self and trying to just constantly be the best version of myself and who I can be and finding out what does that mean.

Kimberly Linares: She doesn't necessarily remember how she identified as in her college application.

Yannell Serrano: I believe race, I put Black and White and then for ethnicity: Hispanic or Latino.

Kimberly Linares: Although she kind of feels represented with the terms Black, White, Hispanic and Latino she prefers there'd be another option that can fully embody who she really is.

Yannell Serrano: I think Mexico just put that

on their census because, I mean like the United States of America is just a diverse group of people. It's not one or the other, there are people who are mixed with many different things. So I think if there were more options, or if they could add more options. I definitely think that is one that should be added.

Kimberly Linares: Yannell thinks she is inspiring others to be their authentic selves by having conversations with peers and family members about important issues, support and be real with each other. She uses her social media platforms to elevate issues related to Afro-Latinidad.

Yannell Serrano: I am also a part of a non-profit organization that I intern for the Latinx LIFE. Where we also kind of do that. We talk about events, and politics and news, events that we are holding or events going on in the world. And we collaborate with other organizations to help bring awareness. We are mainly based here in North Carolina, that's who our target market is for that Hispanic and Latino population because people do need to be informed about what's going on.

Kimberly Linares: She does plan to have a family in the future, where she visualizes herself teaching her children about her culture through books, movies, food and family stories.

Yannell Serrano: Teaching them about my culture is just kind of immersing them in it—the food, being around my family, my mom's side of the family, my dad's side of the family.



Home interior, San Basilio de Palenque, 1976

Empowering Others To Embrace Their Natural Hair



Sherly Tavárez: I was born in the Dominican Republic, moved to Orlando Florida when I was three years old with my family. And I moved to New York eight years ago, so most of my growing up was in Orlando.

Graciela Colorado: Growing up Sherly was surrounded by others who shared the same culture and ethnic backgrounds.

Sherly Tavárez: I was really always around people like me, there were a lot of Puerto Ricans that lived in Orlando, a few Dominican here and there but I always found my little group, my best friends were all Dominican, Puerto Rican so we kind of just always grew up together. And not really feeling any different because my school had a lot of Latinos, too.

Graciela Colorado: Sherly grew up being very involved with her family and always felt like she was a part of the Latino community because of the culture and traditions her family would practice.

Sherly Tavárez: A lot of my friends were Latinos, as well, so we had the same rules that we had to follow and we ate the same food so everything was pretty much the same. Especially in the neighborhood—we all lived in the neighborhood, all of our parents knew each other so they were all friends. My mom, we grew up listening to the

music, eating the food, my tias would come over, they would dance. I definitely felt very connected to being Dominican. I felt like I didn't know a lot about the country but I did know a lot about the culture because my mom made sure that we knew.

Graciela Colorado: Growing up Sherly saw a lot of people with straight hair and didn't always feel comfortable wearing her natural hair.

Sherly Tavárez: My mom started relaxing my hair when I was six years old so I didn't even know what my natural hair looked like. We would go to the hair salon every single weekend—longer than I could remember. We would make it a whole day thing because we would be there from 9 to 5 every Saturday. I just kind of felt like a slave to my hair at some point.

After I moved to New York my best friend started letting her hair go natural and stopped relaxing, blow drying and she was like, "I'm just going to let my curls be." I was always very aware of my looks, and felt like it was important to look the part. Being in the fashion industry it was always important for me to fit in and so I finally just decided one day I was going to stop relaxing my hair but I would keep blow drying it. One day I just stopped everything and I started to see how my hair was growing in and I started taking care of

it, learning the products that it needed.

I started seeing the community was learning a lot about their own hair and teaching people—YouTube channels, a lot of influencers were going natural. And that's when I kind of got into the community and going to events and started meeting people from different hair brands and then two-and-half years ago, I felt like there was nothing that represented the Latinx community in the natural hair movement. And so I was going to a curly hair event and I wanted a T-shirt that represented and expressed myself. And I couldn't find one and that led me to starting House of Curls.

