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- ² hooks (1996) defends that film teaches its audience.
- ³ Dyer (2000) defines stereotypes as almost a term of abuse, making visible the invisible.
- ⁴ Dyer (2002) states that cultural representations of social grouping such as women, black people, ethnic minorities (like Latina (o), homosexuals, the disabled, and the aged become represented in homogenous constructions inserted in the norms of U.S. society.
- ⁵ Dávila (2001) argues that Latinos representation in mass media still favors whiteness and ignores blackness.

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The Afro-Latin@ Reader: History and Culture in the United States

Edited by Miriam Jiménez-Román and Juan Flores
 Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010
 592 pages; \$29.95 [paper]

REVIEWER: Roberto Márquez, Mt. Holyoke College

Among the new crop of notable books devoted to Latin@s which, to name just a few of the more recent, includes the *Norton Anthology of Latino Literature*; Laird Bergard and Herbert Klein's controversial *Hispanics in the United States: A Demographic, Social, and Economic History, 1980–2005*; Claudio Ivan Remeseira's *Hispanic New York: A Sourcebook* and, of those also singling-out that city, Edward J. Sullivan's *Nueva York 1613–1945* and Lorrin Thomas's admirable *Puerto Rican Citizen: History and Political Identity in 20th Century New York City*, *The Afro-Latin@ Reader* is undoubtedly one of the most authentically novel, richly and instructively revealing.

With more than sixty-five individual contributors and weighing in at well over half a thousand pages, one is first struck by the sheer breath and sweep of Miriam Jiménez Román's and Juan Flores' anthological exploration in depth, which includes detailed charting and bringing into critical view of the defining coordinates, varied topography, and sundry textures of a terrain and territory that (discreetly evaded, artfully dodged, or habitually veiled in a tellingly calculated hush) is all too seldom so fruitfully traveled in and remains on the whole still insufficiently surveyed. Indeed, some appear even at this late date—anxiously or piously—to believe, with the ancient cartographers, that “there be dragons.” Arguably, and surely topically, among the longest and most patiently

awaited of that lately gathering harvest, it is also, for this reader at least, one of the most altogether welcome.

Refreshingly plainspoken in its presentation, probe and illumination of the multiple dimensions and evolving progression of Afro-Latin@ history, experience, and realities (their contemporary contour, impact, significance, and strategic potential in the United States, within the country's diverse Latin@ communities, and against the broader backdrop of the different Latin Americas of those communities' varying national origins), *The Afro-Latin@ Reader* is, in addition, as consistently compelling as it is bracingly candid and thoughtfully comprehensive.

Splendidly various and fittingly provocative in the very best sense, *The Afro-Latin@ Reader* is, most obviously, a compendium of historical and scholarly essays, social and cultural analysis, demographic and census data studies, biography, memoir, living personal testimonies; articles on contemporary racial and cross-ethnic alliance politics, sports, religion, music, the media, sexuality, gender, including as well germane samplings of current verse and fiction. Offering its readers, under ten apposite topical headings, a both usefully informative and vivid kaleidoscopic view of the wide span of the Afro-Latin@ American landscape of identity, this catholicity of genres, themes, individual voices and perspectives thoroughly and fully illustrates its many and shifting material contexts; its complexly nuanced densities, regional, generational, (multi- and trans) national particularities—the polydimensional essentials of its unfolding arc, undulations and distinct (collective, communal, individual) facetings and specificities. It's ample vista effectively extends over the centuries since a sixteenth-century Spanish-speaking Moroccan Berber slave, Estebanico, (Alvar Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca's companion of *Naufragios*.) served as the imperially wandering colonial Spaniards' indispensably resourceful scout, translator, and guide: "constantly in conversation [with the local Amerindian inhabitants], finding out about routes, towns, and other matters we [Spanish] wished to know." Only the first formally recorded of a host of early Afro-Hispanic slaves and attendants, militiamen, mediators, and settlers who were, in fact, the first Africans in North America, an Afro-Latin@ presence has since the very earliest "Age of Discovery" been an integral and inextricable, if too long disregarded, part of the history and reality of these United States, no less than of this hemisphere as a whole.

