From Cuba to the Guianas and across every inflection which language confers on the chosen tongue of each territory, this style of performance is evident and travels whenever this island people, and those islanded on the mainland, migrate without any loss of innocence to forge exotic and subversive enclaves in cities whose prestige once made them certain of their names. London, Paris, New York, Amsterdam. These are the Caribbean external frontiers.

George Lamming

Caribbean Diaspora and Return

Caribbean peoples are considered an "exemplary case of a cultural diaspora." In his overview of the history and typology of "global diasporas," Robin Cohen identifies the Caribbean and its scattered emigrant and exile populations as privileged sites for the study of contemporary diasporic life under globalization. Culture and cultural change make up the dimension of collective experience that distinguishes modern-day Caribbean migratory processes from those primarily marked off by relations of trade, victimization, imperial, labor or religious relations between homelands and countries of destination. In this view, it is cultural dynamics that define the content of Caribbean diasporic life first of all because of the common African descent of its populations and Afro-Atlantic moorings of their cultural histories, that is, "being phenotypically African and being conscious of racism."

The Caribbean region and its peoples are thus a site of diasporic formation throughout its history. Beyond that Afro-diasporic foundation, and thinking of the modern Caribbean and its new migrant communities in Europe and North America, the Caribbean is a quintessential "cultural diaspora" because of the ample evidence of "cultural retentions or affirmations of an African identity, ... a literal or symbolic interest in 'return,' ... cultural artifacts, products and expressions that show shared concerns and cross-influences between African, the Caribbean and the destination countries of Caribbean
European colonization and the African slave trade. The latter involuntary migration was of greatest consequence, as it was formative of the culture of the entire region and made of it a central component of the African diaspora, or the Black Atlantic. The constant scattering of Caribbean peoples throughout their history, and the resultant multiple layers of colonial and neo-colonial rule, have made for extensions and reinventions of the African diaspora and at the same time new, nationally and regionally formed diasporas, primarily in Europe, North, Central and South America, and within the region itself.

This two-tier phenomenon of new diasporas spawned of a formative colonization is unique to, or at least strongly characteristic of, the Caribbean, as is the passage from an extended epoch marked by European colonialism to a subsequent one under the dominion of the United States. Each of those colonial epochs generated major diasporic formations, especially in England until the end of World War II, and in the United States and Canada since the mid-twentieth century. The experience of intense racism in those metropolitan centers and the real and imagined “return” to Afro-Caribbean homelands make for the special content of the lived reality of that transnational imaginary. The complex, mutually enriching relations forged with other non-white diasporas in England, and with African Americans and fellow Caribbean peoples in the United States, become a significant component of the cultural reimaginings introduced into Caribbean life, especially in the period since formal independence. These latter ties, and the spanning of the Caribbean into Central and the northern rim of South America, are what led Orlando Patterson to identify the Caribbean as the hub of what he calls the “emerging West Atlantic system.”

These qualities issuing from an analysis of the Anglophone countries are paradigmatic for the Caribbean as a whole, such that the “West Indies,” the Antilles, and the Caribbean often appear virtually coterminous in the public mind and in much of the research on migration and “homecoming.” There has been some important work on the Francophone Antilles transnational experience, notably that of Nina Glick-Schiller and Michel Laguerre on the Haitian diaspora and its links to homeland politics. Generally, Haiti, Martinique, Guadaloupe and other Francophone examples are treated as closely analogous to the Anglophone experience with its strong African presence and ongoing colonial and cultural links to the European metropolis.

It is the Hispanic Caribbean, “las Antillas,” the second most studied instance of Caribbean cultural reimaginings after the English-speaking, which is most often seen as running askew of the more general regional paradigm. Representatively, in mapping his new “migration systems” Patterson separates the “Afro-Caribbean societies” (meaning the West Indies) from what he calls the “insular and south Caribbean Latin societies.” Similarly, in their important co-edited volume Caribbean Life in New York City (1987), Constance R. Sutton and Elsa M. Chaney divide their case studies into two distinct sections, “Afro-Caribbean” and “Hispanic Caribbean.” Similar cases abound and, aside from the differentiation in language culture, the issue is clearly about the designation “Afro-.” For in the view of many Caribbeans, and as articulated in cultural self-definitions as well, the Spanish-speaking Caribbean countries have more trouble with the African background, and with blackness, than the rest of the region. It is also clear that this real or perceived difference has its effect on the diasporic experience, and as regards the baggage and reception of cultural remittances on their re-entry into the home societies.