Graciela Colorado: Sherly searched for brands and clothing that would best represent her confidence in her natural curly hair, this motivated her to start her own clothing brand House of Curls. The company encourages women to wear their hair naturally while feeling empowered.

“IF I SAW MYSELF IN MORE MEDIA, OR REPRESENTED BETTER, THEN I WOULDN'T HAVE FELT SO BAD ABOUT ME NOT HAVING STICK-STRAIGHT HAIR.”

Sherly Tavárez: I've gotten a lot of messages from different girls telling me, “thank you for showing this brand, I honestly feel so comfortable seeing women that look like me, wearing their hair naturally and speaking about their struggles.” Some girls felt really shy to even just talk about their journey and their hair before this brand. I did a lot of events before COVID where we all got together, we did a lot of pop ups, and different events where we just got together and just talked and took pictures. It's just really good to be around many people that have been through struggles that you have been through because not everyone understands what it's like growing up with curly hair so it's a different type of community. And we didn't really have that type of community before and that's exactly what I wanted to bring with my brand.

Graciela Colorado: With House of Curls, Sherly

also hopes to bring the conversations of racism in between the Latino community and what the term Afro-Latina means.

Sherly Tavárez: Before Afro-Latinx was never spoken about, not with my family not with my friends, it was not even a thing until recently. No one ever spoke about that, no one ever spoke about where curly hair comes from, where your roots come from. My mom actually showed me a picture of my great grandma the other day and she was Black! That was something that we never spoke about, because in Dominican Republic the darker that you are the more racists they are towards you. I never really understood it, I just knew it was. I love that we are now opening up this conversation and speaking about it. Especially in the Latinx community, we talk about other racists but even within our community there is a lot of racism. In my country there is a lot of racism, if I go now with my curly hair they will still be like, “peinate,” “you didn't do your hair today.” So it's something that we are still struggling about but we are at least speaking about it and I love that my brand is opening up that conversation as well.

Sherly Tavárez: We have a T-shirt that I made early on and it says, “Afro-Latina, ¿y tú?” So, you know, it's a conversation starter. Like if you don't know what the word is, “what is that?” And people start talking about it. And if you do—it stands in solidarity with others.

Graciela Colorado: Sherly has been able to inspire others. The lack of representation from outlets inspired her to have conversations that are hard to happen.

Sherly Tavárez: Speaking with my friends who are influencers and content creators as well, a lot of us have curly hair, we're brown, it was something that came up. We started speaking about it, we started doing events about it, we started speaking panels about it and bringing light to it. So we were going to shed light on it because no one ever just speaks about it. I felt like there was a lot of media and TV that didn't represent Afro-Latinx people and that's what we wanted to do. We wanted to bring forward people who don't ever get seen, who have great talent and no one ever speaks about them.

On my page we try to do, “story takeovers” every week with someone different and let them tell their story, their curly hair journey, how they got there.

Graciela Colorado: With House of Curls, Sherly hopes to become an inspiration for the younger generation so that they feel comfortable wearing their own hair.

Sherly Tavárez: I focused on hair because it's such an important part of a women, I think that when our hair doesn't look good or when we're having a bad hair day, it kind of messes up our whole mood, especially for the Latino community no matter if you have curly hair or not, hair is a big deal. So, for girls with curly hair, I think I started it more so for the younger generation because I didn't have anything like this or anyone like this to look up to when I was growing up and I feel like if I did and if I saw myself in more media, or represented better, then I wouldn't have felt so bad about me not having stick-straight hair. So, one of our main goals is to get this brand to the younger audience and speak with them. I've done a lot of speaking engagements with middle schoolers, elementary, even colleges and I try to speak to them about my journey, my struggles and how it's okay to wear your natural hair now. And I think I've seen a lot more people wearing their natural hair now than I've ever before which is amazing and it's definitely what we want to accomplish with House of Curls.

Graciela Colorado: Though finding the importance of her natural hair wasn't until she was an adult, Sherly never felt resentment towards her mother for relaxing her hair at such a young age.