Beginning with the unambiguous recognition, in their excellent, succinct introduction, that "we now can speak of an Afro-Latin@ history and trace the trajectory of a collective experience through the entire span of the history of the United States," the editors simultaneously organize their compilation as a synoptic brief and historical précis of the stages, patterns, primary issues, structural contradictions, abiding struggles, challenges, and dilemmas that give that trajectory its distinctive shape and inflections. Giving us different points of initial departure and thus making good the traditional absence—or erasure—of those early African- and African-descendent-Hispanic pioneers, their successors and heirs down the centuries, from the customary tale of the country's genesis and development, the editors more inclusively and dynamically reconfigure and amplify their readers' perception and overall critical awareness of the racially and ethnically exclusive precincts of our conventionally paradigmatic narratives' of national(ist) emergence and identity. Their omnibus consequently, and to some considerable extent, more completely disinters as it articulates and examines the composite unfolding of an Afro-Latin@ story which the editors likewise, and properly, insist demands specifically focused, sustained, and on-going engagement as a distinct and emerging

field of necessary study. A recurring element of effective uncoverings, no less than actual and vitally real disclosures and *disinvisibilities* is, at any rate, not the least of this collection's virtues.

Excavating in the comparatively little dug in fields of the Afro-Hispanic experience in the centuries before 1900, Peter H. Wood's, Jack D. Forbes', and Virginia Meacham Gould's opening essays are all the more noteworthy for the depth and revelatory detail of their careful scrutiny of that foundational and crucially formative period. More than one general reader or eager undergraduate will, I suspect, here first meet those "African Americans—mostly men and mostly Spanish-speaking—" who were pivotal to Spain's first operations and founding settlements in Florida, or the "persons of negro ancestry... participated in most or all of the early sea expeditions along the Pacific coast," who by the 17th century formed close to a quarter of the population of Baja Californians, as they learn, too, about the *pureza de sangre* hierarchies and the linkages between freedom and skin color among the "Slave and Free Women of color in the Spanish Ports of New Orleans, Mobile, and Pensacola."

On the relatively more cultivated and familiar ground runs from the late nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century and after, this anthology's rendezvous with the canonic narratives or more traditionalist "gran familia" pastorals of conventional nationalist historiography similarly refocuses and rearticulates our customary panorama in at least two important respects. Against that historiography's usual general thrust and equivocations on the issues of racism and race, it spotlights and put into considerably sharper and more substantive relief that "Race discrimination is," as one contributor puts it, "a skeleton in the closet of the Latino community." Its selections, contrary to established paradigm as well, similarly highlight and more palpably enhance readers' appreciation of the irony that "for many Afro-Latin@s the overt nature of segregation [in the United States] would actually prove to be a refreshing change from the hypocritical rhetoric of Latin American and Caribbean 'racial democracy.'"

Tilting further against old school historiographic stress and practice, Jiménez Román's and Flores' compilation accentuates and more revealingly draws out and delineates, in the decades after 1898 and beyond, the depth and span of the experiential convergence, ordinary comminglings and singular intimacy of Afro-Latin@ associations and links to local African American communities in the U.S. Beyond their early integrative role in the Afro-Latin@ process of transition and nominal incorporation into the metropolitan landscapes and ordinary fabric and environments of American (racial and ethnic) living, the sustained familiarity of those connections also effectively animates and quickens a rather more self-affirmatively assumed Afro-Latin@ consciousness and the emergence among some Afro-Latin@s, as well, of "a different kind of politics that focused on international racial unity rather than on nationalism or coalitions with whites." Their included selections of and about Arturo Alfonso Schomburg, Evelio Grillo's Ybor City recollections, Nancy Raquel Mirabal's essay on Melba Alvarado, Ruth Glasser's observant considerations of "The Strange Career of the Afro-Puerto Rican Musician" as well as, among several others, the singer Graciela's reminiscences and recollection that "my first positive experience [in the U.S.] was with [African] Americans" offer a privileged immediacy of access as they chronicle and give a palpably human dimension, to all of these realities.