Before turning to the study of the cultural counterpart from Caribbean Latino diaspora enclaves back to the diverse island homelands, it is important to have a sense of the historical trajectory of Puerto Rican, Cuban, and Dominican life in the United States. Paralleling the intersections and divergences among the three national cultures and histories, the diaspora experiences of U.S. caribeco communities have witnessed both close bonds and sharp contrasts over the decades. At different historical periods one or the other of the groups has been of primary importance both in terms of its presence in and impact on the host society and its interaction with the home culture and politics. In broad terms, during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the Cuban community was the protagonist in that story; then for most of the twentieth century through the 1980s it was the Puerto Rican experience; and since the 1970s and into the new millennium Dominicans have come to take on an increasingly prominent place in U.S. Latino reality and its transnational relations. Taking a cue from the life of Davilata, a beloved Caribbean Latino musician from the early decades, let us trace some of the contours of that diaspora history. We can then return to consider the main lines of thinking about the longstanding “counterstream” that has accompanied that history, and especially its intense impact in our own times.

Islands and Enclaves in song

“Son tres” (The three sister islands)

La música de Borinquen, y la música cubana, y la quisqueyana,
[coro]: que sabe a ron, sabe a mild, sabe a caña
Que lindas son, que lindas son, las tres islas hermanas,
Por eso yo, por eso yo, las adoro con el alma
Lo leí lo leí, lo leí (etc.)
Es el tabaco cubano el mejor del universo,
Y el café de Puerto Rico no hablar mi hermano de eso
De Cuba es el son guajiro, de Puerto Rico la danza,
De Quisqueya es el merengué que a todo el mundo le encanta.
Fue en Cuba José Martí quien luchó su libertad,
Y Duarte fue por Quisqueya, y por Boriquen, quién será?
Son tres, son tres, las islas hermanas
Que las quiero ver, las quiero ver, las tres soberanas
Que no me quiero morir sin ver la unión antillana.

The music of Puerto Rico, and from Cuba, and from the Dominican Republic / [chorus]: it tastes like rum, tastes like honey, tastes like sugar cane / How beautiful they are, how beautiful, the three little sister islands / and that’s why I, that’s why I adore them with all my heart. / Cuban tobacco is the best in the whole universe, / and coffee from Puerto Rico, brother, let’s not even talk about that. / [chorus]. / From Cuba the son guajiro and from Puerto Rico la danza, and from Quisqueya the merengué that everyone loves. / [chorus]. / In Cuba it was José Martí who fought for its freedom, and Duarte was for Quisqueya, and for Borinquen, who will it be? / [chorus]. / And I want to see, want to see the three of them sovereign, / I don’t want to die without seeing the Antillean union.

Davilita sings “las Antillas”: “Son tres, las islas hermanas,” the three islands—Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic—are sisters, bound together in deep cultural and historical affinity. In his beautiful song of that title, the great Puerto Rican vocalist and composer Pedro Ortiz Dávila (“Davilita,” 1912–1986) evokes the distinctive flavors and rhythms of his Spanish Caribbean, “el Caribe hispano,” “las Antillas.” He sings adoringly of their physical beauty, their seductive music, and their world-renowned cigars and coffee, all to the delicious flavor (“sabor”) of rum, honey and sugar cane, whose praise he sings in the lilting refrain: “It tastes like rum, it tastes like honey, it tastes like sugarcane” (“sabe un ron, sabe un mel, sabe una caña”). Davilita also voices great pride in the three countries’ struggles for freedom, and in national leaders of the stature of José Martí and Juan Pablo Duarte. But, as we shall see, it is here, when he turns to the historical experiences of the Island sisters, that the seams in that sibling kinship begin to show, and the great singer’s adoration gives way to uncertainty, and the forceful proclamation of an unfulfilled political ideal.

Davilita was a Caribbean Latino, un caribeño. With all the heartfelt love he expresses for the islands, and though born in Puerto Rico, he spent nearly all of his adult life in El Barrio, New York, having arrived there at age 15 in 1927, and not returning to live in Puerto Rico until the 1950s. Through the 1930s and 1940s, the formative decades in the history of New York’s early Latino community, he established himself, and was widely recognized, as the premier vocalist in Puerto Rican music. Over his long and illustrious musical career, he recorded over 3,000 songs.

Shortly after his arrival in 1929, Davilita joined up with none other than the legendary composer and bandleader Rafael Hernández, and was lead voice in Hernández’s Trio Borinquen, renamed the Cuarteto Victoria, during the height of its immense international popularity. He also sang both chorus and lead with the variously named groups of Pedro Flores for many years, and was the first to record many of the historic compositions of both Rafael Hernández and Pedro Flores, two of the foremost composers in twentieth century Latin American music. His associations and achievements were boundless in the musical field of that period, and included collaboration with musicians of the magnitude and variety as Manuel Jiménez (“Canario”), Alberto Socorrás, Plácido Acvedo, Augusto Coén, Noro Morales and, after his return to Puerto Rico, Felipe Rodríguez (“La Vox”). Of exemplary note, his first recording, in 1930, was Rafael Hernández’s “Lamento Borincano,” and thanks to the prodging of Canario, Davilita entered history as the first to record that international anthem of the Latino migrant population, a composition that the author José Luis González considered the first protest song in the history of Latin American popular music. It was the voice of Davilita, a 19-year-old boricua from East 100th Street, that resounded from the record stores and tenement windows of El Barrio, and of many Latino working-class barrios, on the ominous eve of the Great Depression.

