



The African Presence in Latin America

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The great Mexican poet and diplomat, Octavio Paz, once stated that under one of the masks that the Mexican people carry is that of an Indian. It is through this deeply inquisitive statement that one can begin to understand the great strides that people go through in order to deny their deeply embedded, and many times obvious, historical roots. For Mexicans, and for much of Latin America, the Indian is under a mask because she/he is meant to be hidden, kept in the dark, left a secret. In other words, the pain and constructed embarrassment is too deep in order to confront the horrific past, which disappears through smiles but is kept alive through the nightmares that collectively haunts a nation. It is difficult being a colonial subject.

The same historical erasure and denial

is true of the African mask that most, if not all, of Latin America has hidden in the closet, only to be taken out for a carnival or two. It is this “Third Root,” alongside the European conquerors and our Indigenous foremothers, that also constitutes the rich mixture that embodies Latin American history, culture, and identity. The African Presence in the “new world” is full of sorrow, resilience, and synchronization that, as one writer for *Que Ondee Sola* eloquently states “...is a remarkable example of human resistance.” Thus, we celebrate, through this edition, the human resistance brought forth by our Afro-Latin American ancestors and the removal of the many masks that keep Latin America from reaching the full potential it inherently is endowed with.

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Que Ondee Sola was established in 1972 and remains the oldest Puerto Rican & Latina/o university student publication in the U.S. Our mission is to provide the NEIU community with a relevant and engaging publication that deals with student issues with a focus on Puerto Ricans and Latinas/os, our communities, and our *patrias*.

Que Ondee Sola continues to affirm the right of Puerto Rican self-determination, freedom for all Puerto Rican political prisoners, and support for a truly participatory democracy.

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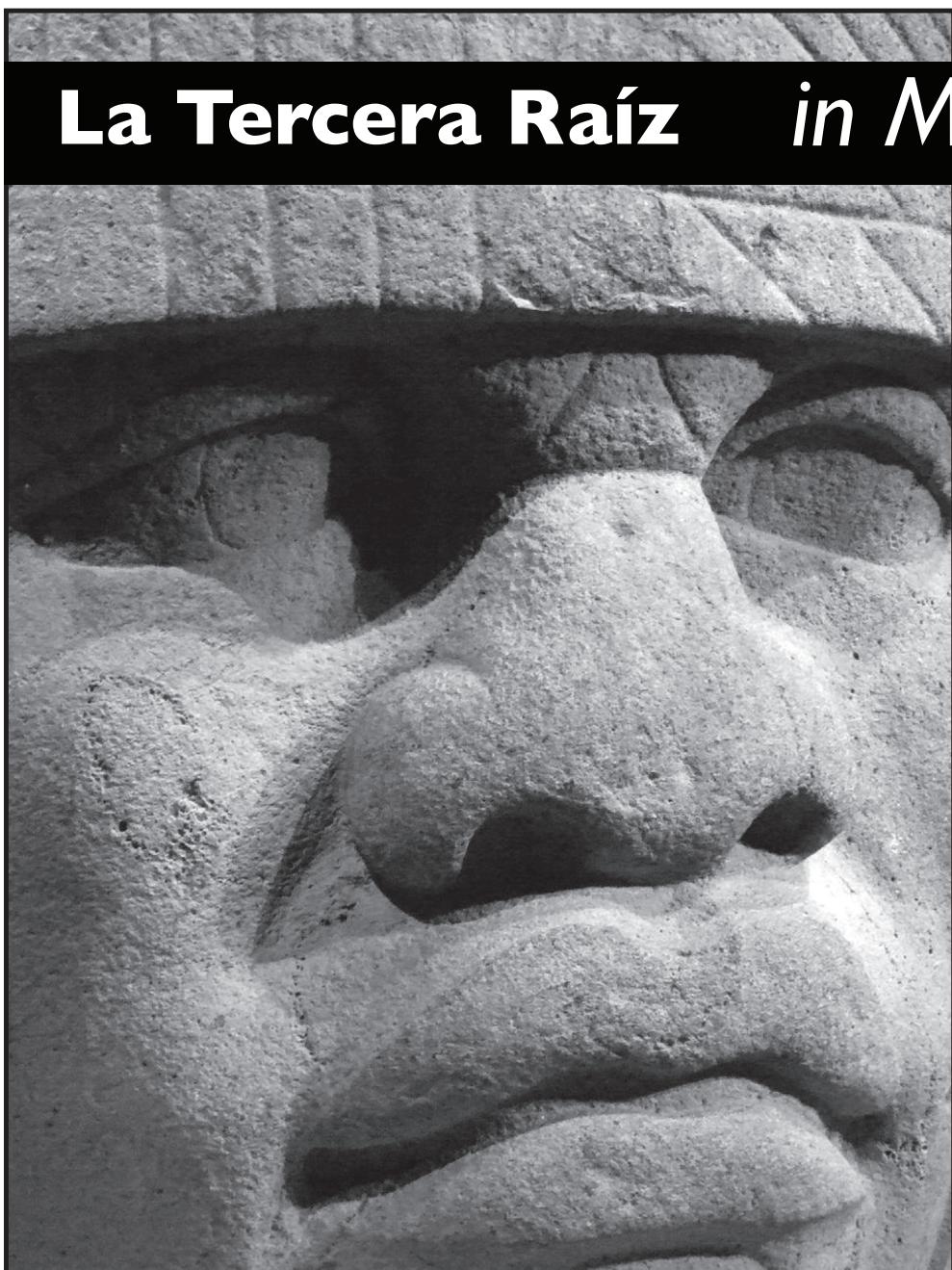
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La Tercera Raíz in México

As Latinas/os, there is an important part of our history that we are not often taught: the African influence on Latin America. The history of the region is a blend of African, Indigenous and Spanish/Europeans cultures. The African presence in Latin America is the most ignored, overlooked and rejected among the three. The African presence is prevalent

in North America, the Caribbean, and South America but it is not as widely known in México.