Sherly Tavárez: I play around her all the time now and I'm like, “you see I could've had this beautiful hair my whole life,” but because she actually gave me a boy buzz cut when I was six years old so I started first grade with a boy haircut because she could not deal with my hair. I get it because she grew up in a different era and so for her it was just a lot of work. She was a single mom, she didn't understand because she didn't have the resources that we have now. There weren't all these curly



“I'VE REACHED MY MOST AUTHENTIC SELF BECAUSE I DON'T WORRY AS MUCH ABOUT WHAT PEOPLE THINK OR SAY ABOUT ME LIKE I USED TO.”

hair products, there wasn't YouTube back then, there was nowhere for her to go and learn about it so I understand where she was coming from.

I actually convinced her to go natural two years ago, so she's also wearing her curly hair and letting her grays out, she's not dying her hair anymore so that makes me feel really proud that I inspired her to go natural. But I understand where she was coming from because it's a whole different era and she waited till she was 58 years old to go natural so I can imagine how long she had to wait to feel like her natural self and I'm just glad I did it when I did it.

Graciela Colorado: Aside from overcoming all the struggles and adversities Sherly has lived through about her identity, she pushes herself everything to be her authentic self all the time.

Sherly Tavárez: Obviously there's an everyday struggle with something but for the most part I definitely do feel like I've reached my most authentic self because I don't worry as much about what people think or say about me like I used to and I think that was part of the problem with not being or wearing my natural hair and not being my natural self was that I was always trying to be someone for someone else and not for myself. So now I feel like everyday that I dress up, do my hair or do my makeup it's for me. It's for me to feel good, for me to feel comfortable and I feel like that's what I try to put out everyday on my platform through my brand and anytime that I am speaking through an interview or to a younger audience. I am always trying to be myself and explain how important it is to be yourself and to feel like your natural self, which is one of the biggest things with natural hair is that, before you wore your hair naturally you were just trying to conform to society's beauty standards. And we are trying to change that little by little.

Proudly Black And Mexican



Shania Torquez: So, going back to my skin color, I am very light-skinned. So, when they tell me, ask me what I am, I just say European or Mexican because I do get questioned whether I am Black because I don't look like my siblings, which have a darker complexion than me.

Yesenia Delgado: Her parents had her twenty-four years ago in 1996, she is the youngest of four. Her mother is first generation Mexican-American; her grandfather came to this country with an agriculture visa and worked planting trees. Shania's father is African-American and White. All her life she has grown up with her mom's family in the area of East Los Angeles, which is mostly of Mexican descent.

Shania Torquez: My father—they're from here, they're from L.A. I don't really know much about my African side and his mom was Black and his dad was White, actually. So, you know, I just knew they were just from here. I don't really know much about where my family is from, but I did do the ancestry (test) and I know my ancestors came from Nigeria. So, that's all I really know.

Yesenia Delgado: Growing up Shania always felt different because she knew she did not reflect what an African-American or Mexican-American looked like. Because of her light skin she felt more connected to be White than Mexican or Black.

The reason for this was because many times she saw how her siblings were discriminated because of their skin color. She was not a "target" of those mean comments.

Shania Torquez: Possibly when I was six years old, I was with my brothers who have a darker complexion than me, they look Black and I was with them. And they basically—the adults were questioning us because I look like them, yes, but at the same time I don't because, you know, of my skin color. When I saw or hear their stories about how they were profiled as a Black child and very judged about how they look, you know, it shows how the world was. And at the point, I was happy I was light-skinned, that way, I wouldn't have to identify as that.

Yesenia Delgado: Because she is seen as a White person due to her skin color, she does not face the discrimination that an African-American usually faces in the United States because of their skin color. But when people find out she is in fact African-American they always question her skin color. Even though she is very grateful that she does not have to face those moments in her life time, she is still a target of discrimination by being Latinx. Some of the Latinx community strongly believe that someone who doesn't speak Spanish is not Latinx enough because, to them, they are denying their roots by not speaking the language.