Musically, “Son Tres” is a canción. While it shows traces of Cuban son montuno and Puerto Rican plena, makes boastful mention of the Dominican merengue, and has a fade-out chorus of traditional leí-loí, Davilita is careful to choose a more generic, hybrid song-form like the canción so as to encompass all three Caribbean traditions without privileging any one national style. He is intent, after all, to marvel at the symbiosis and cohesion of the three-part cultural family. And as long as he lingers on their shared sensibility—kindred tastes, smells, sights, and sounds—and expressive traditions, he is able to sustain that confident sense of delight and harmony. But when it comes to political history, the dissonance sets in, or, more precisely, the sisters take divergent paths. For while Cuba and the Dominican Republic achieved national sovereignty, and can hail their founding leaders in Martí and Duarte, Davilita is made to ask, suggestively, of his own patria, “and for Puerto Rico, who will it be?” (“y por Borinquen ¿quién será?”). Of the three sisters, his Puerto Rico remains in direct colonial bondage, and thus stands apart from, despite their deeper affinities, the other sisters. As the song dates from around mid-century, and as Davilita was known for his strong affiliation with the Puerto Rican nationalist cause, one could surmise that the question “who will it be?” might well be posed in veiled reference to the supreme anti-imperialist leader Pedro Albizu Campos, who was then languishing in a federal penitentiary while his fellow combatants carried on the intense militant struggle for national independence. Or perhaps it is a sarcastic allusion to
What Vega fails to mention, though it would certainly sustain his case more convincingly than the doses of "myth" (as he calls them) that infuse his biographical version of events, is that already then, in the 1820s, the documentary and literary presence of Caribbean Latinos in New York had begun. In 1823, the 20-year-old Cuban poet and patriot José María de Heredia arrived to spend several years of exile in the American northeast, mostly New York City. Fleeing the Spanish and colonial authorities because of his avid clamor for the independence of his beloved homeland, Heredia founded and edited a newspaper, continued to write prolifically, and published his first book of poems, Poesías, in New York in 1825. Most memorably, he had occasion to visit Niagara Falls, to which he paid emotional and philosophical homage in his long poem "Niágara," one of the canonical texts of Cuban literature. It can also be considered, from today's vantage, one of the founding works of Caribbean Latino literature in the United States. Though it contains little by way of description of American society of the time, much less of any Cuban exile settlement, "Niágara" is nonetheless of cardinal importance in being such an early reflection by a Caribbean on the metaphysical significance of the U.S., written on North American soil, anticipating in this way the profound and prolific reflections of Martí, Hostos, and others later in the century.

Though "Niágara" stands as something of a curiosity item in the literary and historical annals, Heredia was not alone in his early exiled state, or the only one to give literary expression to that condition. In fact, another of his poems, "Himno del desterrado," became something of an anthem among exiled Cuban writers of the period, and served as the signature text in the first anthology of such writing, Latúg del desterrado, which was published in 1858.

New York shared the stage in this early period of Caribbean Latino history with Florida. As of the early years, as is also true in more recent times, "La Florida" took its distinctive place in the Latino imaginary. It was in Florida, not so much Miami as Tampa, Key West, and Ybor City, that the drama of Caribbean Latino life took on discernible shape during the middle half of the nineteenth century. The tobacco industry played a central role in the formation of a Spanish and Cuban community and the racial and class divisions that unfolded in that context. Rather than the sporadic and numerically insignificant numbers of antillano exiles of the preceding decades, the Florida enclaves were the earliest evidence of a relatively dynamic and sizable population. Very little of this important pre-history finds its way into Bernardo Vega's account, which tends to leap over the mid-century period to arrive at the dramatic entrance of Hostos and Martí on the New York scene in the later decades of the century.

