

## 11 A CONSOLIDATED HISTORY OF BLACKS IN LATIN AMERICA

In order to be able to effectively center Black identity in language, we will need to know the extent to which Black identity has been honored or suppressed in Latin America. The following brief history will allow us to have an overview of Black identity in Latin America in order to better understand the populations in the countries of focus in this curriculum.

First and foremost, the term Afro-Latino is not widely used throughout the region. It is used mostly amongst scholars and researchers but the general population does not frequently use the term. Usually the general population will use terms such as: Negro, preto or “Afro-prefix followed by nationality (ie, Afro-Peruvian, Afro-Mexican, etc).

This section will provide you with an overview of Afrolatinidad in the region as well as give brief insight into the Black populations in all of the countries. Although the curriculum focuses on six countries, there is a benefit to being able to be familiar with the Black populations in all of the countries.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In the 15th and 16 centuries, many people of African origin were brought into the Americas with the Spanish and Portuguese. Those who were directly from West Africa mostly arrived in Latin America as slave labor as a part of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, or Maa’fa, in agriculture, mining and in plantation homes.

There are some African descended populations that have been so well established in their regions that they have developed their own culture. Some of these cultures are: garífuna (in Nicaragua, Honduras, Guatemala, and Belize), cafuzo (in Brazil), and zambo in the Andes and Central America.

The mix of these African cultures with the Spanish, Portuguese, French, and indigenous cultures of Latin America has produced many unique forms of language (e.g., Palenquero, Garífuna, and Creole),

religions (e.g., Candomblé, Santería, and Vodou), music (e.g., kompa, salsa, Bachata, Punta, Palo de Mayo, plena, samba, merengue, cumbia) martial arts (capoeira) and dance (rumba, merengue).

Latin America has been criticized for marginalizing or ignoring Black presence in favor Latin Americans who appear closer to or more "white," especially in popular culture, media and advertising. As of 2015, Mexico and Chile are the only two Latin American countries yet to formally recognize their Afro-Latin American population in their constitutions. This is in contrast to countries like Brazil and Colombia that lay out the constitutional rights of their African-descendant population.

## SOUTH AMERICA

### Argentina

Traditionally it has been argued that the black population in Argentina declined since the early 19th century to insignificance. Many believe that the black population declined due to systematic efforts to reduce the black population in Argentina in order to mirror the racially homogeneous countries of Europe. However, the pilot census conducted in two neighborhoods of Argentina in 2006 on knowledge of ancestors from Sub-saharan Africa verified that a significant population of Argentinians either knew for certain of Black ancestry or at least thought it was possible. Because of the large influx of European immigrants to Argentina in 1960, it is believed that there was an invisible layer introduced socially that ignored Black ancestry of Afro-Argentinians in favor of European ancestry.

### Bolivia

Black African descendants in Bolivia were brought in during the Spanish colonial times and the majority live in the Yungas. There are about 500,000 people of Black African ancestry living in Bolivia.

### Chile

Chile enslaved about 6,000 Africans, about one-third of whom arrived before 1615; most were utilized in agriculture around Santiago. Today there are very few Afro-Chileans.

### Colombia

Approximately 4.4 million Afro-Colombians actively recognize their own black ancestry as a result of inter-racial relations with white and indigenous Colombians. They have been historically absent from high level government positions.[citation needed] Most of them are concentrated on the northwest Caribbean coast and the Pacific coast in Chocó, Cartagena, Barranquilla and San Andres Isla. Many of their long-established settlements around the Pacific coast have remained underdeveloped.

During Colombia's ongoing internal conflict, Afro-Colombians were both victims of violence or displacement and members of armed factions, such as the FARC and the AUC.



Afro-Colombians have played a role in contributing to the development of certain aspects of Colombian culture. For example, several of Colombia's musical genres, such as Cumbia (think Shakira - who does NOT claim to be Afro-Colombian), have African origins or influences. Some Afro-Colombians have also been successful in sports such as Faustino Asprilla, Freddy Rincón or María Isabel Urrutia.

### **Ecuador**

The Afro-Ecuadorian culture is found in the northwest coastal region of Ecuador and make up the majority in the province of Esmeraldas and the Chota Valley in the Imbabura Province. They can be also found in Ecuador's two largest cities, Quito and Guayaquil. The best known cultural influence known outside Ecuador is a distinctive kind of marimba music. From the Chota Valley there is Bomba (Ecuador) music which is very different from marimba from Esmeraldas.

### **Paraguay**

Black Paraguayans are descended from enslaved West African brought to Paraguay by the 16th century. They became a significant presence in the country, and made up 11% of the population in 1785. Most Afro-Paraguayans established communities in towns such as Areguá, Emboscada, and Guarambaré. Many achieved their freedom during the Spanish rule. In the capital Asunción, there is a community of 300 Afro-Paraguayan families in the Fernando de la Mora municipality.