In fact, Africans have had an immense impact on the culture of México. It is widely acknowledged that Mexico's culture is mestizo, a blend of European and indigenous roots, but the "third root" - the African root - is forgotten or ignored. This due to internalized ideas about race and ethnicity. Nonetheless, it is difficult for a person of Mexican descent to claim to have no African ancestry. At one point

there were more Africans in México than Europeans. In some areas, specifically the coast it is almost guaranteed that a person has African ancestry.

The first African slaves were brought to México in 1519 to work in silver mines. Under

brutal conditions they would often rebel and runaway into the mountains of Orizaba and would establish maroon societies.

One of these maroon societies was led by a Cimarrón named Yagna, who led a resistance against the Spanish crown in January 1609, and after several victories the Spanish left Yagna and the other cimarrones alone.

The first free African town in the Americas was established by the present-day state of Veracruz named San Lorenzo de los Negros. As a matter of fact, slavery in México was abolished 36 years before it was abolished in the United States, which offered incentive to runaway slaves or cimarrones to escape to México. The use of the Underground Railroad served not only as a way to free enslaved Africans but also as a way to add an African influence to Mexican culture.

It is difficult to distinguish all cultural influences Africans have contributed to México. Africans have migrated to México since before Christ, and there has been so much race mixing and blending of Native, Spanish and African cultural elements in México. However, today there are regions in México where the African presence is visible. Along the coastline of México, you can still hear the people play songs and sing about slave uprisings. The



Marimbas of México have a very strong African influence and there are traditional dances that are hinted as being African influenced such as the "Dance of the Devil" throughout the state of Guerrero.

Today there are still strong Afro-Mexican enclaves in México. One enclave being Veracruz and the others being Costa Chica, which is two hundred miles long and extends from the states of Guerrero to Oaxaca. Costa Chica has a significant African population numbering 66,381 people living in 29 communities. Sadly, this region is also an area hardest hit by social and economic inequality.

The African presence in México is not limited to cultural influences but to influential people as well. One of the revolutionaries in the Mexican War of Independence was an Afro-Mexican. Vicente Guerrero was born in Tixtla near Acapulco in August 1782. Guerrero joined the revolt against Spain in 1810, took command of rebel troops in 1825 and became President on April 1, 1829 after he staged a coup against Manuel Gómez Pedraza. As President of México, Guerrero immediately abolished slavery and emancipated all slaves. Guerrero's legacy can still be seen in México, with a state named after him.



A Short History of Slavery

in Puerto Rico



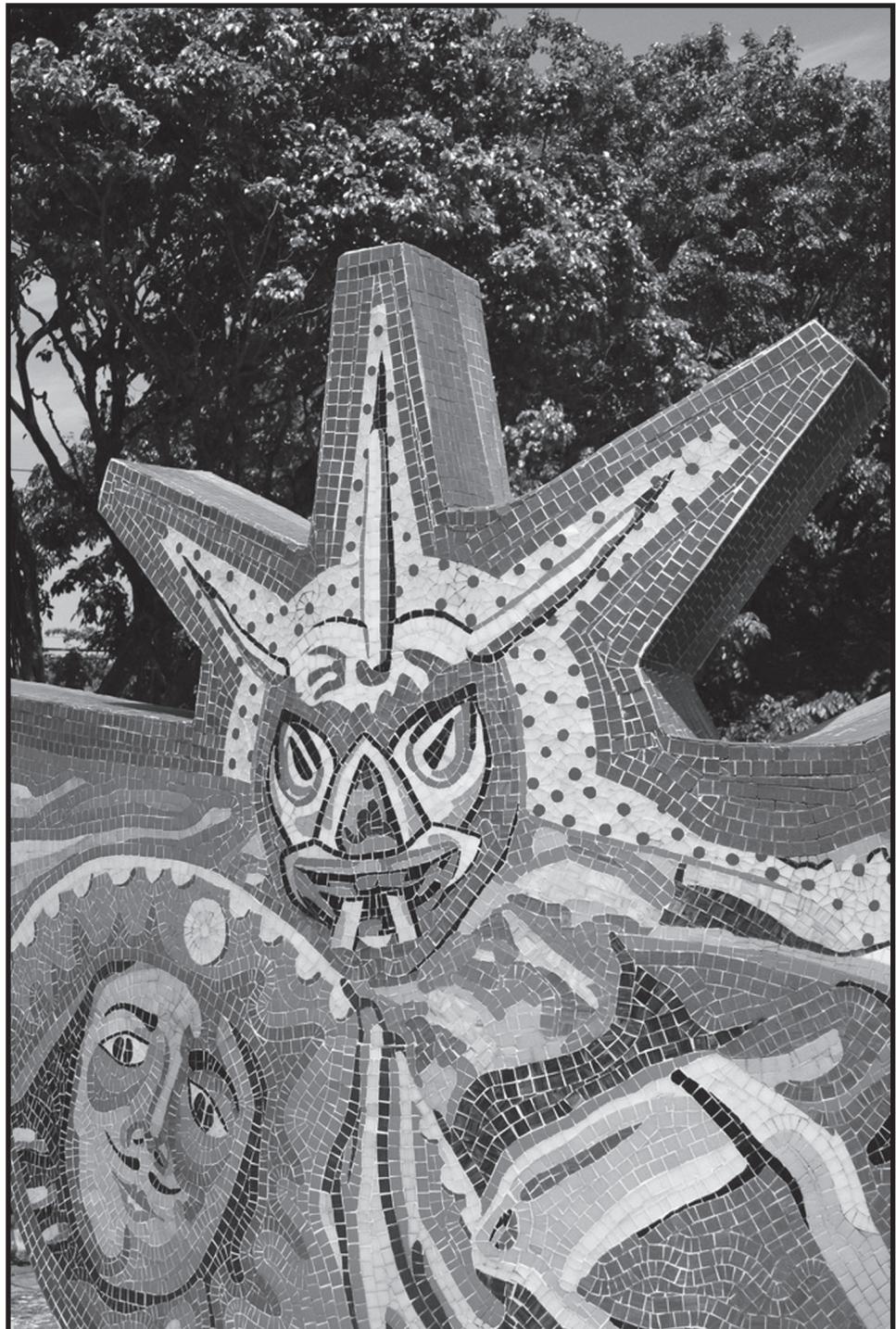
The history of the enslavement of Africans to Puerto Rico began with the slave trade myth that one African was worth four Indians. Puerto Rico, in the 16th century had many gold resources, and Indians were near extinction. The Spanish needed a high supply of cheap labor for the establishment of a sugar economy, which resulted in the enslavement of Africans to the island. This peaked in the 18th century, and slavery was not abolished on the island until 1873. Throughout the years with Africans living in Puerto Rico certain things began to happen. The indigenous Taíno culture began to transform in order to survive, racism began to form, and Puerto Rico was becoming