Vega acknowledges at several points the selective functioning of his aging uncle's memory, and comments on Tío Antonio's tendency to highlight and lend uncritical preference to Puerto Rican actors in the drama. Bernardo even justifies this boricu-centrism by pointing to the subordinate role given to Puerto Ricans in international affairs. But with all of Tío Antonio's exaltation of early Puerto Rican achievements, the nineteenth century is no doubt the Cuban chapter in the story of Caribbean Latino presence in the United States, from the earliest signs and articulations of an exile location to the tumultuous activism and vocal community presence in New York, Philadelphia, and Florida of the century's closing decades. As the principal Puerto Rican leaders and thinkers themselves recognized, it was the Cuban presence that comprised the bulk of the community in formation, and it was the Cuban struggle to which the Puerto Ricans remained interally tied. If in Lola Rodríguez de Tío's vision Puerto Rico and Cuba were "two wings of a bird," then that bird was admittedly lopsided. The wings seemed as though they were not made for the same airborne creature. But in those heady times the ideal of Antilean unity was at the peak of its propagation, and such contrasts and contentions along national lines were not of overriding concern. The metaphorical bi-national bird, however awkward, will surely find its equilibrium, and soar to new heights of solidarity and sovereignty.

There is a wing missing, of course, from Lola's emblematic antillano mascot, the Dominican Republic, a further reflection of divergent historical experiences through the entire period. Of course some Dominicans did play a noteworthy role in the struggle against Spain—the towering revolutionary general Máximo Gómez was Dominican—and Santo Domingo itself was a significant location of exile activity—one thinks, above all, of the immense significance of Hostos in Dominican intellectual and educational history. But no sizable Dominican presence can be established in U.S. settings, much less any evidence of a distinctive Dominican enclave. Though much research remains to be done, the same can be said of the Dominican exile and emigrant experience through most of the twentieth century. Important exceptions like members of the illustrious Henríquez Ureña family and others have been identified, as have numerous individuals and conjuntos on the New York musical scene of the 1920s and 1930s. Bernardo Vega even mentions that a winner of the prestigious Juegos Florales literary prizes in 1919, according to him "the most outstanding event in the Spanish-speaking community in New York since the turn of the century," was a Dominican author, the esteemed Manuel Florentino Cesteró.

While a Dominican part in the building of the Latino community would wait until the final decades of the century, it would be mistaken to discount the ongoing Dominican role in the conceptualization of a pan-antillano ideal. One need only recall the dramatic opening lines of Pedro Mir's masterpiece, Contracanto a Walt Whitman, written in mid-century, to recognize the co-conspiracy of Dominicans in opposition to U.S. domination over the region and its cultures. Generally considered the country's national poet,
Mir begins his majestic "counter-song" by asserting his own personal full-scale pan-Spanish Caribbean identity, a "yo" which he then goes on to counterpose to that of the formidable Whitman: "Yo," he begins,

I,  
as a son of the Caribbean,  
Antillean to be exact.  
The raw product of a simple  
Puerto Rican girl  
and a Cuban worker,  
born precisely, and poor,  
on Quisqueyan soil.  

Yo / un hijo del Caribe / precisamente antillano / Producto / primitivo de  
una ingenua / criatura borinquena / y un obrero cubano / nacido  
justamente, y pobremente, / en suelo quisqueyano.12

Divergences and Convergences

Turning to the twentieth century, in the early years, along with the Cubans and Puerto Ricans, Spaniards figured prominently in that community. Whatever one thinks about the inclusion of Spanish immigrants and descendants in the present-day "Latino" configuration, there can be no doubt as to their presence and importance in the Florida and New York Latino settlements prior to World War I and beyond. This was particularly the case in the decades before and after the turn of the century, and most evidently in the world of tobacco and cigar production. Bernardo’s entire account, from his first New York years and through the Spanish Civil War of the 1930s, makes constant mention of Spanish comrades and cultural activity, and he even counted the Sephardic Spaniard Jacobo Silvestre Bresman as one of his most faithful friends and influential intellectual and political mentors. The Spanish role in the anarchist and labor movements, including those in New York and Florida, is well-known and often told, a significant part of Latino history.

What often goes unmentioned in this necessary attention to Spanish immigrants in early Latino history, however, is the issue of class and racial differences in those multi-Latino interactions, where the seams of pan-ethnic enclave life showed through. As is described in the important memoir Black Cuban, Black American (2000) by Evelio Grillo, an Afro-Cuban who grew up in Florida in the 1920s and 1930s, Spaniards and white Cubans played an increasingly central role in the ownership and managerial operations of the cigar trade in later nineteenth-century Florida.13 As a result, class and black-white divides took an ever greater toll on the earlier unity among the Spanish-speaking caballeros. An Afro-Cuban consciousness thus emerged early on among the black cigar workers, with the obvious implication that subsequent Caribbean Latino history needs to be studied, and told, with that crucial differentiation squarely in view. In her book on Puerto Rican musicians in New York through the 1940s, My Music Is My Flag (1997), Ruth Glasser offers further evidence of this racist dimension of Latino community formation, and especially the role of Spanish cultural presence in that kind of discrimination. On the basis of extensive interviews, Glasser tells of the exclusionary policies of the Asturian, Valencian, and Galician clubs and cultural centers, which often drew the line on black Latinos.14