### **Peru**

Over the course of the slave trade, approximately 95,000 slaves were brought into Peru, with the last group arriving in 1850. Today, Afro-Peruvians reside mainly on the central and south coast. Afro-Peruvians can also be found in significant numbers on the northern coast. Recently, it has been verified that the community with the greatest concentration of Afro-Peruvians is Yapatera in Morropón (Piura), made up of around 7,000 farmers who are largely descended from African slaves of "malagasy" (Madagascar) origin. They are referred to as "malgaches" or "mangaches".

Afro-Peruvian music was actually well known in Peru since the 1600s but oppressed by the Peruvian elite, as was Andean religion and language. Afro-Peruvian culture has not only thrived but influenced all aspects of Peruvian culture without any acknowledgement from mainstream media or history. Luis Miguel Sanchez, Peru's 71st President, was the first Afro-Andean President (1930–1933).

### **Uruguay**

Enslaved Africans and their descendants figured prominently in the founding of Uruguay.

In the late 18th century, Montevideo became a major arrival port for slaves, most brought from Portuguese colonies of Africa and bound for the Spanish colonies of the New World, the mines of

Peru and Bolivia, and the fields of Uruguay.

In the 19th century, when Uruguay joined other colonies in fighting for independence from Spain, Uruguayan national hero Jose Artigas led an elite division of black troops against the colonists. One of his top advisors was Joaquín Lenzina, known as Ansina, a freed slave who composed musical odes about his commander's exploits and is regarded by Afro-Uruguayans as an unheralded father of the nation.

### **Venezuela**

The late President Hugo Chávez was the first afrodescendiente to serve as head of state of Venezuela.

African Venezuelans are mostly descendants of enslaved Africans brought to Venezuela from the 17th to the 19th century to work the coffee and cocoa crops. Most of the African-Venezuelans live in the North-central region, in the coastal towns Barlovento, Northern Yaracuy, Carabobo and Aragua States, and Eastern Vargas State; but also in several towns and villages in areas in South Lake Maracaibo (Zulia State) and Northern Merida State in the Andes, among others. They have kept their traditions and culture alive, especially through music.

Venezuela is a very racially mixed nation, which makes it difficult to individually identify and/or distinguish their ethno-racial background with precision. Most Venezuelans have some Sub-Saharan African heritage and are pardo, even if they identify as white.

Afro-Venezuelans have stood out as sportsmen, many of them in the Major League Baseball and other sports (e.g. former NBA/Houston Rockets forward Carl Herrera), however, most of them do not describe themselves as Afro-Venezuelan, but as Latinos or Hispanics or simply Venezuelans. Afro-Venezuelans have also stood out in the arts, especially in music, for example: Magdalena Sánchez, Oscar D'León, Morella Muñoz, Allan Phillips, Pedro Eustache, Frank Quintero, and many others. Miss Venezuela 1998, Carolina Indriago, Miss Venezuela Universe 2006, Jictzad Viña, and Miss Venezuela World 2006, Susan Carrizo are mulatto.

## **CENTRAL AMERICA**

The Afro-Latin Americans of Central America come from the Caribbean coast. The countries of Belize, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua, are of Garífuna, Afro-Caribbean and/or Mestizo heritage, as well as of Miskito heritage. Those of Costa Rica and Panama are mostly of Afro-Caribbean heritage. Many Afro-Caribbean islanders arrived in Panama to help build the Panama Canal and to Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Costa Rica to work in the banana and sugar-cane plantations.

### **Belize**



*Note: Common definitions of Latin America do not include Belize*

Belizean culture is a mix of African, European, and Mayan. The main community of African descent are the Creoles and Garifuna concentrated from the Cayo District to the Belize District and Stann Creek District (Dangriga) on the Caribbean Sea. Belize City, on the Caribbean coast, is the center of West African culture in Belize, with its population being of mixed Black African, Maya, and European.

### **Costa Rica**

There is significant debate about the number of African descended Costa Ricans. Overlaying indigenous and European ancestry has marginalized identification with Black ancestry although there is a significant population of English-speaking Jamaican immigrant workers in the country. In the Guanacaste Province, a significant portion of the population descends from a mix of local Amerindians, Africans and Spaniards. Most Afro-Costa Ricans are found in the Limón Province and the Central Valley.

### **El Salvador**

A total of 10,000 African slaves were brought to El Salvador. The African population, creating Afro-Mestizos in the certain areas where the Africans were brought. El Salvador has no English Antillean (West Indian), Garifuna, and Miskito population, largely due to laws banning the immigration of Africans into the country in the 1930s, these laws were revoked in the 1980s.

