Accepted version.

Coming out Fall 2024 in

*APA Studies on Hispanic/Latino Issues in Philosophy*

Arango, Alejandro, and Adam Burgos. Forthcoming. “No Latinx Without Afro-Latinx: A Desideratum for Accounts of Latinidad.” *APA Studies on Hispanic/Latino Issues in Philosophy*

No Latinx Without Afro-Latinx: A Desideratum for Accounts of Latinidad

Alejandro Arango & Adam Burgos

## I. Introduction

The purpose of this essay is to articulate a specific desideratum for any theory of Latinidad, namely, that there is no adequate conception of Latinx without an attendant conception of Afro-Latinx.[[1]](#footnote-1) If the term ‘Latinx’is going to be retained as a meaningful category of social identity, it is essential that it include Afro-Latinx as a core element. It is essential, first, because to do so is historically and conceptually honest, and second, because this allows Latinidad and Latinx to be understood in their fullness rather than in ways that hide and exclude certain constituent elements.[[2]](#footnote-2) This articulation entails critical genealogical attention to the role of racist, antiblack, and colorist histories within the emergence and construction of Latinidad, up to the present and as an ongoing process.[[3]](#footnote-3) Those histories have excluded, sidelined, distorted, belittled, dwarfed, and otherwise rendered invisible or insignificant African-descended peoples and cultures and their participation and contributions in and to the construction and development of Latinx identity. In contrast, we seek to show that such excluded realities nevertheless remain defining features of Latinx, and remain so despite the exclusion but partly characterized by it.

In order to be reflective of those whom it purports to describe in the U.S. and elsewhere in the hemisphere, the term Latinx must be plastic enough to encompass the many internal differences, and even antagonisms, between its different constituent parts. Within it, we argue here in particular, it must include its Afro-descended history, which includes not just African-descended people but also a denial of the influences of African-descended culture writ large.

Our central claim here, then, is that a certain *African-descendedness* is constitutive of Latinidad in multiple registers, including history, cultural practices, and social identificatory processes despite Latinidad’s pernicious exclusionary history. We bring a specific argument to bear on, and with regard to that pernicious history: we draw and seek to understand an explicit link between Afro-Latinx and mestizaje.[[4]](#footnote-4) Briefly, mestizaje has historically been one of the most decisive ways in which Afro-Latinidad has been sidelined. Reclaiming and centering Afro-Latinx involves grappling with the role of mestizo identity, the ways it’s been understood and played out, in erasing it.[[5]](#footnote-5)

## II. Critical Genealogy

We are interested here in the historical constitution of present social realities. In describing our process as a critical genealogy, we focus on the ever-evolving historical repertoire of socially meaningful concepts associated with Latinidad for certain sets of peoples, as well as the array of actions available for and allowed to them That is, we are looking for the conditions that gave rise to what has emerged historically around the concepts and identities associated with Latinidad, as they developed socially, politically, etc.[[6]](#footnote-6) These are the overarching historical givens that at any particular moment structure action and events, the conditions immanent to historical reality, that are also nonetheless products of antecedent events and actions. We are asking: ‘What is the historical ontology –“not only ‘material’ objects but also classes, kinds of people, and, indeed, ideas…the coming into being of the very possibility of some objects”– that we find within Latinidad?’ (Hacking 2004, 2).

Bernard Harcourt, writing specifically about the importance of *critical* genealogy, advises, “Rather than sorting critical philosophers into these taxonomies [validating, debunking, problematizing, and possibilizing], arguing over the essence of their method, or asking us to take sides, I believe it would behoove us instead to conceive of the different types of genealogy rather as different modalities that we can draw upon in combination or serially, together or at different times, *to achieve the objective of critical philosophy, namely to augment and nourish our praxis*” (Harcourt 2022, 2). Harcourt focuses his conception of genealogy on whether or not it is useful for action, and whether that action is productive or unproductive (Harcourt 2022, 16–17). This is alongside the more traditional view of genealogy, which understands it to be doing the work of uncovering, demystifying, or problematizing concepts or objects through analysis of their historical unfolding (Harcourt 2022, 2), or of understanding the development of meanings (De la Cadena 2005, 263).

Such a focus on action is important for us because we recognize that it is not only how we understand concepts like Latinx that matter for the material realities and lives experiences of persons, but what we *do* with those concepts. Our understanding of concepts takes shape, pragmatically speaking in what we do, in our current practices. And since current social practices regarding Latinx and Afro-Latinx are continuously being decided and negotiated, there is a place to see how the available concepts and categories do the work of inclusion or exclusion, or contributing to personal and social identification or of alienating people. In this sense, critical genealogical work has an outlet of action and practice that we are interested in.

## III. From Inheritance and Imposition to Transformation

There are well known critiques of a whole host of concepts related to the very idea of Latin America, including Latinidad, Latinx, and mestizaje. The term “Latin America” itself originates in French usage. As Linda Martín Alcoff has pointed out, the terminology “Latin” was introduced by the French to demarcate French Catholic colonial territories from Anglo-Saxon ones (Alcoff 2005, 401–2). In the 1830s French economist Michel Chevalier was the first to use the term “Latin race” to refer to the people in the Americas. The term “Latin America” was first used in writing decades later by Chilean politician Francisco Bilbao at a conference in Paris. Finally, in 1856 an alliance was formed across “Latin America” in opposition to the U.S. recognizing William Walker’s regime in Nicaragua. From this very brief mapping of moments in which the term was mobilized, we can see it shift from European imposition to “local” usage and endorsement for political ends.[[7]](#footnote-7)

As such history clearly illustrates, these are all colonial terms, and we must grapple with their coloniality. We cannot simply reject them because of their unsavory history, a move that strikes us as an attempt to divest from an ineliminable historical connection to things. Our critical account begins with these histories and the details of their emergence in the crucible of colonialism, which must be reckoned with. That colonial context is antiblack and colorist, and non-European populations, African-descended and Indigenous, have been excluded from the construction of Latinidad (regarding colorism see Quiros and Araújo Dawson 2013). Those exclusions are the conditions of possibility for colonial conceptions of Latinidad and Latinx identity.