But with the experiences of the Depression and inter-war years, including the final decline of the tobacco industry, the Spanish role in the New York Latino community came to recede in both volume and significance, and the Cuban and Puerto Rican components of the multi-Latino diaspora assumed the central place, which they held in that history until recent decades. While Cubans continued to prevail in Florida and in pockets of the northeast, the Puerto Rican population came to far surpass all of the other groups, particularly after the decreasing of U.S. citizenship for Puerto Ricans in 1917. By 1930, New York Puerto Ricans were already twice as numerous as Spaniards, and as Cubans and Dominicans combined. During those decades, and through the 1950s, the latter two groups found themselves in similar positions as exiles from long-term dictatorial rule, a situation that was further complicated by the overt and covert complicity of U.S. imperial power, including direct military occupation. Puerto Ricans, meanwhile, as citizens and as mobile labor reserves resulting from the orchestrated industrialization of the Island, saw their numbers increase geometrically in the post-World War II years, a development that brought their presence to nearly a million by the 1960s and made them the second largest Latino group in the country after the Mexican Americans.

But prior to this divergence in their paths, marked off emphatically by the Cuban Revolution of 1959, Puerto Ricans and Cubans during the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s constituted the core of the Caribbean Latino community in the United States. General social and cultural interaction can be documented, and is particularly conspicuous, for example, in popular music. Members of both nationalities proliferated and dominated in all the major bands and orchestras through those years, and shared musical repertoires and audiences. Styles were most commonly and preponderantly Cuban, which reflected the far greater visibility of things Cuban in the mass culture. It is sometimes recognized, as a telling example, that of the fifteen "Afro-Cubans" in Machito's unsurpassed orchestra of the 1940s, all but two were Puerto Ricans. It was the Cuban image that stood in as emblematic of the tropical, Spanish-speaking Caribbean, as evident in the proliferation of dance crazes
and of course in the entry into the American living room during the 1950s of the ubiquitous figure of Desi Arnaz. The Cuban American critic Gustavo Pérez Firmat has provided sensitive and lasting analysis of this phenomenon, which he calls "The Desi Chain," in his book *Life on the Hyphen.*

But while the swelling Puerto Rican demographic presence was thus typically eclipsed by that of Cubans in the public sphere, the relation between the two cultures was one not of contamination, but of remarkable creative symbiosis and confluence. Davila's songs resound with these fusions and blendings: though his repertoire comprised mainly Cuban song traditions of the *son,* *boleo,* and *guaracha,* many of them were written by the major Puerto Rican composers Rafael Hernández, Pedro Flores, and Plácido Acedo. As is evident in "Son Tres," there is a smooth flow of continuity between Puerto Rican and Cuban traditions. Both create and partake equally of "el sabor." What better evidence than the music that came to be called "salsa" through the last quarter of the twentieth century?

**Afrodispora**

The Cuban–Puerto Rican continuum, which has formed the crux of Caribbean Latino cultural history, is a field of blackness in the U.S. context. The shared African moorings of their national and popular cultures carry over strongly to the diasporic context, such that if they share language culture with other Spanish speakers, they at the same time share with fellow Caribbean and other African-descendant peoples those deep cultural heritages, and of course deeply racialized social histories. **Afroantillanos** constitute by far the largest non-English-speaking black population in U.S. history, and Caribbean Latino history thus overlaps substantively with the history of Afro-Latinos in the U.S.

To a significant degree, in fact, what marks off **caribeños** within the Latino pan-ethnicity as a whole is precisely this interface with blackness and an Afro-Atlantic imaginary. As **Afro-Latinos,** they embody the compatibility of blackness with the notion of Latino identity in the United States. While in its dominant and consumer version Latino realities are often walled off from, or counterposed to, blackness and Afro-diasporic cultural experience, the **antillano** perspective instates the continuity and mutuality between them. This more porous border, of course, has made for a far more active reciprocity with African Americans. After a half century of close social interaction, Caribbean Latinos, and **afroantillanos** in particular, are the Latinos who most directly encountered anti-black racism in the U.S. setting, including from other Latinos. They are also those who have enjoyed the most productive sharing and exchange with American Blacks. Music history provides ample evidence of the latter dimension, while the figures of Afro-Puerto Ricans

Arturo Alfonso Schomburg and Jesús Colón illustrate, in different historical periods, the strong and complex attachments between the two populations at the intellectual and political level, and their unity in facing up to anti-black racism.