### **Guatemala**

The main community of African heritage are the Garifuna, concentrated in Livingston and Puerto Barrios. The rest are Afro-Caribbean and mulattoes who lives in Puerto Barrios and Morales. All these places belong to Izabal department, on the Caribbean coast. Sadly, because of unemployment and lack of opportunities, many Garifuna from Guatemala had left the country and move to Belize and the United States. Also many people of African descent are located in different regions of the country but most notable are in Amatitlán, San Jerónimo, and Jutiapa, although most of them may not recognize it because the loss of culture in these places.

Many of the slaves brought from Africa in colonial times came to Guatemala to work on cotton, sugar cane, tobacco, and coffee plantations. Most were brought as slaves and also servants by European conquistadors. The main reason for slavery in Guatemala was because of the large sugar-cane plantations and haciendas located on Guatemala's Pacific and Caribbean coasts. Slavery didn't last too long during those times and all slaves and servants brought were later freed. They spread to different locations, primarily Guatemala's north, south and east. It is said that these freed slaves later mixed with Europeans, Native Indigenous, and Creoles (Criollos) of non-African descent.

The national folk instrument, the marimba, has its origins in Africa and was brought to Guatemala and



the rest of Central America by African slaves during colonial times. The melodies played on it show Native American, West African and European influences in both form and style.

Today, the Garifuna and Afro-Caribbean people of Guatemala are organized in a group called Organización Negra Guatemalteca (Onegua). According to its website, Onegua is "a non-governmental organisation established in 1995 with a mandate to promote the interests and fight for the rights of Guatemala's Garifuna and Afrodescendant populations". There is also an association called Asociación Raíces Afrodescendientes Guatemaltecas.

On 26 November 2009 Afro descendants mostly of Garifuna heritage and all mixes came to the Catedral Metropolitana located in Guatemala City for a church event organized by Garifunas from Izabal, Guatemala to prove that after 200 years of Garifuna existence in Guatemala they are not considered part of the population of Guatemala. The main reason for this event was to prove a point to stop discrimination against Afro descendants and other ethnic groups in Guatemala.

### Honduras

The official census of Honduras indicates about 150,000 individuals, self-identified as black. A more recent and accurate estimate indicates that there are around 600,000 Garifuna Afro-Hondurans. The census number is based on self-identification and does not use the American definition of blood to identify "blackness." If one uses the blood quantum definition of blackness, then blacks came to Honduras early in the colonial period. One of the mercenaries who aided Pedro de Alvarado in his conquest of Honduras in 1536 was a black slave working as a mercenary to earn his freedom. Alvarado sent his own slaves from Guatemala to work the placer gold deposits in western Honduras as early as 1534. The earliest black slaves consigned to Honduras were part of a license granted to the Bishop Cristóbal de Pedraza in 1547 to bring 300 slaves into Honduras.

The self-identifying black population in Honduras is mostly of West Indian (Antillean origin), descendants of indentured laborers brought from Jamaica, Haiti, and other Caribbean Islands or of Garifuna (or Black Caribs) origin, a people of Black African ancestry who were expelled from the island of Saint Vincent after an uprising against the English and in 1797 and were exiled to Roatan. From there they made their way along the Caribbean coast of Belize, mainland Honduras and Nicaragua. Large Garifuna settlements in Honduras today include Trujillo, La Ceiba, and Triunfo de la Cruz. Even though they only came to Honduras in 1797, the Garifuna are one of the seven officially recognized indigenous groups in Honduras.

Slaves on the north coast mixed with the Miskito Indians, forming a group referred to as the Zambo Miskito. Some Miskito consider themselves to be purely indigenous or mestizo, denying this Black



**African heritage.**

Much like other parts of Latin America, socio-cultural as well as socio-political circumstances led to a denial by many Hondurans of their Black African heritage which reflects in the census even to this day. "Blacks were more problematic as national symbols because at the time they were neither seen to represent modernity nor autochthony, and their history of dislocation from Africa means they have no great pre-Columbian civilization in the Americas to call upon as symbols of a glorious past. Thus Latin American states often end up identities where the Indian is privileged as the roots of the nation and blackness is either minimized or completely erased."

**Nicaragua**

About 9% of Nicaragua's population is African and mainly reside on the country's sparsely populated Caribbean coast. Afro-Nicaraguans are found on the autonomous regions of RAAN and RAAS. The African population is mostly of West Indian (Antillean) origin, the descendants of indentured laborers brought mostly from Jamaica and other Caribbean Islands when the region was a British protectorate. There is also a smaller number of Garífuna, a people of mixed Carib, Angolan, Congolese and Arawak descent. The Garífuna live along in Orinoco, La Fe and Marshall Point, communities settled at Laguna de Perlas. Nicaragua has the largest population of blacks in Central America.