a physically different place.

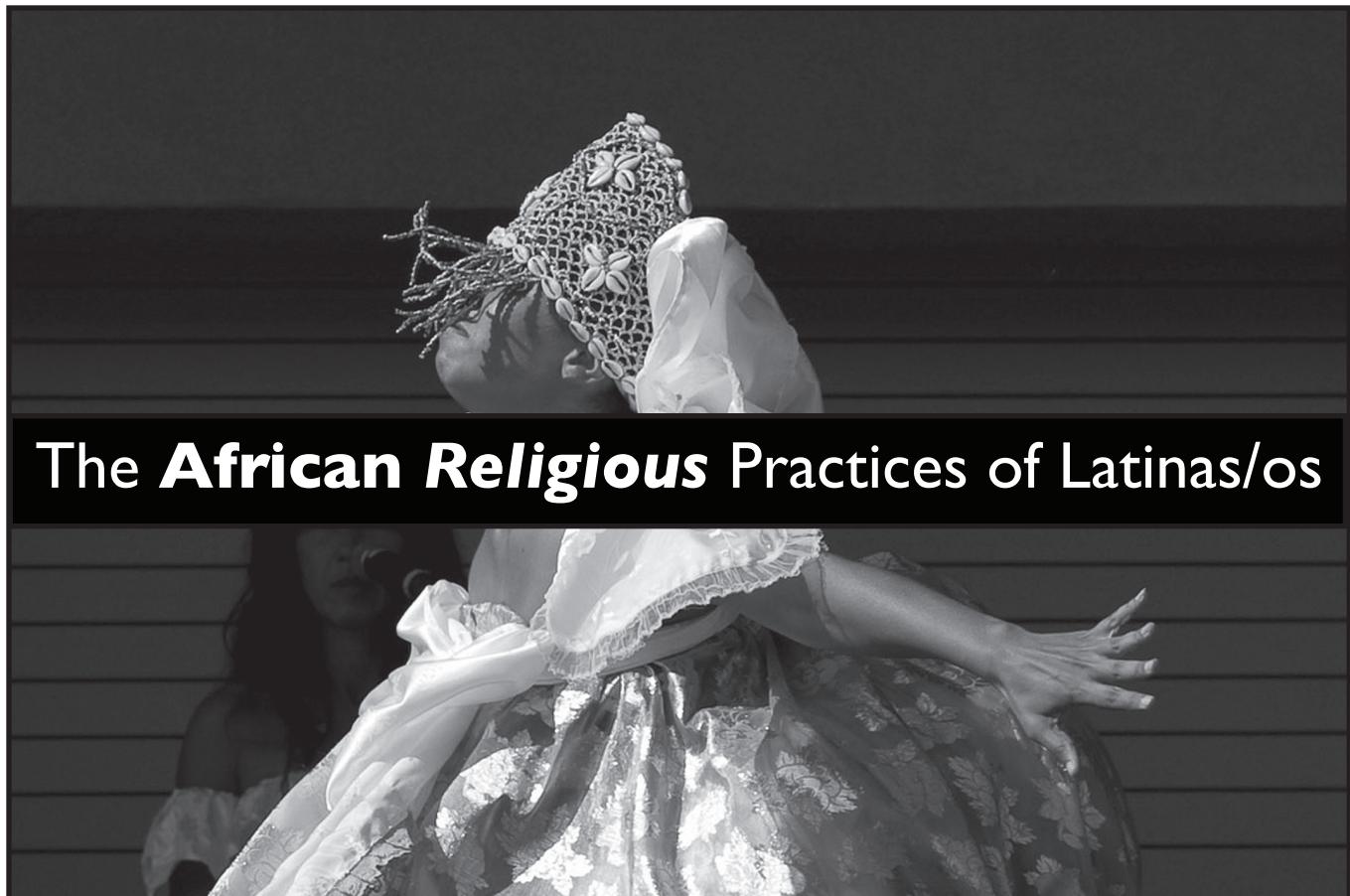
Slavery in Puerto Rico was intended to get the work done for the sugar mines and not have to pay ridiculous amounts of money for the labor. The labor in the sugar mines was intense and brutal. Men, women, children worked hours in the sun cutting sugarcane and transporting it to the main site. People were beaten, starved, and most of the time did not get paid. Taínos and Africans made attempts to join forces and revolt against the Spanish, and each attempt failed. Many Taínos and Africans died in the heroic attempt to be free from slavery, to be free from the

Spaniards. In the Puerto Rican culture today the African presence can be felt by the musical expression of Bomba. Africans used the drum-heaving music of Bomba to liberate themselves from everything their people were going through. Africans also used the sounds of Bomba as a form of communication. In the slave trade, the slaves were not able to carry long conversations because of the Spanish's fear that they were planning an escape. Though, with Bomba, they were able to plan rebellions. Through the mountains and the valleys they would send messages to each other with the conga drums with different rhythms and beats interpreted as different message. Things like sound and dance is how these families and friends communicated. African influences are also found in our Spanish language today, like *mondongo* (a stew) and *mofongo* (a plantain dish) were words that were taken from West African languages.