This difference within the pan-Latino cultural configuration is not new to our times. The racial and color divide has been operative since early on, and has been evident over the long stretches of Caribbean Latino history in the twentieth century. The great Davilia is once again a key source on *caribeño* experience in this regard. The renowned black Puerto Rican emigrant of long standing once recalled the hierarchy he witnessed in the musical field, where Puerto Ricans and Cubans were typically paid less than other Spanish-language artists: "Victor never treated us like they did the Mexicans, the South Americans when it came to money ... Venezuela, ... and Argentina and all those countries charged a lot of money and [the company] paid them ... [Xavier] Cugat was Spanish, [he] charged as if he were an American, wherever he went. But the Puerto Ricans, no." Predictably, Cubans and Puerto Ricans, inhabiting as they do the darker end of the Latino chromatic spectrum, are also most frequently situated at the bottom of the pan-Latino pecking order of privilege. And it would seem that Davilia's observations about the world of popular music would apply fittingly to all other areas of U.S. society, and to most any historical era. But the implications of Davilia's comments run deeper still, and perhaps point to yet another distinction, this time within the **caribeño** diaspora experience itself. With his emphasis on the Puerto Ricans as those most devoid of any cultural preference or equal treatment, we are reminded again of the lines from "Son Tres," "and for Puerto Rico, who will it be?" ("Y por Borinquen ¿quién será?"). All the other Latino groups, even the other **antillanos,** have their diplomatic representation, and their home countries are there to stand up for them, however feebly and selectively at times, in the U.S. context. The diasporas are an extension, as it were, of their native republics, as corrupt or tyrannical as those republics may be. Not so the Puerto Ricans, whose unique status as U.S. citizens has proved a mixed blessing at best, and whose U.S. residents are alone among the Latinos in their sense of disconnection from any governmental or institutional support from their home nation. An editorial column of the same period makes a similar point about inter-Latino relations in New York: the Spanish-language weekly *Gráfico,* under the editorship of Bernardo Vega, included the following comment in an issue from 1927: "The most vulnerable group of those which comprise the large family of Ibero-Americans (in New York City) is the Puerto Rican. Truly it seems a paradox that being American citizens these should be the most defenseless. While the citizens of other countries have their consulates and diplomats to represent them, the children of Borinquen have no one." This
paradoxical and “exceptional” orphan state of the Puerto Ricans among the many Latino groups is directly attributable to its colonial condition and the ramification of that status in the diaspora in the form of internal colonialism. What is more, if the colonial relation drew visible lines of differentiation between Puerto Ricans and other Latinos, including caribeños, in earlier times, the same continues to be the case today. Class and racial subordination is compounded in the Puerto Rican case by the fact and rule of ongoing colonial dependence, a dimension of collective social experience that puts a challenging test to the inclusiveness of the prevailing Latino concept.

Within the antillano subset, the Puerto Rican presence is, in this sense, of a very different order than both the Cuban and the Dominican, as extremely divergent as those two also are from one another. Fidel Castro once referred to Puerto Rico as the “perfumed colony,” and that it certainly seems to be with respect to relative degrees of economic misery and political authoritarianism. But in the U.S. setting, the community forged of a colonial labor migration stands in greater long-term disadvantage than that which has issued from political exile, or even the more recognizable Third World immigration as in the Dominican case. The sheer relative volume of the Puerto Rican emigration movement, where the diaspora stands nearly equal in size to that of the Island population, is but another blatant indication of this disparity. The “perfume,” and the sugarcane legacy, have a bittersweet taste when it comes to the racialized, pathologized circumstance of the colonial minority citizen.

Interlocking Diasporas

On the other hand, Puerto Ricans are for related reasons the main U.S. antillano group who lived through and participated in the formative 1960s and 1970s period in U.S. history, though there was some Dominican and Cuban presence as well. The ethnic affirmation and political stridency of those years were of constitutive importance for the emergence of Latino identity in the context of U.S. minority struggles, and the emergence of a “Nuyorican” identity in those years came to pre-figure analogous developments among Dominicans and some Cuban Americans in times closer to our own. These movements also demonstrated bonds of coalitional solidarity across national lines with African Americans, Native Americans, and Asian Americans, as well as the connection of domestic social movements with political and cultural developments at an international level. In this respect, the social positioning and group history of Puerto Ricans would seem to approximate that of Mexican Americans more closely than that of the other Caribbean Latinos, whose cultural location and sense of group identity came to take shape subsequent to that dramatic and definitive stage. It is important
to call attention to this differential political history and social placement of the diasporic groups, because many discussions of Latino pan-ethnicity, especially those which limit the focus to immigration, or to language background and other cultural commonalities, tend to leave such crucial considerations out of account.