The history of the concept of Latinidad was built on drawing social and political distinctions relative to a center of whiteness, Europeanness or civilization. In that context, from enslavement and colonialism in the Americas and the creation of the very idea of Latin America; from the *criollos* to the adoption of a Pan-Latino identity against colonialism; to contemporary erasure of Afro-Latinx folks in the United States, African-descended peoples have been systematically excluded from definitions of Latinidad. A similar pattern appears when exploring the 20th century question of Afro-latinidad that interested many black intellectuals, for it takes place against the background of mestizaje (Hooker and Guridy 2018).

There are myriad figures whose work is illustrative of this history, though here we focus on only one of the most prominent figures in the construction of Latinidad, Simón Bolívar.[[8]](#footnote-8) Bolívar’s identifications first as *criollo* and then as *mestizo* in his Jamaica Letter and Angostura Address, respectively, shed light on the dynamics of identity construction of certain forms of anticolonialism, as he attempts to consolidate a new continental identity by excluding *both* Europeans and African-descended peoples, as well as distancing himself from any Indigenous populations.

In particular, the Angostura Address shifts to emphasize mestizaje as a solution to the problem of governing in the Americas without a shared nationality, people foreign in their own land: “We…do not even retain the vestiges of our original being. We are not Europeans; we are not Indians; we are but a mixed species of aborigines and Spaniards**.** Americans by birth and Europeans by law, we find ourselves engaged in a dual conflict: we are disputing with the natives for titles of ownership, and at the same time we are struggling to maintain ourselves in the country that gave us birth against the opposition of the invaders” (Bolívar 2004, 69). ‘We’ here means *criollos*: he rejects indigenous peoples and he leaves Africans and African-descended identity excluded entirely.

In this brief foray into Bolívar’s famous words we can already see what Alejandro Vallega calls the “abyssal truth” Bolívar is grappling with (Vallega 2014, 20) . Namely, that identity in the Americas will be marked by an essential “uprootedness” and “self-negation” that brings with it a “perpetual internal violence” (Vallega 2014, 21). The relation between identity-formation and violence is apparent in the development of mestizaje, to which we now turn.

## IV. Mestizaje

Any consideration of Latinx identity and the development of Latinidad must grapple with mestizaje, which, as the foregoing example of Bolívar illustrates, is intertwined with the place of its African influences. Linda Alcoff highlights the Spanish acceptance of mestizaje, though she is less forthcoming about the underside of that acceptance: the denial of Blackness as an acceptable part of Latinidad (Alcoff 2016). Even a text as potentially radical as Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera* has been read as excluding Black geographies from its analysis (Anzaldúa 2012). This is the idea that Anzaldúa’s alternative geography does not and cannot generalize, and must be read as a specifically Chicanx geography alongside an alternative Black geography.[[9]](#footnote-9) The two begin from different places and historical moments, and as such grapple with different particular problems. Ultimately, the Black geographies that are foundational for Anzaldúa’s Chicanx geography, due to the relationship between 1441 when the Portuguese first arrived in what we now call Senegal, Columbus’ arrival in the Caribbean in 1492, and the Spanish colonization of what we now call Mexico in the 16th and 17th centuries, are absent from her framework (Cahuas 2019; see also Talante 2020).

It is not only as a vector of antiblack racism that mestizaje has been criticized. In this very newsletter, in his “Letting Go of Mestizaje: Settler Colonialism and Latin American/Latinx Philosophy,” Julio Covarrubias argues that the concept itself is an instance of epistemic injustice against both Indigenous people as well as *“mestizos”* themselves (Covarrubias 2019, 4; emphasis his).[[10]](#footnote-10) His argument is that mestizaje as an identity and the idea of indigenismo that came along with it were products of colonial state-formation that on the one hand prioritized the integration and assimilation of Indigenous peoples in the name of national cohesion, and on the other hand treated Indigenous ways of life as static and frozen in the past. The result is an erasure of contemporary Indigeneity as well as a denial of Indigenous futures (Covarrubias 2019, 4). In the same vein, it is instructive to note that the erasure of African-descended realities – people, cultural practices – can be inscribed in the 20th century in the context of “the idea that race was not an important dimension of Latin American societies” (de la Fuente and Andrews 2018, 2). In the context of the “racial democracies” of the 19th and 20th centuries, the groups that made up societies in Latin America were seen by the powers of the state as social classes rather than other sorts of groups, some of which would clearly be races.

Additionally, Jared Sexton argues that the general discourse of multiracialism, of which mestizajeis surely a form, is itself a move to exclude Blackness. As he writes in *Amalgamation Schemes*, “impurity and hybridity, in and of themselves, are no guaranteed challenge to the racial orders of white supremacy and antiblackness–such are their conditions of possibility” (Sexton 2008, 35). At the very least, Sexton and Cahuas set some parameters of what any conception of *mestizaje* must live up to, and that our account of Afro-Latinidad hopes to reach.