Puerto Rico was raped by the Spaniards, and



we cannot deny it has affected us. Puerto Rico today has a culture that many are not willing to give up, a culture that shows our struggle, a culture that would not exist without the presence of Africans on our island.



The African Religious Practices of Latinas/os

There is no doubt that religion is a very sensitive subject among Latinos. For this reason it is important that we maintain an open mind and open dialogue when discussing religion in the context of Latinas/os. The religion that has had the most profound impact on this group has no doubt been Christianity, imported to the Americas by the Spanish, among other things, after 1492. Since then, some denominations of Christianity have become the norm in terms of religion for Latinas/os and Latin Americans. However, it is important to note that not every Latina/o is a Christian.

Before 1492 most religions in the Americas were polytheistic, or the belief in more than one God. It is difficult to generalize these

pre-Columbian religions because they are so diverse, but most held similar ideas about creation, nature, god, life and death. Many of these pre-Columbian religions still exist today but it is important that we shed or at least put the Eurocentric lens aside before discussing any “alternative” religion.

Among these alternative religions is a very specific set of religious practices that were also imported to the Americas after 1492. These religions are known as African Traditional Religions or ATR's. These ATR's made the journey along with African slaves and arrived throughout Latin America. Most arrived from the western part of Africa. One group in particular, the Yoruba, have had a large impact on the status of ATR's in Latin

America and the U.S. today.

How these religions survived in the “new” world is a remarkable example of human resistance. The African slaves were forcibly baptized and converted to Christianity. All aspects of their religions were seen as devil worship and savagery. As a way to continue their traditions the African slaves began to incorporate Catholic elements into their belief system. They actively began to hide their Orishas or intermediaries between God and humans, behind the faces of Catholic saints. Every Orisha had its Catholic counterpart. This is just one example of how ATR’s survived in the Americas, it is also the birth of the syncretic religion commonly known today as Santería.

elements.

It is difficult to say how many practitioners of ATR’s there are in the world but the estimates have been in the hundreds of millions. It is difficult to get a clear number of practitioners because there are different levels of devotion, from the casual to the absolute. It also can be difficult for practitioners to openly disclose their devotion to ATR’s. While ATR’s are more visible they still are not widely accepted by society, because most of the world adheres to the five major religions—Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and Judaism, and their denominations. Any deviation from the five major religions and their denominations is considered deviant, therefore it is rejected by members of society.

“How these religions survived in the ‘new’ world is a remarkable example of human resistance.”

The incorporation of Catholic elements into the Yoruba tradition helped them and their religious practices survive those tumultuous times. Although they have been syncretized they still maintain a strong African influence. Today ATR’s, specifically the Yoruba traditions, have manifested themselves throughout Latin America and the United States. There is Candomblé and Úmbanda in Brazil, La Regla de Ocha/Regla Lukumi/ Santería in Cuba, México, Puerto Rico as well as the U.S., Voodoo in Haiti and 21 Divisions in Dominican Republic. While these religions have been syncretized, many practitioners actively practice them without the Catholic

ATR’s are also rejected because almost all of these traditions are portrayed in a negative light. Most negative opinions formed about ATR’s are based on a Eurocentric bias, misconceptions, misinformation and close-mindedness. Negative media focuses can serve as a way of scaring people from anything outside the “norm”. Sporadically one hears news about a raid on a house where satanic rituals were being performed, where there were animals being sacrificed. A person with no exposure to any religion outside their own will form judgments and opinions based on this type of misinformation.

Today throughout Latin America and the U.S. the presence of these ATR's still exist, what were once hidden practices and beliefs are more visible. In Brazil, there are entire carnivals dedicated to Yemayá the Orisha of the Sea. In Puerto Rico and Cuba it is common to see people dressed in all white clothing head to toe. In terms of music, some of Latin America's biggest stars have incorporated African chants into their music, such as Celia Cruz, Hector Lavoe, La India, Gloria Estefan, and Tito Puente to name a few. Today it is not uncommon to be a Santería devotee Monday through Saturday and a Catholic on Sunday. These ATR's serve as way for individuals to connect to their African ancestry.

Religion is a very aspect when discussing Latinas/os issues. For this reason it is important to discuss the diversity of religions among Latinas.os. This article is not meant



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to advocate, defend or justify the actions for any religion but instead show the impact and presence of African Traditional Religions in Latin America as well as opening a dialogue and understanding about alternative religions among Latinas/os.



African Rhythms: Tango



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Tango is a combination of African, Cuban, and Spanish music. It started in the immigrant *barrios* (urban communities) of Buenos Aires, Argentina. It was developed as entertainment for men and as a pantomime of sexual behavior between man and woman.