In our times, the three Caribbean Latino enclaves exhibit as many disjunctures and discontinuities in the U.S. context as do their respective “sister islands” in the contemporary Caribbean regional and international settings. The anachronistic direct colony, the beleaguered neo-colony, and the founding experiment in dependent socialism issue up markedly divergent diasporas, whose principal commonality corresponds to the degree to which their current configurations mirror and are defined by the status of their home countries in world affairs. Despite their obvious affinities within the full Latino composite, and the long-term historical congruencies and interconnectednesses that underlie the persistent Antillean ideal, no facile assumption of intimate family loyalties or automatic political cohesion among U.S. Cubans, Dominicans, and Puerto Ricans would seem in order, at least for the foreseeable future.

Indeed, one recent analysis even proposes a useful typology of the three diasporas, referring to the Puerto Ricans as “colonial/racial subjects,” the Dominicans as “colonial immigrants,” and Cubans as “immigrants.” This contrastive schema is not merely descriptive, but also speaks of a process of racialization according to which diasporic Puerto Ricans become “African Americanized,” Dominicans increasingly “Puerto Ricanized,” and Cubans, specifically pre-1980s Cuban migrants, intent on disassociating themselves from the Dominican experience of approximating Puerto Ricans in their social status. This idea of a dynamic range of diasporic options is valuable in thus differentiating the situation of the groups based on their relation to structures of transnational power and ongoing dynamics of colonial and racial subordination. For the three main ethno-national groups comprising the Caribbean Latino diaspora do in fact cover the gamut of possibilities among contemporary transnational communities and within the pan-Latino continuum, from the least to the most privileged in terms of economic, political, and cultural capital. The tendency to vie and dis-identify among them would seem to outweigh any prospects of cross-group solidarity.

However, historical experience shows these relations and disparities to be in continual flux, and it is therefore important not to fix our analytical gaze too squarely on the immediate present. Just as the island nations themselves can well undermine and re-figure the familiar patterns of international demarcation, so too the three diaspora enclaves may recognize new grounds for rapprochement and cultural coalescence along the contentious ethnic quete. The present study, based on ethnographic testimony and critical interpretation of cultural expressions, would suggest that the signs of such a
new development are already coming into view. Certainly the shared Afro-Latino background that tends most to distinguish them within the pan-Latino composite, and the attendant complementary relationship to blackness, promises to have unifying repercussions within the U.S. racial formation, where the significance of the color line seems to be in no way diminishing.

The socio-cultural location of Caribbean Latinos is thus defined by their relationship to non-Caribbean Latinos, on the one hand, and to non-Latino Caribbean on the other. A key question for the future will be whether the prevailing Latino concept has the effect of perpetuating, in the enclave context, the Caribbean's long and tragic history of balkanization along the lines of language cultures, or whether alternatively it may help foster the kind of pan-Caribbean solidarity that shared life in the United States has engendered in earlier historical periods. It is clear that the transnational linkages and interrelations between diaspora and homeland politics are central to any prognostic view. As we shall see, the interactions among diasporic Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, and a new generation of Cubans reveal interesting convergences, and the impact of U.S. Caribbean Latinos could well end up changing the face of the Hispanic Caribbean.

Notes on the Antillano Counterstream

After spending formative years and the bulk of his adult life in the New York diaspora, Davilita returned to live in his native Puerto Rico in the 1950s. There he formed a duo with the immensely popular vocalist Felipe Rodríguez, known as "La Voz," and together recorded some of the best-selling and most widely admired albums of his career. In spite of this ascending success, Davilita did not find happiness in his long-lost homeland, and grieved about the discrimination he was forced to endure because of his militancy anti-colonialist politics, his blackness, and his life-long residence in the diaspora. Lacking the overdue recognition of the country's cultural establishment, this towering figure of the national music died sickly and isolate in his hometown of Bayamón. The full story has yet to be told, but this sad ending to such an illustrious life can only be explained by understanding the phenomenon of circular migration and the cultural counterstream shared by all caribbean through the decades of diasporic community life.

Of the three island nations of the Hispanic Caribbean, it is the Dominican Republic that has generated the largest body of literature on the transnational and return migratory experience. Perhaps because the dramatic growth of a huge Dominican diaspora coincides with the emergence of transnational studies, the Dominican experience is sometimes referred to as a transnational community par excellence. A slew of major social scientific volumes, by Dominicanists Sherri Grasmuck, Patricia Pessar, Peggy Levitt, and Eugenia Georges, as well as important work by Luis Guinzolo, Jorge Duany, Silvio Torres Saillant, José Izaguirre, and many others, all focusing on Dominican transnationalism, have appeared since 1990. The massive out-migration after the end of the Trujillo era, concentrated in New York City and San Juan but fanning out to other U.S. settings, a range of European countries, other parts of the Americas, and elsewhere, has attracted broad scholarly, literary, and journalistic attention, and has made the Dominican case a central instance of transnational political and cultural life in the generation before and after the millennium.