Mestizaje is an important locus of our critical-genealogical approach, which aims is to provide an apt, epistemologically and ontologically anti-colonial version of a *constellation of mixings* that reflects the historical realities involved. Our positive proposal is that mestizaje and other hemispheric modes of racial mixture should be understood in a way that embraces not only their internal differences between their constituent parts but also the antagonisms (Miller 2005; Wade 2003; 2005; 2014; Lugones 2003b).

In charting this path we are aiming to address how the development of mestizaje has gone hand in hand with the erasure of any connection to Africa. This is a distinct, though parallel, wrong to the one that Covarrubias highlights, namely, that erasure of “contemporary Indigenous complexities…renders indigeneity no longer fluid or dynamic or coeval: to be Indigenous is to exist in the past” (Covarrubias 2019, 5). While indigeneity on his view is frozen and tied to the past by mestizaje, we are focused on how mestizaje has rendered its African-descendedness completely unseen or erased.

Accordingly, we understand mestizaje pragmatically to appreciate the cultural, linguistic, religious, etc. interconnections that occur under the umbrella of Latinidad, while avoiding any ontological commitments relating to purity and mixture. Indeed, as Sexton has also pointed out, “The general is *always already mixed*, if only because it inheres in a restless contradistinction to the particular as its most fundamental differential term” (Sexton 2008, 24). Or, in complementary fashion, as Marisol de la Cadena writes, “a multiplicity of meanings can be uttered through the same word, at the same time – yet mostly only some of them get to be heard” (De la Cadena 2005, 261). We reject, then, any logic of mixture that is dependent on purity, that is, on the mixing of supposed pure elements. According to our pragmatic approach, when someone is identified as Latinx, it is an identification based on a set of possibilities for action and understanding and grounded in the context in which the identification occurs, which includes realities such as power relations and histories of oppression. This is opposed to an approach focused merely on categorization that essentializes identities.

With that approach in mind, we highlight three paths forward for thinking through the transformation of mestizaje against its explicit anti black political and social history. First, Marisol de la Cadena, who develops a genealogy of the terms mestizo and mestizaje, argues that the terms are hybrid in multiple ways. She argues that in the different meanings of mestizaje some appear to be dominant, while others “circulate either marginally or cloaked under dominant meanings.” That exploration allows “to rescue mestizos from mestizaje – and thus challenge the conceptual politics (and the political activism) that all too simplistically, following a transitional teleology, purify mestizos away from indigeneity” (De la Cadena 2005, 262).[[11]](#footnote-11) For us, this means that the story of mestizaje is both its overarching political history of identity formation through exclusion, as well as the myriad ways that it is lived and negotiated in everyday life in very different ways in different places, as evidenced by Cadena’s recounting of her experience as a Peruvian encountering a Native American man in Arizona (De la Cadena 2005, 261).

Second, Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui offers an alternative to mestizaje through the aimara idea of *ch’ixi* (chehe), which may be translated as “motley” and points to the color seen as unified from a distance but that reveals its parts up-close: “the notion of *ch’ixi*, like many others (*allwa, anyi*), reflects the Aymara idea of something that is and is not at the same time. It is the logic of the included third” (Rivera Cusicanqui 2020, 65). What is *ch’ixi* has a potential of undifferentiation that can bring opposites together without combining them. *Ch’ixi* is not autonomous, it entails a type of heteronomy that “alludes… to the idea of muddling, to a loss of sustenance and energy… it is feeble and intermingled” (Rivera Cusicanqui 2020, 65). But, importantly, it is *not* hybrid. Rivera opposes what she calls the “hybridity lite” championed by scholars like Néstor García Canclini, a type of amphibian identity that one can use to “enter and leave modernity.” The mestizo type of existence, understood as *ch’ixi*, is for Rivera not the new product, a mixture of two things, that harmoniously preserves, in some form, its two components. Instead, *ch’ixi* lives in the “coexistence of multiple cultural differences that do not extinguish but instead antagonize and complement each other. Each one reproduces itself from the depths of the past and relates to others in a contentious way”(Rivera Cusicanqui 2020, 66).[[12]](#footnote-12)

Lastly, Maria Lugones argues that the logic of purity underlies our understanding of racial categories, and even of mestizaje when conceived as a certain type of mixture – the lazy metaphor of the melting pot. For Lugones, we should reject the logic of purity and replace it with curdling. She focuses on the type of dual personality that is produced by an ethnocentric and racist culture, one example of which is the Chicano, whom she describes as “the curdled or mestizo person” (Lugones 2003b, 134). Lugones argues against both assimilation and authenticity, each being a “mythical portrait” that actually obscures reality (Lugones 2003b, 136). Her response is to invoke “curdle-separation” as an embrace of heterogeneity and of not attempting to overcome any internal differentiation of the self. It “is not something that happens to us but something we do…in resistance to the logic of control, to the logic of purity” (Lugones 2003b, 144).

These three thinkers show us inventive ways to grapple with the complex history of mestizaje that in no way undermines facing up to the pernicious role that it has played in, on the one hand, the construction of Latinx identity, and on the other hand, simultaneously, the exclusion of Afro-Latinidad. Our treatment of mestizaje, hybridity, the motley and muddled and curdled, and ch’ixi is three-fold. First, it recognizes the historical and contemporary antiblack deployments of mestizaje, while insisting that they not be taken as definitional of the potential of mestizaje itself. Second, we contest the role of ‘purity’ in identity. A richer take on the cultural, ethnic, and racial hybridity of people in Latin America and their descendants in the U.S. is itself a breaking down of the seemingly clear lines that demarcate race and ethnicity which have been articulated as instances of some sort of purity. Following Sexton, all conceptions of purity are always already mixed. Finally, although it is an identity central to understanding of the Latin American and Latinx peoples, it need not necessarily be claimed as an identity by all individuals there even though it may be available to them.