**Panama**

Blacks in Panama are the descendants of West African slaves but later on blacks from the Caribbean islands arrived. The Afro Colonials are the group of Hispanics, while the Antillanos are those of West Indian descent.

**CARIBBEAN****Cuba**

According to a 2001 national census which surveyed 11.2 million Cubans, 1.1 million Cubans described themselves as Black, while 5.8 million considered themselves to be "mulatto" or "mestizo" or "javao" or "moro". Many Cubans still locate their origins in specific African ethnic groups or regions, particularly Yoruba, Congo and Igbo, but also Arará, Carabalí, Mandingo, Fula and others, as well as a small minority of people who migrated in from surrounding Caribbean countries like Haiti and Jamaica.

**Dominican Republic**

According to the recent sources, 11% of the Dominican population is black, 16% is white and 73% is mixed from white European and black African and Native American ancestry. If one were to use the "one drop rule" used in the United States, one could easily argue that the majority of the population in the Dominican Republic have African ancestry.

Some Afrocentric commentators and race/ethnicity scholars have been harshly critical of Dominicans of mixed racial background for their reluctance to self-identify as "Black". Dominican culture is a mixture of Taino Amerindian, Spanish European, and West African origins. While Taino influences are present in many Dominican traditions, the European and West African influences are the most noticeable.

Afro-Dominicans can be found all over the island, but they make up the vast majorities in the southwest, south, east, and the north parts of the country. In El Cibao one can find people of either European, Mixed, and African descent.

Most Afro-Dominicans descend from the Bantu tribes of the Congo region of Central Africa (Angola, Democratic Republic of the Congo and Republic of Congo), and as well as the Ga people of west Ghana.

### **Puerto Rico**

According to the 2010 U.S. Census taken in Puerto Rico, 75.8% of Puerto Ricans identified as being white, 12.4% of the population as being black or African American and 11.1% as mixed or of another ethnicity. An interesting anecdote to consider was that during this whole period, Puerto Rico had laws like the Regla del Sacar or Gracias al Sacar by which a person of African ancestry could be considered legally white so long as they could prove that at least one person per generation in the last four generations had also been legally white descent. Therefore, people of African ancestry with known European lineage were classified as "whites", the opposite of the "one-drop rule" in the United States. This was done in reaction to the Naturalization Act of 1790 imposed by President George Washington granted naturalization only to those Puerto Rican's who can identify as white.

Many persons of African descent in Puerto Rico are found along coastal areas, areas traditionally associated with sugar cane plantations, especially in the towns Loiza, Carolina, Fajardo, and Guayama. The Puerto Rican musical genres of bomba and plena are of West African and Caribbean origin, respectively; they are danced to during parties and West African-derived festivals. Most Puerto Ricans who have African ancestry are descendants of enslaved Congo, Yoruba, Igbo and Fon from West and Central Africa. After the abolition of slavery in 1873 and the Spanish-American War of 1898, a number of African Americans have also migrated and settled in Puerto Rico.

## **NORTH AMERICA**

### **Mexico**

Veracruz, Campeche, Pánuco and Acapulco were the main ports for the entrance of African slaves.



The vast majority of contemporary Afro-Mexicans inhabit the southern region of Mexico; those who migrated north in the colonial period assimilated into the general population, making their existence in the country less evident than other groups.

Gaspar Yanga founded the first free African township in the Americas in 1609.

A Black man named Esteban el Negro (Steven the Black), a North African Moor from Spain, searched for the fabled city of Cibola with Cabeza de Vaca. Mexico's second president, Vicente Guerrero, an Afro-Mexican, issued a decree abolishing slavery and emancipating all slaves in 1829, during his short term as president.

In the past, offspring of Black African/Amerindian mixtures were called jarocho (wild pig), chino or lobo (wolf). Today jarocho refers to all inhabitants of the state of Veracruz, without regard to ancestry.

### **United States**

Many Afro-Latino immigrants have arrived, in waves, over decades, to the United States, especially from the Caribbean, Cuba, Haiti, Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico. Central America and to a lesser extent from Mexico too. In the state of California, the dominant population consisted of people of color but as the years progressed the percentage has declined severely or at least the way Californian residents claim to identify themselves has shifted towards a White population.

A Pew Research Center survey of Latino adults shows that one-quarter of all U.S. Latinos self-identify as Afro-Latino, Afro-Caribbean or of African descent with roots in Latin America.