Shania Torquez: I actually don't speak Spanish. So, when I would say I was Mexican and they would talk to me in Spanish and I would say, "I don't know Spanish," they would be like "well, you said you're Mexican but yet you're here not speaking Spanish." And I would have to say, "well, my grandfather came to this country to give his child, his children, and his future grandchildren a better chance. So, he decided not to teach us Spanish." And for my Black side, while I can't change the color of my skin but I do know what runs through my blood. And you know what—the Black culture—I can do to represent.

Yesenia Delgado: Since she was little, she never knew what she really was because of other's people's opinion. If she would say she was African-American people would not believe her because of her skin color. If she would say she was Mexican-American people would not believe her because she did not speak Spanish. People may think that this is not important because a Latinx could be anyone who identify as one, but some people think otherwise. In Shania's experience older Hispanic people are usually the people who made rude comments to her about not speaking Spanish.

Shania Torquez: Like I said, my grandfather he didn't want anybody to know Spanish. He only taught his wife—my grandmother—how to speak Spanish but my mom and her siblings neither of them known Spanish. So, we were all an English (language speaking) household. The only problem where I have problems speaking Spanish has been in the outside world or at my job. I had these older Hispanic women come to my boss and say I should be fired because I don't know Spanish. So that was really (a moment when I thought) like "oh, I have know Spanish." But, you know, I try to understand them—I just can't, you know, speak the language.

Yesenia Delgado: In view of the fact that both of her identities that are part of her does not approve of her because of her skin color and the language she does not speak. The only think that she knew was that she was White, and she only knew how to speak to English. The African-Americans and Mexican-Americans could never fully accept her because her appearance does not apply to what is "normal" to them.

Shania Torquez: I had a hard time identifying who I was as a child. So, I basically I told myself I was White for a long time because I felt like I wasn't accepted in either community, until I was able to voice my opinion about that.

Yesenia Delgado: If she would say she was White people would believe her because she

did look White. She always feels like she did not belong anywhere else even when her parents and grandparents told her she was Afro-Latinx. But she always wanted to connect somehow to both parts of her culture because she thought she was missing out a lot and feel left out. Which is something a lot of people can connect to her because they are not one hundred percent something there would always something that does not apply to been African-American or Mexican and it does feel like something is missing.

Shania Torquez: Oh yeah, definitely, you know, I just sometimes feel like the outsider because I can't connect with them when they're speaking Spanish. They have their jokes, or you know, if they say something about, you know, a tradition on an African-American family.

Yesenia Delgado: Filling out applications should be something very easy to do. Most of these applications usually ask about everyone's ethnicity. People usually only choose one but what can people do when they are more than one ethnicity? There are some people who put their ethnicity as "other." In other words, these people are not something that is normal to everyone else.

Shania Torquez: Personality-wise no, but when it does come to, when I'm writing down what ethnicity I am, I do have trouble because right now most of us are of mixed generation and so some people are just like, well what are you

"I HAD A HARD TIME IDENTIFYING WHO I WAS... I TOLD MYSELF I WAS WHITE FOR A LONG TIME BECAUSE I FELT LIKE I WASN'T ACCEPTED IN EITHER COMMUNITY."

mostly of? And that is a struggle. Well I feel like I am everything, but you tell me I can only choose one?—which is very difficult.

Yesenia Delgado: When people come out to her and question her identity, they usually offend her in some way by making mean comments to her, but Shania does not hold grudge against them because she knows that they could change their way of thinking by just explaining to them what

“I JUST SOMETIMES FEEL LIKE THE OUTSIDER BECAUSE I CAN’T CONNECT WITH THEM WHEN THEY’RE SPEAKING SPANISH.”

she is and that everyone is different in a very special way.

Shania Toriquez: I just say, you know, we all just come (in) different colors and sizes and, you know, my Black side just doesn’t come out. So I just look, you know, I am Mexican, or, you know, White, basically. And I just you know just let them say what they wanna say and just move on with that.

Yesenia Delgado: Even when she had to go through those awful moments, there were other instances when she did feel a connection to her roots and learn to accept who she was. It was a long process for her to do that and be proud of where her ancestors came from. Her grandmother, who was fully African-American, was worried about her because she knew her granddaughter would face many struggles due to her light skin. Her grandma knew people would question her about who she was because she looks different from everyone else even when she did look like her family member her skin color would always be an issue to other people who did not know her and where she came from.