The relationship of Latinidad with Afro-Latinidad has often been one of antagonism and exclusion, and yet also of coexistence that yields a motley landscape. Instead of shying away from the tensions, we invite the aforementioned three paths – a doubly hybrid mestizaje, the Aimara, high-Andean notion of ch’ixi, and the curdled – to help us understand the contentious motley that constitute Latinidad as a constellation of mixings.

## V. Afro-Latinx

The relationship between Afro-Latinx and mestizaje has been one of exclusion within, as we have seen. Often, the notion of mestizaje has been used to affect that exclusion, inextricably linking Afro-Latinidad and mestizaje. We have termed this excluded within *African-descendedness* to counteract the English-language word for Latinidad, Latinness. The importance of the choice is reflected in the fact that, although Afro-Latinx identity is usually applied to a Black Latinx person, phenotype and skin color do not exhaust the identity. The concept of Afro-Latinx exceeds the narrow meaning of race as phenotype or skin color, thus going beyond the identification of Afro-Latinidad and blackness. We are aiming here for a broader identity concept that allows for other elements to be part of the identity, and which may be context-sensitive, such that they may apply to people in different ways in different contexts.

In different contexts – whether New York City, Miami, Santo Domingo, or anywhere else – the vectors of meaning within which being Latinx operates are ever-shifting. Maria Lugones writes about navigating her experiences across different contexts in terms of “worlds.” She writes, “In describing my sense of a ‘world,’ I am offering a description of experience, something that is true to experience even if it is ontologically problematic” (Lugones 2003a, 89). Ontology is generally thought of as being or not being. Applied to personality traits or to individuals, the thought is that we are a thing or we are not a thing – we have an attribute or we do not. Against this, Lugones is writing of her experience of being *both*, of being and not being something, here the example being a stereotypical Latina as opposed to simply being a Latina. In that way, she inhabits multiple worlds, and has to navigate moving between them. Her real lived experience, then, runs counter to the ontological entreaty to be or to not be. Her distinction between the experiential and the ontological is helpful here. It highlights the fact that there are often tensions between individual experiences and the overarching, historically constructed concepts like Latinx or Afro-Latinx, such that the latter can never fully inhabit or manifest the former. As a result, some behaviors or self-conceptions can seem ethically puzzling or performatively problematic, or ontologically problematic as Lugones describes.

Latinidad has erased or excluded Blackness, both politically and conceptually, which underscores the necessity of grappling with antiblackness in any attempt to understand Latinidad, and with it, to illuminate the options of jettisoning or retaining it. But it should also underscore the fact that there is no way to separate Latinidad from its links to Blackness. From the very beginning, both historically and conceptually, articulations of Latinidad and of Latin America have grappled with being “Afro.” The Afro in Afro-Latinidad has functioned as a constitutive outside, denied repeatedly, both explicitly and implicitly, yet always present and determining the content of Latinidad.

Eric Bayruns García has outlined how certain situations demand the use of Afro-Latinx in certain contexts where its use brings additional explanatory power that either Latinx or black or, e.g. Dominican do not. One way of framing the issue is that, given the Blackness doesn’t exhaust either the concepts at hand or the experiences of those who navigate those concepts, and neither does Latinidad. He writes, “even if ‘Afro-Latinx’ is more apt in certain cases because it yields subjects understanding that ‘Latinx’ does not, ‘Latinx’ will still be apt in many, if not more, cases because “Latinx” will yield understanding that ‘Afro-Latinx’ does not similarly yield. A basic idea here is that whether an identity term is apt will depend on the event, episode or portion of social reality that a subject seeks to explain and thus understand” (Bayruns García Forthcoming).

## VI. Distinguishing Concept and Identity

An important upshot in arguing for the centrality – indeed, the indispensability – of Afro-Latinx for any conception of Latinx, is a distinction between concept and identity, and so our analysis operates on those two distinct levels. At the macro level, we find the history of what we now call the Americas, including its violent colonization and the collision, asymmetrical in nature, between its pre-Columbian Indigenous inhabitants, European colonizers, and the enslaved Africans and their descendants’ subjection to discrimination and oppression. Here we find the discourses circulating over time that give us our inherited conceptualizations of race, place, and ethnicity, including the concepts of Latin America and of Latinindad, and more recently of Latinx.

At the micro level, we find the multitude of lived experiences of individuals and collectives throughout the hemisphere, experiences that are not always clean fits within the black/white binary but that are often made to be understood in relation to it nonetheless.[[13]](#footnote-13) Sometimes white/non-white and black/non-black binaries enter the explanatory picture. Time and place determine to some degree which explanatory frame is given and whether or not multiple frames of reference come into conflict.

At the conceptual level, we affirm Latinidad as having always been Afro-Latinidad, a claim that means at least two things. First, the cultural history of Latinidad is incoherent and impossible to understand separate from its connection to African-descended peoples and practices.[[14]](#footnote-14) Second, it means a normative call to be accountable for the racist and colonial dimensions of inheriting the history within Latinx identity, and to move forward rejecting that dimension.