The African contribution to tango involves the Cuban *habanera* and *milongo* musical forms and European rhythms and dances such as the fox-trot and the waltz. According

to Bill Matthiesen's article 'Tango Pulse', "Some historians believe it was a group of these *compraditos* imitating the athletic and improvisational movements of black *candombe* dancers, incorporating these movements into *milongas*, which created the first tangos in the late 1870s." An article by Lasonanta states that, "The 1988 Diccionario Enciclopédico, compiled by José Blas Vega and Manuel Ríos Ruiz, claim that the word 'tangos' is derived from the onomatopoeia 'tang', meaning 'sound

of the drum' being one of the rhythmic characteristics of the tango. In some parts of South America 'tangosa' refers to African slaves dancing to the beat of the drums, potentially confirming the influence of African rhythms to tango." Tango along with its flutes,

became known in cafes, bars, and the streets, eventually making it to bars and pool halls. "In the bordellos and small cafes, tangos might be played by a solo pianist, or perhaps a duo or trio" (Matthiesen: 'Tango Pulse').

"In some parts of South America 'tangosa' refers to African slaves dancing to the beat of the drums, potentially confirming the influence of African rhythms to tango."

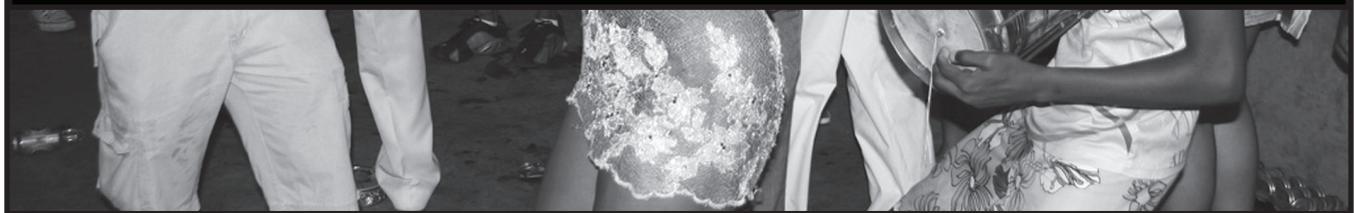
guitars, violins, harps, and clarinets were joined by mandolins and accordions. Tango singers stepped in to give the movements of the dance more meaning and emotion. The dance

Europe embraced Tango in the 1900s, spreading to Paris, then in England, Spain, and Italy. Tango then reached the United States in the 1930s.





African Rhythms: Samba



Samba began over a hundred years ago with tambourines and clap beats in the cities of Bahía and Río de Janeiro – a mixture of Indigenous European/Portuguese, and African rhythms. The indigenous peoples of the region used reed flutes while Africans, brought as slaves, used drums. Samba has three roles: sing, dance, and parade. The most enjoyable kind of samba was the batucada, which is made up of hundreds of percussionists and has a style of polyrhythmic drumming. According to Shirley Vieira's article 'Brazilian Rhythms,' "Urban concentration areas fermented the appearance of popular nightclubs, called gafieiras, which produced their own style of samba- the samba-choro or gafieira samba, in the 30s, the samba de breque came around with pauses (breaks)

in the song filled in with rap-like speeches, helping crystallize the gangster persona (*O Malandro*) created by Moreira da Silva, as well as the sub-genre *samba-cancao* or *samba-tune*." The *bossa nova*, a fairly new style of samba, was influenced by American jazz.

Timothy Collins wrote on 'Ezine Articles' that "Brazilian music includes the soft sounds of *bossa nova*, the driving beat of samba and other rhythms based on percussion instruments and hand clapping." Axe music is a mixture of Caribbean and African rhythms with a twist of pop-rock formed around the 1950s. In the Afro-Brazilian religions of Candomblé and Umbanda, it's also a ritual greeting. "Along with the Trío musical movements, Afro-Brazilian *blocos* (block)

(a gathering of percussionists that parade during Carnival) blossomed... They would play African rhythms like *ijexa*, Brazilian rhythms like *maracatu* and samba (with the same instruments used at samba schools in Rio) and

Caribbean styles like merengue."

The style of samba reggae was brought by the blocos by mixing samba rhythms with reggae, salsa, and merengue.

by Alexei Barrionuevo, *The New York Times*



Off Runway, Brazilian Beauty Goes **Beyond Blond**

João Pina for The New York Times

Alisson Chornak, who combs Brazil for potential models, photographed Eduarda Waholtz, 15, at her school in Paraíso do Sul.

RESTINGA SÉCA, Brazil — Before setting out in a pink S.U.V. to comb the schoolyards and shopping malls of southern Brazil, Alisson Chornak studies books, maps and Web sites to understand how the towns were colonized and how European their residents might look today.

The goal, he and other model scouts say, is to find the right genetic cocktail of German and Italian ancestry, perhaps with some Russian or other Slavic blood thrown in. Such a mix, they say, helps produce the tall, thin girls with straight

hair, fair skin and light eyes that Brazil exports to the runways of New York, Milan and Paris with stunning success.

Yet Brazil is not the same country it was in 1994, when Gisele Bündchen, the world's top earning model, was discovered in a tiny town not far from here. Darker-skinned women have become more prominent in Brazilian society, challenging the notions of Brazilian beauty and success that Ms. Bündchen has come to represent here and abroad.

Taís Araújo just finished a run as the first black female lead in the coveted 8 p.m. soap opera slot. Marina Silva, a former government minister born in the Amazon, is running for president. And over the past decade, the income of black Brazilians rose by about 40 percent, more than double the rate of whites, as Brazil's booming economy helped trim the inequality gap and create a more powerful black consumer class, said Marcelo Neri, an economist in Rio de Janeiro.

Even prosecutors have waded into the debate over what Brazilian society looks like — and how it should be represented. São Paulo Fashion Week, the nation's most important fashion event, has been forced by local prosecutors to ensure that at least 10 percent of its models are of African or indigenous descent.

Despite those shifts, more than half of Brazil's models continue to be found here among the tiny farms of Rio Grande do Sul, a state that has only one-twentieth of the nation's population and was colonized predominantly by Germans and Italians.