Shania Toriquez: So, when I was twelve, I had a group of friends and their families were Mexican and they just spoke Spanish. So, they were able to help me, you know, build. I don’t speak it, but I could understand the language. And then my grandmother of my dad side she’s very dark skinned, you know, her children are dark skinned, as well. So, she had to pull me aside—also when I was ten years old, telling me (that) I am Black. And the color of my skin shouldn’t reflect on how I feel, you know. I’m just a color and this is how god wanted me to come out. And I just have to learn to embrace it. And there’s nothing to be ashamed about being Black or being a Mexican that doesn’t even know Spanish because I am not the only person (in that situation).

Yesenia Delgado: All her life she lived with her mother and did not spend a lot of time with her

dad. The only person she was connected the most was her dad’s mother, her grandmother. Shania loved her grandmother, and they were very close to each other. The day she passed away Shania was twelve years old, that was the last time she spoke to her family from her dad side. She never asked questions about her African roots and was never interested about where she came from. She only knew her grandmother was African-American; her dad and ants were both African-American and White. So, that was the border that she had.

Shania Toriquez: So, I really didn’t get a chance to connect to my Black side, as my older siblings had, because when I was born my mom stepped away from my dad and his mom. And just moved forward with her mom. So, that’s why I really don’t know, really anything about my Black side only, you know, paternal needs, where I came from, from my DNA test or basically that I know that, my dad is an African-American man.

Yesenia Delgado: African hair is very important because their hair is very different from everyone else. They need special treatment that takes care of their hair. Growing up with a Latinx family meant they could not teach her how to take care of her hair.

Shania Toriquez: Oh yeah, definitely, well like I said when I was younger, we would all go together. My mom would drop us off at my dad’s house. Then he would teach us his culture, you know, he would show us hair care. Because yes, I am light skinned, but I do have the African hair—where I have their texture. So he would come, he and his sister would let us know how to take care of our hair, our skull, you know, what to do like, you know. Our hair is not normal... let me rephrase that—our hair is different because we have so much, you know, different cultures, different blood in our veins that our hair needs more attention than a typical, you know, White person, typical Hispanic. Those are the only times I really felt connect to him.

Yesenia Delgado: It took a long time for her know who she was and learn to love it. But after years she knew it was time for her to accepted who she was and told herself she was not going to deny her roots and she say out loud who she was. It did not matter what other people think of her, she would say her true. Because she discovered that by denying where her family came from would take away all the struggles her family went through. She was able to clean her mind and say out loud that she is Mexican, that she is African-American, White, and Indian and she is an example of how this country is a pod of different culture combined together into one. That is what she wants to see in a near future.

Shania Toriquez: My future—I see, basically, more comfortableness, you know, being comfortable in our own skin and embracing who we are. And just being able to teach my children that yes, you’re gonna have Black in your blood. And I’m going to try my best to, you know, teach them that it’s okay to be different. And don’t let anybody put you down—no matter what they say, what they do because later in life you are going to—know, you know, who you are. Like I had to know that—I had to learn it. Now in my 20s, I’m proud to say that I am Black and I am Mexican. And a lot of people are scared to say that. And so in my future, I’m hoping that people won’t cringe or won’t scoff at anything that has to do with, you know, being Black.

Yesenia Delgado: At this moment Shania is eight months pregnant with a baby boy. She is very happy about becoming a mom for the first time and she does not want her baby to face the same things she did. She wants him to know what he is very special and beautiful, because people would always ask questions no matter what, but she would be there for him.

Shania Toriquez: The future—I want for him is to know that we don’t see color, we just see the person that someone is. His father is Mexican—both of his sides, both of his sides of his family is Mexican. So, you know, he’s gonna have the more characteristic but I’m not gonna let him show—I am not gonna let him see that only part. I want him to know my other half, too. And so just he knows that he comes from a beautiful, you know, culture and a beautiful background. He needs to, you know, embrace that like his uncles, like my brothers have and my sister and myself have as well.