Shifting from the level of concept to the level of identity there is also an additional thing that it emphatically does *not* mean. In terms of an individual’s social identity, it does not mean that nonblack Latinxs are now to be considered Black. In other words, a white Latinx person does not become an Afro-Latinx person. Yet what it does mean is that Latinx folks, of any race or ethnicity, or any combination thereof, in understanding themselves as being predicated of the concept of Latinx, exist in relation to the African-descended history we have written of here.

This is not a wholly *racial* claim, but a claim about the centrality of African-descended influence in the construction of the concepts of Latinidad and Latinx. Normatively, it is incumbent upon Latinxs to understand and grapple with this history in much the same way it is for white North Americans to grapple with the legacies of racism that structure the worlds in which they live.

There are many texts to look to, and stories to tell, that articulate the meaning of being Afro-Latinx from within, and that highlight its plurality. That path leads to particular narratives of navigating the complexities of what is often thought of as the racial paradoxes of Latinidad (Jones 2021, 425). Pablo “Yoruba” Guzmán, one of the founding members of the radical Puerto Rican group the Young Lords Party in New York City, gives voice to this complexity when he recounts the group’s coming into being. He writes,

“Even in New York, we found that on a grass-roots level a high degree of racism existed between Puerto Ricans and Blacks, and between light-skinned and dark-skinned Puerto Ricans. We had to deal with this racism because it blocked any kind of growth for our people, any understanding of the things Black people had gone through. So, rather than watching Rap Brown on TV, rather than learning from that and saying, ‘Well, that should affect me too,’ Puerto Ricans said, ‘Well, yeah, those Blacks got a hard time, you know, but we ain’t going through the same thing.’ This was especially true for the light-skinned Puerto Ricans. Puerto Ricans like myself, who are darker-skinned, who look like Afro-Americans, couldn’t do that, ’cause to do that would be to escape into a kind of fantasy. Because before people called me a spic, they called me a n\*\*\*\*r. So that was, like, one reason as to why we felt the Young Lords Party should exist” (Young Lords Party 1971, 68).

Guzmán’s forceful articulation, in the YLP newspaper, of the seeming paradox of thinking Black alongside Latinidad – of thinking Afro-Latinx identity – also points the way toward its possible overcoming.

## VII. Remaining Tensions

Rather than arguing that the concept of Latinx can *overcome, outgrow* these colonial and antiblack histories, the aim of our larger project, of which this essay is one of the building blocks, is to re-articulate the meaning of Latinx through critical analysis of the role of antiblack racism in the construction of Latinidad, and outline the ways that Afro-Latinidad is lived, felt, and experienced by Afro-Latinx people.

One’s social identity has an undeniable subjective element, albeit one that exists within a public and historical context.[[15]](#footnote-15) It is therefore central that any understanding of being Latinx does not erase the identity of those who understand themselves as both Latin and Black. Rather, the social identity Latinx does not require the rejection or replacement of other social identities. It is an explanatory requirement that our proposal can articulate that some Latinx folks see themselves as belonging to certain racial or ethnic groups or subgroups while Latinidad itself is neither a race nor an ethnicity.[[16]](#footnote-16) In this sense, Latinidad as currently lived by many Latinx folks remains significantly racist, while Latinidad is lived by many Afro-Latinx folks as part of their identity (Hordge-Freeman and Veras 2020).

Consider the case of the famous Cuban singer Celia Cruz, as told by Frances Negrón Muntaner: “Given [Celia’s] ‘undistinguished’ class origins and membership in a racial and ethnic group rarely afforded the dignity of individuality, Celia’s shoes insisted on her uniqueness as a person and a performer” (Negrón-Muntaner 2007, 67). It is worth noticing here the individual performance of someone who cannot only be said to have thought of themselves as Latin American, yet understands that given her racial and ethnic background she must act in certain ways. Shoes, for her, afforded a type of distinction that was perceived as cutting across class and race.

Cruz directs us to how Latinidad extends beyond the visual into perceptual practices. But the fact of visual racial identification is not eliminated, instead being provided for by the affordances of Latinidad. Cultural mestizaje in Latin America, and in Latinx populations more broadly, is inconceivable without its African heritage: in food, in clothing, in music, in dancing, in spoken language, and in innumerable other folkways. Accordingly, the perceptual practices linked to the wide cultural backgrounds of Latinx folks are partly non-visual. As Latinidad was being constructed in ways that explicitly excluded Indigenous and African peoples, that construction was being done using practices from those very populations being excluded and whose relation to those practices were then being effaced. Here we can think of religion, music, food, etc., which we can easily see today as making up various aspects of different Latinx cultures. The content of Latinidad was, upon inspection, thoroughly Afro and Indigenous, even as that link was being disavowed. Here, we focus on the African-descendedness of Latinidad is not only racial or phenotypical, but more broadly cultural as well.

## VIII. Conclusion

We understand Latinidad in terms of a constellation of mixture that on the one hand calls into question any logic of purity and on the other hand makes explicitly its inheritance of *African-descendedness*, including practices surrounding food, music, and religion, to name a few, that define in large part the hybridity of Latinx folks. Latinidad is undeniably Afro-descendant. To insist on the necessity of Afro-Latinx within any articulation of Latinx is not to imply that other identities are not also at play. Be they class, sex, gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, or disability status, they are each also at play, with their specific social pragmatics. Myriad racial and ethnic categories are always at play in the lives of Latinx folks, while Latinidad itself has been constructed through interaction with those categories. This means that racial and ethnic categories are sometimes part of what being Latinx means for some, perhaps not for others. By the same token, to say that Afro-Latinx is at the heart of Latinx, when thought of at the level of persons, means that for some persons the Afro- dimension comes to infuse their social identity in a particular way.