Indeed, scouts say that more than 70 percent of the country's models come from three southern states that hardly reflect the multiethnic melting pot that is Brazil, where more than half the population is nonwhite.

On the pages of its magazines, Brazil's beauty spectrum is clearer. Nonwhite women, including celebrities of varying body types, are interspersed with white models. But on the runways, the proving ground for models hoping to go abroad, the diversity drops

off precipitously. Prosecutors investigating discrimination complaints against São Paulo Fashion Week found that only 28 of the event's 1,128 models were black in early 2008.

The pattern creates a disconnect between what many Brazilians consider beautiful and the beauty they export overseas. While darker-skinned actresses like Juliana Paes and Camila Pitanga are considered among Brazil's sexiest, it is Ms. Bündchen and her fellow southerners who win fame abroad.

"I was always perplexed that Brazil was never able to export a Naomi Campbell, and it is definitely not because of a lack of pretty women," said Erika Palomino, a fashion consultant in São Paulo. "It is embarrassing."

Some scouts have begun tepid forays to less-white parts of Brazil. One Brazilian designer, Walter Rodrigues, recently opened Rio Fashion Week with 25 models, all of them black.

But here in the south scouts still spend most of their time hunting for the next Gisele, and offer few apologies for what they say sells.

Clóvis Pessoa studies facial traits that are successful on international runways and looks for towns in the south that mirror those genes.

"If a famous top model looks German with a Russian nose, I will do a scientific study and look for cities that were colonized by Germans and Russians in the south of Brazil in order to get a similar face down here," Mr. Pessoa said.

Dilson Stein, who discovered Ms. Bündchen when she was 13, called Rio Grande do Sul



Alisson Chornak, right, a model scout, and Michele Meurer, 16. Ms Meurer was discovered by a female scout as she rode her bicycle to school.

a treasure trove of model-worthy girls. A year before discovering Ms. Bündchen, whose parents are of German ancestry, he found 12-year-old Alessandra Ambrosio, now famous for her Victoria's Secret shoots.

Today, younger scouts like Mr. Chornak have taken up the mantle. With catlike quickness, he jumped from his chair and strode up behind a tall girl with a hooded sweatshirt. "Have you ever thought of being a model?" he asked a 13-year-old with light blue eyes and pimples.

The girl smiled, her metal braces glimmering.

Later, Mr. Chornak pulled up at a school where

the director, Liliane Abrão Silva, showed off albums from school beauty contests. She allows scouts to visit during class breaks.

"Since I got to this school, five have left for São Paulo to become models," she said. "The girls who do not have money to go to university will have to stay here and work in the fields."

The next morning, Mr. Chornak studied the girls returning with red lollipops from recess. "There is nothing special here," he declared.

At another stop, Mr. Chornak staked out a school in Paraíso do Sul (population 8,000) with the tools of his trade: business cards, camera,

measuring tape and a notebook.

The bell rang and students streamed out. Mr. Chornak stopped a tall, skinny blond girl. Within seconds he was fluffing her hair and taking her measurements, directing her to pose against the wall.

Mr. Chornak also drove to Venâncio Aires, where a billboard heralded “the land of the Fantastic Girl,” alluding to a television show that featured a local girl.

At a small tobacco farm he visited Michele Meurer, a blue-eyed 16-year-old discovered while riding her bicycle to school. Timid and shy, she cried profusely the first time she went to São Paulo. The next time, she lasted six days before Mr. Chornak sent her home.

Her mother, who grew up speaking German, had never left the town until the São Paulo trip. They live in a four-room house with chickens and dogs. Michele keeps the freezer in her room for lack of space.

Mr. Chornak counsels Michele to use sunscreen while working in the fields and to watch her diet. Bursting with pride, her father enrolled her in English classes in case she went abroad.

“I want to give them a better life,” Michele said tearfully of her parents.

Recently, she went to São Paulo again, where Mr. Chornak put her in a three-bedroom



Taís Araújo just finished a run as the first black female lead in the coveted 8 p.m. soap opera slot. Ms. Araújo, left, poses with Victor Wagner on the set of an earlier Brazilian soap opera, ‘Xica Da Silva.’

apartment with 11 other girls. Two weeks before São Paulo Fashion Week, Michele packed up and left.

“I am very disappointed that Michele gave up,” Mr. Chornak said. “I invested a lot in her.”

Myrna Domit contributed reporting.

by Elma Beatriz Rosado



Courage is man's most permanent value. Courage is the supreme virtue of man, and it is cultivated as a virtue is cultivated, and it can be lost as any virtue can be lost. Courage in an individual is a superior good. It is worth nothing to a man that he will be full of knowledge and of physical vitality if he lacks courage. It is worth nothing for a people to be full of vitality, and of wisdom if they lack courage. Only courage

The True Image of
Filiberto Ojeda Ríos
Sculpted in the Heart of the Puerto Rican Country



Dedicated to the compañeros in the struggle –Puerto Ricans and Cubans–, Rafael Varona (Fefel), Antonia Martínez Lagares, Ángel Luis Charbonier, Santiago Mari Pesquera, Arnaldo Darío Rosado, Carlos Enrique Soto Arriví, Carlos Muñiz Varela, Ángel Rodríguez Cristóbal, Orlando Canales Azpeitia, Filiberto Ojeda Ríos... and others who, like them, were assassinated by Injustice.

allows the transmutation of man for superior ends. Only courage allows man to tread firmly and serenely through the shadows of death, and when man treads firmly and serenely through the shadows of death, it is then that he enters immortality."

To become immortal there is only one entrance: through the door of courage, which leads to sacrifice for a superior cause. We have to make sacrifices for our nation's independence.