The thirty and more years after the nineteen thirties saw Jazz, Cu/Bop, Latin Jazz, Boogaloo, Latin Soul, and Salsa all develop as so many evolving expressions of the cross-fertilizations, blendings, creative collaborations, singular fusions, and affirmations emerged of those realities' on-going, daily shared intimacies and

strains. In our own pre- and postmillennial era of (im)migrations, overlapping diasporas and an even larger diversity of *Latimidades*, those shared intimacies and strains, as here also duly and instructively recorded, are similarly evident in the new and ever more popular mixes and amalgamations, at once black *and* Afro-Latin@ origins and varying tonalities of Rap, Hip Hop, and Reggaeton. The constellations of concrete material and broader social forces, which at each juncture underpin, encourage, and promote (or present obstacles to) the solidarities and efficacy of that intimacy and those convergences, the power and enduring strategic promise, possibilities, and political potential of this legacy of innovative synergies in the immediately contemporary present is, indeed, one of this collection's recurring leitmotifs.

No less than Latin@s more general lack of conforming compatibility with the unrelentingly bi-polar universe of traditional American racial protocols, classifications, practice, and their corrosive tenacities, the paradigm-shifting force and implications of Afro-Latin@s' challenge and regular refusal of the strictly American precincts and ethnocentric partiality of any African American claims or pretensions to "a monopoly of Blackness" (one among the points of a sometime friction or mutual uneasiness) also have a thematic pride of place in this corpus of essays. Several of them simultaneously submit to critical scrutiny the parallel deficiencies and essentialist limitations of too homogenizing, abstract, or merely figuratively emblematic conceptions of more recent pan-Latin@ discourses which either ignore, minimize, or otherwise occlude recognition of decisively shaping historical or individual particularities of experience, distinguishing individual, regional, or provincial contextual specifics. Ed Morales' shrewd analysis of "Brown," as a would-be synonym of Latin@, in the work of writers like Richard Rodriguez and Nicolas C. Vaca, who expressly envision both in *Not-Black, flight from Blackness*, or, in Vaca's case, even *anti-Black* and politically antagonistic terms, like Eduardo Bonilla-Silva's "Reflections about Race by a Negrito Acomplejao," which also persuasively note that "before our eyes...an intermediate racial space for 'in-betweeners' ([as] honorary whites) is being created," are only two among a number of others equally incisive.

But at the vital core and axial hinge of this compilation, giving it its overarching perspective and singular positioning, its ultimately most commanding force and critical weight is the editors' and their contributors generally discerning recognition and arresting demonstration that, even as Afro-Latin@s in the U.S. are concurrent, inextricably constitutive denizens of more than one racial, national, and ethnic community and, indeed, precisely because of their thus triple—Black, Latin@, American—identification and consciousness, they at the same time constitute a distinct and separate social and experiential collectivity. Moreover, such a collectivity is uniquely and strategically situated to take advantage of the historic opportunity its particular location affords for the effective building of coalitions and bridges toward an anti-racist politics in each of these communities and across the group and cultural conflicts and divisions separate each from each. The most striking empirical pivot and anchoring evidential linchpin of that central insight and its successful demonstration is, undoubtedly, what the editors' call, in a newly inflected echo of the Frantz Fanon of *Black Skins, White Masks*, "The Fact of Afro-Latin@ness": that is to say, the actually lived ordinary reality and actual individual experience of *being* Afro-Latin@. Nowhere is this fact's most quotidian and intimate dimensions more powerfully and eloquently conveyed than in the assorted constellation of personal testimonies, deposition, and particular witness that the editors' have intelligently included as an essential and vital feature of this anthology. The wise and canny

blend of the analytic or academic and the visceral and confessional, which so often comes to the fore here, as in Angela Jorge's keen, anguished dissections of the many oppressions Black Puerto Rican women contend with from their earliest years, also has its affecting analogue in the poignancies and more obvious *cri de coeur* of, say, Nilaja Sun's "Letter to a Friend," where she piercingly confesses "There is nothing like growing up and feeling ugly to your own people."