Latinidad must be understood as a concept and an identity perpetually in tension with itself due to its political history. That tension cannot be resolved or overcome, but demands a response, which we argue must be anti-antiblack and, in a more general sense, must oppose Afro-descended exclusion, thus pointing toward the possibility of solidarity across Latinx populations, Afro-Latinx and non-Afro-Latinx. It must also acknowledge and affirm the ineliminable *co-constitutive* presences within Latinidad of a foundational African relation, and its denial down through the generations.

**References**

Abreu, Christina D. 2015. *Rhythms of Race: Cuban Musicians and the Making of Latino New York City and Miami, 1940-1960*. 1st edition. Envisioning Cuba. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.

Alcoff, Linda Martín. 2005. “Latino vs. Hispanic: The Politics of Ethnic Names.” *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 31 (4): 395–407. https://doi.org/10.1177/0191453705052972.

———, ed. 2016. “On Being Mixed.” In *Philosophy and the Mixed Race Experience*. Lanham: Lexington Books.

Anzaldúa, Gloria. 2012. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books.

Arango, Alejandro, and Adam Burgos. 2022. “Neither Race nor Ethnicity: Latinidad as a Social Affordance.” *Journal of Social Philosophy*, December, josp.12500. https://doi.org/10.1111/josp.12500.

———. 2023. “The Social Identity Affordance View: A Theory of Social Identities.” *The Southern Journal of Philosophy*, October, sjp.12542. https://doi.org/10.1111/sjp.12542.

Bayruns García, Eric. Forthcoming. “Afro-Latinx, Hispanic and Latinx Identity: Understanding the Americas.” *Critical Philosophy of Race*.

Bolívar, Simón. 2004. “Address Delivered at the Inauguration of the Second National Congress of Venezuela at Angostura.” In *Latin American Philosophy for the 21st Century: The Human Condition, Values, and the Search for Identity*, 67–71. Amherst, N.Y: Prometheus Books.

Cahuas, Madelaine. 2019. “Interrogating Absences In Latinx Theory And Placing Blackness In Latinx Geographical Thought: A Critical Reflection.” 2019. https://www.societyandspace.org/articles/interrogating-absences-in-latinx-theory-and-placing-blackness-in-latinx-geographical-thought-a-critical-reflection.

Covarrubias, Julio. 2019. “Letting Go of Mestizaje: Settler Colonialism and Latin American/Latinx Philosophy.” *APA Newsletter: Hispanic/Latino Issues in Philosophy* 18 (2): 4–8.

De la Cadena, Marisol. 2005. “Are Mestizos Hybrids? The Conceptual Politics of Andean Identities.” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 37 (2): 259–84. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022216X05009004.

Feldman, Heidi Carolyn. 2006. *Black Rhythms of Peru: Reviving African Musical Heritage in the Black Pacific*. Music/Culture. Middletown, Conn: Wesleyan University Press.

Fernández Retamar, Roberto. 1989. *Caliban and Other Essays*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Flores, Juan. 2000. *From Bomba to Hip-Hop: Puerto Rican Culture and Latino Identity*. Popular Cultures, Everyday Lives. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

Fuente, Alejandro de la, and George Reid Andrews. 2018. “The Making of a Field: Afro-Latin American Studies.” In *Afro-Latin American Studies: An Introduction*, 1–24. Afro-Latin America. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316822883.

García-Peña, Lorgia. 2022. *Translating Blackness: Latinx Colonialities in Global Perspective*. Durham London: Duke University Press.

Hacking, Ian. 2004. *Historical Ontology*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Harcourt, Bernard E. 2022. “On Critical Genealogy: An Answer to the Question ‘What Good Is Genealogy for Praxis?’” *Columbia Public Law Research Paper* No. 14-706 (June). http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4147668.

Hooker, Juliet, and Frank Guridy. 2018. “Currents in Afro-Latin American Political and Social Thought.” In *Afro-Latin American Studies: An Introduction*, edited by Alejandro De La Fuente and George Reid Andrews, 1st ed., 179–221. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316822883.

Hordge-Freeman, Elizabeth, and Edlin Veras. 2020. “Out of the Shadows, into the Dark: Ethnoracial Dissonance and Identity Formation among Afro-Latinxs.” *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity* 6 (2): 146–60. https://doi.org/10.1177/2332649219829784.

Juncker, Kristine. 2014. *Afro-Cuban Religious Arts: Popular Expressions of Cultural Inheritance in Espiritismo and Santería*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida.

“Latinos and Colorism: Majority of U.S. Hispanics Say Skin Color Impacts Opportunity and Shapes Daily Life.” 2021. *Pew Research Center’s Hispanic Trends Project* (blog). November 4, 2021. https://www.pewresearch.org/hispanic/2021/11/04/majority-of-latinos-say-skin-color-impacts-opportunity-in-america-and-shapes-daily-life/.

López, Ian F. Haney. 2007. “‘A Nation of Minorities’: Race, Ethnicity, and Reactionary Colorblindness.” *Stanford Law Review* 59 (4): 985–1063.

Lugones, Maria. 2003a. “Playfulness, ‘World’-Traveling, and Loving Perception.” In *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes: Theorizing Coalition Against Multiple Oppressions*, 77–100. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.

———. 2003b. “Purity, Impurity, and Separation.” In *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes: Theorizing Coalition Against Multiple Oppressions*, 121–50. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.