Pedro Albizu Campos I

Filiberto Ojeda Ríos worked tirelessly toward achieving Dignity for his Country. He reaffirmed the principle of legitimate struggle and denounced colonialism's vileness, basing his arguments on the United Nations resolutions: "The subjection of peoples to alien subjugation, domination, and exploitation constitutes a denial of fundamental human rights, is contrary to the Charter of the United Nations and is an impediment to the promotion of world peace and co-operation."²

The image of Filiberto Ojeda Ríos has been incessantly manipulated by the United States Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). The FBI has referred to Filiberto as a terrorist on a myriad of occasions, and has tried to portray him as an extremely negative person, resorting to defamation, in their constant attempts to criminalize the struggle of the Puerto Rican people for their independence.

Since the Sixties, Filiberto has been subjected to persecution by the FBI, in an all-out war. More than forty years passed, during which the FBI engaged in a merciless fight against him in their efforts to neutralize him and, concurrently, try to destroy his revolutionary ideas. On August 30, 1985, the FBI tried to assassinate him in his home in Luquillo. This fact was admitted in Court by one of the FBI agents, who declared, under oath, that he shot to kill. They failed, and from that moment on, a sentence, illegally articulated by the United States agency, had been signed: a bullet for Filiberto Ojeda Ríos. A sentence they enforced on September 23, 2005, when they finally assassinated him in the town of Hormigueros.

The FBI shot Filiberto and left him to bleed

to death, in a vile act of torture which made quite clear the United States government's viciousness, rancor, cruelty and insensitivity. This political assassination constitutes an extrajudicial execution which translates into an action of State Terrorism against the Puerto Rican people. Agents foreign to our Nation resort to political assassination in an effort to thwart the "live forces" of the Puerto Rican people, in their natural political trajectory.

The practice of casting shadows over Puerto Rican revolutionaries and patriots was unfittingly applied in Puerto Rico by the government of the United States since the 1930's, when their principal target was the Partido Nacionalista and Pedro Albizu Campos. This practice was executed with greater detail from 1960 onward, when the FBI resorted to grafting on to Puerto Rico their counterintelligence, or counterspy program, COINTELPRO, which had, as its primary objective, the disruption of the *independentista* movement and curtailing their activities. The directives specified in a memorandum sent to the FBI Office in San Juan, instructed the agents to focus their efforts on disruption and discord; on casting doubts on Puerto Ricans as to the wisdom of remaining in the *independentista* movement; and in causing defections within the *independentista* movement ranks.³

When there is a call to *independentistas* not to resort to armed struggle, there should also be a call to the State not to threaten or intervene through armed actions against those who struggle for independence. The United Nations has declared that, "All armed action or repressive measures of all kinds directed against dependent peoples shall cease in order

to enable them to exercise peacefully and freely their right to complete independence and the integrity of their national territory shall be respected.”⁴

Puerto Rico is in a different context than the rest of the world, because we are a colony subjugated by the United States. When a country such as the United States oppresses a People who are different from their national composition and executes extrajudicially the sons of this People, with the objective of preventing them, as a People, from assuming a destiny of liberty; those sons cannot renounce the right to defend themselves, to resist, and to fight for their homeland. It becomes necessary for them to confront those who threaten Puerto Ricans with the purpose of harming them. This is just what Filiberto did; confront those who threatened his brothers and sisters.

Filiberto was a revolutionary. He believed in the inalienable right of the people to liberty, to control their own destiny. The struggle for liberty was the maximum principle governing his life; he was not willing to renounce the use of any means in defending and protecting his country. In his revolutionary path, Filiberto fought through all means possible, excluding terrorism. His practice was one of Humanity, the cornerstone of his revolutionary formation. He constantly vowed that he would not allow the abuse of a Puerto Rican brother or sister, considering them as part of his own family.

Filiberto fought for his country's liberty. He defended himself and fought using numerous and varied mechanisms. He denounced Puerto Rico's colonial status at the United Nations Decolonization Committee Hearing in 1990; he

analyzed Puerto Rico's situation and explained his strategies, plans and projections through press communiqués, and in messages directed to his Puerto Rican brothers and sisters; he organized actions reaffirming the rights of the Puerto Rican people; he reaffirmed the bonds of solidarity with Caribbean and Latin American countries; he collaborated in the struggles for equality and human rights at the international level, even in the United States.

As part of his concept of struggle, he joined numerous campaigns and battles, being amongst the most prominent, his efforts to constitute the Frente Popular para la Salvación Nacional (National Salvation Popular Front). His concerns were, besides libertarian, of social justice. He was alarmed by the degradation of the environment, and advocated the conservation of natural resources, with a particular predilection for trees. His heart ached at seeing the lack of health options for Puerto Ricans, and he denounced the insensitivity of a health system embedded in rampant capitalism. He felt uneasy about the lack of housing, and advocated in favor of those with fewer economic resources, particularly, people living in public housing projects, and he expressed his indignation at the discrimination against them. He was concerned with the future of youth, who, had always had a special place in his heart, and he would tell them to study, and he encouraged and supported the demands made by the students' movements. The intervention of the United States armed forces in the recruitment of Puerto Ricans for their wars and teaching them to kill, corroded his soul, and he challenged, with his words and actions, those affronts. He was worried about the people's right to work, and warned about



<http://www.flickr.com/photos/venegas/4664463/>

the government's intentions of transforming Puerto Ricans into totally dependent beings. He expressed his solidarity with the just causes adopted by Puerto Rican labor unions and denounced the government's attempts at trying to strip the workers of their sense of pride in work. He would criticize the intolerance of some toward the religious sector; and he promoted the understanding of different spiritual manifestations, emphasizing non-discrimination. He was disturbed by the loss of Puerto Rican identity, and he joined national reaffirmation efforts, recognizing the initiatives and achievements of those who forged Puerto Rican culture. The fact that Puerto Ricans were kept in situations where they were deprived of their liberty caused him anguish, and he was constantly demanding their liberation;

in one case, interceding with Latin American movements, for the release of a Puerto Rican sister so that she would be allowed to return to her country; and he was also willing to be traded in exchange of Puerto Rican patriots jailed by the United States government, which would allow them to return to their homeland. Finally, he was always willing to give his life for his ideal. A life that was snatched from him mercilessly and with vileness.