Uncommonly inclusive and all-encompassing, its scholarly heft and solidity thus sympathetically alert and impressively coupled to the emotionally expressive verve, revelatory force, and persuasive authority of the autobiographical, *The Afro-Latin@ Reader* is, in sum, an extraordinary and exceptional achievement. A splendid contribution to the field it here so ably moves forward, it admirably also advances, more fully and fruitfully than any single comparable volume on the subject has so far done, its readers' knowledgeably complex, non-reductive understanding of Afro-Latin@ America's contemporary emergence and, above all, how regularly—where, when, by whom, and why—Afro-Latin@s have "been rendered invisible and silent because they simply do not fit larger historical narratives of immigration, race, gender, culture and location in the United States."

The Trouble with Unity: Latino Politics and the Creation of Identity

By Cristina Beltrán

New York: Oxford University Press, 2010

240 pages; \$24.95 [paper]

REVIEWER: José E. Cruz, University at Albany—State University of New York

The point of departure of Cristina Beltrán's book is her objection to the characterization of Latinos in the United States as "subjects [continually] on the cusp of political power and influence" (p. 3). The metaphor that is most commonly used to refer to this "recurring cycle of [political] emergence" (p. 3) of Latinos is that of the sleeping giant. Just about every two years, Beltrán tells us, this giant is said to be on the verge of awakening, its "imminent mobilization" (p. 4) carrying with it the potential of determining which political candidate or candidates will win in close races.

Beltrán argues that the image is "more than an inaccurate political cliché or a simple metaphor for political agency" (p. 4). And her book is devoted to showing that the civic cohesion presupposed by the image does not really exist. According to Beltrán, "while the mass media and other political elites often portray Latinos as a collective body with common interests, the actual existence of Latino unity—of a collective political consciousness and will distinct among Latinos—is far less certain" (p. 6).

What are the implications of referring to Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, Cubans, Dominicans, and others from Central and South America as Latinos or Hispanics? For one thing, "Latino" and "Hispanic" are "so comprehensive that their explanatory power is limited" (p. 6). Second, because "Latino pan-ethnicity has been fostered by a climate of xenophobia...the regional and cultural history of all people of Latin American descent has been erased" (p. 7). Third, "homogenizing depictions of Latinos continue to be invoked by those who fear the rapid growth of the United States' Latino population. For these Americans, Latinos are still monolithically 'foreign,' a racially and culturally distinct group that resists

A review of Miriam Jimenez Román and Juan Flores, eds. *The Afro-Latin@ Reader: History and Culture in the United States* (2010). Petra R. Rivera reviews *The Afro-Latin@ Reader*, a kind of portable archive that should open both black and white eyes to the history and culture of their brown brothers and sisters, fresh or Continue reading. This is what makes comparisons with Afro-focused struggles in Latin America and the Caribbean hard to make or learn lessons from in the United States. But without the knowledge base and questions presented in *The Afro-Latin@ Reader* it would be that much more difficult to address this politically central question. And, finally, you may have noticed that I am resistant to using the ampersand instead of the "o" in Latino. *The Afro* *Reader: History and Culture in the United States* edited by Jimenez Román, Miriam and Flores, Juan. Kwame Dixon. Published: 4 September 2012. by Wiley. in *Bulletin of Latin American Research*. *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, Volume 31, pp 545-546; doi:10.1111/j.1470-9856.2012.00756.x. Publisher Website. Full-Text. Google Scholar. Keywords: edited / Jim / Afro / Nez Rom / Juan No / no abstract / Miriam / history. Scifeed alert for new publications. Never miss any articles matching your research from any publisher. Get alerts for new papers matching your research... Share this article. Click here to see the statistics on "Bulletin of Latin American Research" .