[Mayes, April J. 2015. *The Mulatto Republic: Class, Race, and Dominican National Identity*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida.](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?Bav9G5)

Mignolo, Walter. 2005. *The Idea of Latin America*. Blackwell Manifestos. Malden, MA ; Oxford: Blackwell Pub.

Miller, Marilyn Grace. 2005. *Rise and Fall of the Cosmic Race: The Cult of Mestizaje in Latin America*. Austin, Tex.: University of Texas Press.

Nahwilet Meissner, Shelbi, and Kyle Whyte. 2020. “Theorizing Indigeneity, Gender, and Settler Colonialism.” In *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy of Race*, First issued in paperback, 152–67. Routledge Philosophy Companions. New York and London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.

Negrón-Muntaner, Frances. 2007. “Celia’s Shoes.” In *From Bananas to Buttocks*, edited by Myra Mendible, 95–116. University of Texas Press. https://doi.org/10.7560/714922-005.

Ortiz, Fernando. 2014. “The Human Factors of Cubanidad.” *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 4 (3): 455–80. <https://doi.org/10.14318/hau4.3.031b>.

[Paulino, Edward. 2016. *Dividing Hispaniola: The Dominican Republic’s Border Campaign against Haiti, 1930-1961*. Pitt Latin American Series. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?Bav9G5)

Quiros, Laura, and Beverly Araújo Dawson. 2013. “The Color Paradigm: The Impact of Colorism on the Racial Identity and Identification of Latinas.” *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment* 23 (3): 287–97. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10911359.2012.740342>.

[Ramírez, Dixa. 2018. *Colonial Phantoms: Belonging and Refusal in the Dominican Americas, from the 19th Century to the Present*. Nation of Nations. Immigrant History as American History. New York: New York University Press.](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?Bav9G5)

[Rappaport, Joanne. 2014. *The Disappearing Mestizo: Configuring Difference in the Colonial New Kingdom of Granada*. Durham: Duke University Press.](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?Bav9G5)

Rivera Cusicanqui, Silvia. 2020. *Ch’ixinakax Utxiwa: On Practices and Discourses of Decolonisation*. Translated by Molly Geidel. Critical South. Cambridge, UK ; Medford, MA: Polity.

Rodó, José Enrique. 1988. *Ariel*. Translated by Margaret Sayers Peden. 1st ed. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.

Sexton, Jared. 2008. *Amalgamation Schemes: Antiblackness and the Critique of Multiracialism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Smith, Daniel W. 2012. “The Conditions of the New.” In *Essays on Deleuze*, 235–55. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Srinivasan, Amia. 2019. “VII — Genealogy, Epistemology and Worldmaking.” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 119 (2): 127–56. https://doi.org/10.1093/arisoc/aoz009.

Talante, Julia. 2020. “Fungible Indigeneity and Blackness: On the Paradigmatic Domination of Borderlands Theory.” *Medium* (blog). November 4, 2020. https://juliatalante.medium.com/fungible-indigeneity-and-blackness-on-the-paradigmatic-domination-of-borderlands-theory-c4084fbfe919.

Tenorio-Trillo, Mauricio. 2020. *Latin America: The Allure and Power of an Idea*. Paperback edition. Chicago London: The University of Chicago Press.

Vallega, Alejandro A. 2014. *Latin American Philosophy from Identity to Radical Exteriority*. World Philosophies. Bloomington (Ind.): Indiana University Press.

Wade, Peter. 2003. “Repensando el mestizaje.” *Revista Colombiana de Antropología* 39 (January):273–96. https://doi.org/10.22380/2539472X.1243.

———. 2005. “Rethinking Mestizaje: Ideology and Lived Experience.” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 37 (2): 239–57. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022216X05008990.

———. 2014. “Race, Ethnicity, and Technologies of Belonging.” *Science, Technology, & Human Values* 39 (4): 587–96. https://doi.org/10.1177/0162243913516807.

Young Lords Party. 1971. *Palante: Young Lords Party*. Edited by Michael Jakob Abramson and Iris Morales. Chicago: Haymarket Books.