Yesenia Delgado: She wanted to leave a message to everyone out there who is going through the same things she did.

Shania Toriquez: Yeah, don’t be afraid to say who you are, don’t be afraid to speak the true and if someone doesn’t like it that’s their opinion. And it is everyone’s individual thoughts and no matter what, what else everyone thinks, you know, just love who you are and just embrace and you would be happy. No matter what everyone else says.





Girl standing with bowl of fish on her head, San Basilio de Palenque, 1975

"To be Afro-Latine, in America, is to feel like you don't fit in anywhere. You're not black enough, you're not Puerto Rican enough. To be Afro-Latine is to be salsa and hip-hop, bachata and reggae, rice and beans and collard greens, *papito* and homeboy. Afro-Latine is important because we exist. It is what we are and our identities rest in reflecting on who we come from, especially in the United States, where we are never represented."

-- Victor (Puerto Rican/Guatemalan)

Recommended

Reading:

"Afro-Latin@s in Movement Critical Approaches to Blackness and Transnationalism in the Americas," 2016. Rivera-Rideau, Petra R.; Jones, Jennifer A.; Paschel, Tianna S.

"Between Black and Brown: Blaxican (Black-Mexican) Multiracial Identity in California," 2011. Romo, Rebecca.

"Crown," 2018. Carrizosa, Natasha.

"¡Manteca!: An Anthology of Afro-Latin@ Poets," 2017. Planas, Melissa Castillo.

"Out of the Shadows, Into the Dark: Ethnoracial Dissonance and Identity Formation among Afro-Latinxs," 2020. Hordge-Freeman, Elizabeth; Veras, Edlin

"Red and Yellow, Black and Brown," 2017. Rondilla, Joanne L.; Guevarra Jr., Rudy P.; Spickard, Paul R..

Watching:

"Jamaica and Tamarindo: Afro Tradition in the Heart of Mexico," 2019. Bailey, Ebony.

Listening:

"¡Así Es Palenque!," 2016. Kombilesa Mi.

About San Basilio de Palenque/Richard Cross

The curated selection of archival images showcased throughout this booklet are the work of photojournalist Richard Cross (1950-1983). The snapshots offer a rare glimpse of life within Colombia's San Basilio de Palenque community — widely regarded as the first free village in the Americas, founded by fugitive slaves.

Characterized by an anthropological approach, Cross accumulated thousands of photographs of the developing town between 1974 and 1978. The expansive collection depicts ceremonial gatherings, food preparation scenes, landscapes, portraits, sports activities and various other everyday rituals.

Perhaps most significantly, Cross' collection stands out as a testament to a population that thrived despite the colossal odds against them.

Want to explore the complete San Basilio de Palenque archive or the rest of Cross' extensive body of work? Visit the CSUN's Tom & Ethel Bradley Center digital database, here:



<https://digital-library.csun.edu/bradley-center-photographs/>

Glossary

Afro-Latinx - Gender-inclusive ethnic identifier referring to individuals of Latin American descent with African ancestry

Borderlands - A place where two cultures converge; existing in an in-between space

Crown - Term that celebrates the wearing of textured Black natural hair; the 2019 California CROWN Act bans discrimination based on hair texture or hairstyle choice

Ethnoracial dissonance - A feeling of not aligning or identifying with predetermined racial molds

Inclusion - The process of supplying individuals with matched access to resources and possibilities for advancement

Intersectionality - The notion that an individual's social identities (class, gender, race, etc.) and social experiences converge or overlap; the collective complexity of these elements should be weighed when examining the disadvantages of an individual or group

Microaggression - Indirect or subtle small-scale acts of discrimination experienced by disadvantaged individuals or groups on a frequent basis

Machismo - Assertive masculine pride that tends to oppress

Mexiafricana - Term coined by American poet Natasha Carrizosa to describe a mixed Mexican and African-American cultural heritage

Ni de aqui, ni de alla - Spanish-language expression literally meaning "neither from here, nor from there"; a popular phrase that alludes to identifying or existing within two cultures, yet feeling like an outsider in both



Group of people standing next to a truck, San Basilio de Palenque, 1978