Filiberto's actions are an example of his sense of Humanity, guided by his revolutionary conscience. In his strategy, he would not renounce armed struggle as a last resource, because in his understanding of Puerto Rico's colonial condition, he was not willing to renounce that same right that even the

United Nations General Assembly recognizes when it "reaffirms the legitimacy of the people's struggle for liberation from colonial and foreign domination and alien subjugation by all available means, including armed struggle".⁵

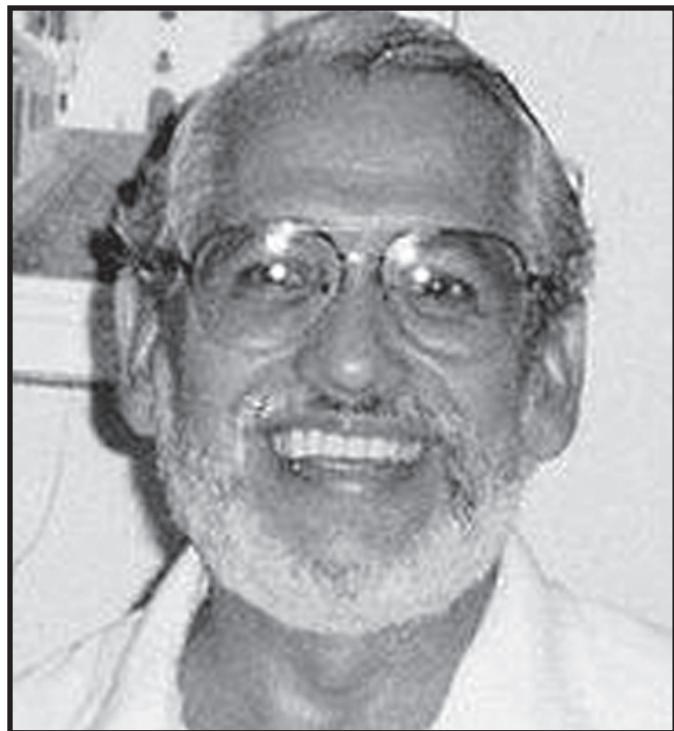
Filiberto resented being forced to opt for that mechanism, which he would never use against another Puerto Rican. Ironically, his assassination, perpetrated by foreign agents, and also foreign to the Puerto Rican homeland and idiosyncrasy, was assisted by Puerto Rican born *cipayos* (similar to lackeys; in our country, it means someone who follows another's opinion, and gets paid for his service, like a mercenary)



and demonstrated that the foreign American power would not mind the use of arms, and in a blind rage against him, would torture him to death. **The government of the United States has assassinated a Revolutionary.**

Clearly, and unequivocally, these criminal acts contravene the United Nations resolutions: "the continuation of colonialism and its manifestations... and the attempts of some colonial Powers to suppress national liberation movements by repressive activities and the use of armed force against colonial peoples are incompatible with the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples." Then, I ask, who is the terrorist? The image of Filiberto Ojeda Ríos will not be desecrated by the vile actions of an FBI commando foreign to our nation. Deep within the remote Barrio Charcas, in the municipality of Quebradillas, from within the heart of our countryside, Filiberto's face looms, sculpted by Puerto Rican hands, as homage to his struggle, and to denounce his assassination. The legendary password is validated: "Filiberto is in the heart of his people".

I would like to send *un abrazo*, a special greeting to our compañeros Carlos Alberto Torres, Oscar López Rivera, Avelino González Claudio, Fernando González, René González, Antonio Guerrero, Gerardo Hernández, and Ramón Labañino, our eight hermanos antillanos (a particular ancestral term which holds a very special meaning for the people of Puerto Rico



and Cuba), our brothers, who were unjustly incarcerated by the government of the United States. Some of our brothers have been in prison for more than eleven years, others 30 years. Their only crime: their struggle for a country free of colonialism and free of terrorism.

(Endnotes)

1 Partial translation from "Albizu Campos and the development of a Nationalist ideology, 1922-1932," by Dolores Stockton and Helffrich Austin, Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin, 1983. In <http://books.google.com/pr/books?id=H5BKAAAAMAAJ&dq=is+the+virtue+of+man+albizu+death+shadows> (accessed 17 March 2010).

2 United Nations General Assembly. "Declaration on the granting of independence to colonial countries and peoples." Resolution 1514 (XV) of the General Assembly, 14 December 1960.

3 United States Government - Federal Bureau of Investigation. Memorandum on "Groups seeking independence for Puerto Rico (Counterintelligence Program) Subversive Controls (San Juan)." Sent by SAC, New York to FBI Director, dated 15 November 1960.

4 United Nations General Assembly. "Declaration on the granting of independence to colonial countries and peoples." Resolution 1514 (XV) of the General Assembly, 14 December 1960.

5 United Nations General Assembly. "Importance of the universal realization of the right of peoples to self-determination and of the speedy granting of independence to colonial countries and peoples for the effective guarantee and observance of human rights." Resolution 3246 (XXIX) of the General Assembly, 29 November 1974.

6 United Nations General Assembly. "Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples." Resolution 2326 (XXII) of the General Assembly, 16 December 1967.

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