1. ‘Latinidad’ as a noun is a quality, property or condition that refers to a sociohistorical reality that attaches to persons, customs, objects, ideas, etc. ‘Latinx’, as an adjective, is an identity marker. To ascribe the term Latinx to someone, some thing, etc. is to claim that it partakes of Latinidad. Linking Latinx and Latinidad in this way allows us to make a broader claim than one simply about Latinx, as it most often refers to persons. Not only, then, “no Latinx without Afro-Latinx,” we also want to say “no Latinidad without Afro-Latinidad.” As such, we use both Latinx and Latinidad throughout, alternating when context demands. We, too, are not litigating the x of Latinx and accept it as is. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. This essay is part of the development of our monograph-in-progress, *From Latinidad to Latinidades: The Radical Plurality of a Social Identity* (see also Arango and Burgos 2022; 2023 for other elements of our under-development study of Latinidad). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See, e.g., *Pew Research Center,* 2021, report on *Latinos and Colorism* (“Latinos and Colorism: Majority of U.S. Hispanics Say Skin Color Impacts Opportunity and Shapes Daily Life” 2021). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Latinx is to Latinidad as mestizo is to mestizaje. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. There are many examples of analyses that bring these exclusionary manifestations of mestizaje to the fore [(see, e.g., Ramírez 2018; Mayes 2015; Paulino 2016; Rappaport 2014; Covarrubias 2019; Abreu 2015; Miller 2005; Talante 2020)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?aISxGH). We discuss some of these in more detail below. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. It may be helpful here to think of our methodology in terms of Deleuze’s reception of Kant. Deleuze transposed Kant’s quest for the (transcendental) conditions of possible experience to the (immanent) conditions of real experience. We understand critical genealogy to be providing something like the conditions, immanent in the historical constitution of the present, for real experience, action, and decision making at both the individual and collective level. See Daniel W. Smith, “The Conditions of the New” (Smith 2012). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. See Walter Mignolo, *The Idea of Latin America* and Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo, *Latin America: The Allure and Power of an Idea* (Mignolo 2005; Tenorio-Trillo 2020). The notion of Indigeneity is entangled with colonialism in similar fashion (Nahwilet Meissner and Whyte 2020). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. We could speak as well, for example, of Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, José Martí, Samuel Ramos, José Vasconcelos, José Mariátegui, and others. The dialectic between José Enrique Rodó’s influential *Ariel* and Roberto Fernández Retamar’s *Calibán* is another (Rodó 1988; Fernández Retamar 1989). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. For a proposal that articulates and centers such a geography see *Translating Blackness* (García-Peña 2022). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. For the relationship between genealogy and epistemic standing see Amia Srinivasan’s “Genealogy, Epistemology and Worldmaking” (Srinivasan 2019). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. The complexities of Latinidad relate in a variety of ways to the drawing of racial lines, which can play out very differently given changes in context. There is the familiar black/white binary. There is also a (i) black/non-black binary, as well as a (ii) white/non-white binary. All three can make sense as the explanatory framework for understanding a given context. Furthermore, again central to the subject of Latin America and Latinidad, (i) indigenous people are distinct from black people, and not all mestizos are black. In (ii) some mestizos are white, but certainly all indigenous people aren’t white. Lastly, of course, these different ways of carving up the racial polarities of a given situation can come into conflict. A fuller articulation of these different binaries is not possible here. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Similar to Rivera Cusicanqui’s notion of *ch’ixi* is Fernando Ortiz’ argument that *ajiaco* – a stew-like dish that receives different names across the Caribbean – offers a rich analogy for understanding the diverse composition of the Cuban people. He writes, “Being an ajiaco, its people is not a finished stew, but rather a constant cooking. From the dawn of its history until the hours that now scurry by, the pot of Cuba has always known the renewing entrance of exogenous roots, fruits, and meats, an incessant gush of heterogeneous substances. This is why the composition is changed and cubanidad has a different flavor and consistency depending on whether it is scooped from the bottom, from the fat belly of the pot, or from its mouth, where the vegetables are still raw and the clear broth bubbles” (Ortiz 2014, 463). We thank Sergio Gallegos for this suggestion. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. In our view, social identities are embodied pragmatic realities to be investigated in actual social life, where historical and political dimensions are central and in which lived experience is listened to, without reducing social identities to those experiences. This is a deflationary view open to the plasticity and multidimensionality of social identities. Our broader view on social identities, including those under the umbrella of Latinidad, is articulated using the notion of social affordances: a possibility for action or interaction within a given social niche, where such possibility is prompted and constrained (but not fully defined) by the objective, perceivable reality of a thing (a person, a ritual, etc.), while also being partly defined by the properties of the thing relative to the perceiver or agent (for a fuller sense of our view of both social identities in general and of Latinidad in particular see Arango and Burgos 2022; 2023). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. There are many studies exploring the African-descended contributions to the culture of the region. Those attempts have been well documented, focusing “on black religion, dance, linguistics, and other cultural forms, or on community studies” (de la Fuente and Andrews 2018, 6), too many to list here (see, e.g., Juncker 2014; Feldman 2006; Abreu 2015; Flores 2000)**.** One example that the reader may find illustrative is the history of tango. Its connections with African rhythms and its long path to being adopted by many as a symbol of Argentinidad are explored by Marylin Grace Miller (Miller 2005, chapter 3, Tango in Black and White). According to Alejandro de la Fuente and George Reid Andrews, historically these studies largely “left aside questions of racial inequality or discrimination, largely accepting the argument that Latin America’s historical experience of racial and cultural mixture had eliminated racism and prejudice and produced societies that offered equal opportunity to all” (de la Fuente and Andrews 2018, 6). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Our central group identity concept is that of *social identity* (see our Arango and Burgos, 2023, for a detailed presentation). A few relevant points from our approach at this point are the following: first, social identities encompass both a subjective and a public aspect, and as such they carry elements of both self-conception and identification by others. Second, both aspects are contextual. The public meaning of a social identity is a function of a given social, cultural and historical situation. On the subjective side, different persons can interpret the subjective aspects of a social identity differently, even in the same social context. Third, there is a feedback loop between the subjective and the public aspects. Public understandings shape self-understanding, and a person can influence (to a limited extent) the way they are perceived by others. It is worth noting that our view does aim at providing criteria for determining who counts or does not count as Afro-latinx. An important reason is that, consistent with our view of social identities, social identification is fluid, multifaceted, and context-dependent. Additionally, our treatment of Afro-Latinidad is also about the category itself, not only about the individuals. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. This does not entail that Latinidad is ‘colorblind,’ that there are no racial dynamics at play, just that Latinx itself is not a race or an ethnicity.. A critical approach to Afro-Latinidad must distance itself from the trend that Ian Haney López has theorized as *reactionary colorblindness,* which would reject the social reality of race, in some cases replaced by a multiplicity of ethnicities (López 2007, 990). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)