Though diaspora-island relations have been of central interest in Puerto Rican cultural and political life over a century by now, the phenomenon of return migration and remittances has generated far less focused attention than the much shorter-lived Dominican mass migration experience. José Hernández Alvarez' very early study mentioned above, Return Migration to Puerto Rico (1967), itself methodologically limited, has not been followed by significant subsequent interest in the subject, at least among scholars, though the theme has been treated in journalistic and literary work over the decades, especially since the return flow reached swollen proportions in the 1970s. The major contribution on Puerto Rican transnationalism thus far is no doubt Jorge Duany's 2002 book The Puerto Rican Nation on the Move: Identities on the Island and in the United States. It is indeed an important scholarly achievement, and contains a wealth of analysis of transnational cultural interactions.

More directly on that subject is the excellent ethnographic study Contested Belonging: Circular Migration and Puerto Rican Identity (2000) by Dutch sociologist Erna Kerkhof. There the interesting life-stories and anecdotes gleaned from interviews in the west-coastal city of Mayaguez are accompanied by informed and sensitive critical analysis, the only drawback being that the author evidently did not have the opportunity to conduct complementary interviews in New York and other parts of the Puerto Rican diaspora itself. On the other hand, the book by Elizabeth M. Aranda, Emotional Bridges to Puerto Rico (2006) promises in thesubtitle (Migration, Return Migration, and the Struggles of Incorporation) to address the return experience, but in fact most of its attention goes once again to problems of "incorporation" to the U.S. setting. "Emotional bridges" are of course an important part of the larger process of cultural flows, but this study unfortunately fails to address any of the other dimensions of that process. Further, the book's over-concentration on the "Puerto Rican middle class" tends to sideline the far more massive experience of the impoverished majority of the Puerto Rican diaspora and therefore makes the study of less interest to an analysis of cultural flows "from below."
Most directly in line with the present study is the book by Gina M. Pérez, *The Near Northwest Side Story: Migration, Displacement, and Puerto Rican Families* (2004), and especially the chapter “Los de Afuera, Transnationalism, and the Cultural Politics of Identity.” On the basis of ethnographic work in Chicago and San Sebastián, Puerto Rico, where many “Chicago Rican” families come from, Pérez analyzes a range of cultural encounters by way of attitudes, changing values, and the stark and at times conflicted contrasts between the “outsiders” (“los de afuera”) and those who stay and have to deal with the influx of so many outsiders. The dramatic everyday clashes over language use, gender roles, valuations of family and education, what it means to be Puerto Rican, and racial identities are brought to dramatic life in this innovative work, which has been a frequent reference point for me in my own study. Pérez suggests that what the returnees bring to San Sebastián constitutes a challenge to accepted ways on many fronts, and one can assume that her own presence as a diasporic Puerto Rican woman contributed to that encounter. My goal here is to push this line of thinking further, by upping the stakes to include a collective challenge to the hegemony of an authoritarian and essentialist concept of national identity and history, and by expanding the idea of cultural practice to include the changes wrought in and by forms of artistic expression.

Finally, in the case of the Cuban diaspora, imaginings of the homeland are obviously more plentiful than actual returns, though cultural remittances may be even more consequential than for Dominicans or Puerto Ricans. In any case, with all the emotional charge attached to the topic, little scholarly work has been devoted to a Cuban cultural countercurrent, though an important Spanish-language testimony, *Contra viento y marea* (1978), anticipates the historic visit of the Antonio Maceo Brigade, a group of sympathetic Cuban Americans during the opening of the dialogue in the 1970s. The personal memoirs of one of that group, Román de la Campa, entitled *Cuba on My Mind: Journeys to a Severed Nation* (2000), offers an elegantly written reflection on the return, while the book by the more conservative Cuban-American critic Gustavo Pérez Firmat, *Life on the Hyphen: The Cuban-American Way* (1994), attests to the abrupt and at the same time long-term distancing between the diaspora and its embattled homeland. Nevertheless, mutually enriching cultural interaction, especially in the music field, continues under the radar screen, as is most dramatically evident in the worlds of Latin jazz and hip hop in our own times.

More general reflections on the Hispanic Caribbean as what might cautiously be called a cultural “sub-region” are surprisingly rare, particularly in view of the intense emotional and intellectual appeal of the “antillano” concept in the intertwined histories of the three islands. The extreme political bifurcation among the national narratives, especially since the second half of the twentieth century, do make generalizations difficult, though therein lies at the same time the challenge and fascination of comparative and contrastive analysis. Like the national political histories, the modern diasporas of the three countries have been radically divergent, even the Puerto Rican and Dominican ones which would appear to have so much in common. For the same reasons, the nature of return and cultural remittances and their impact also varies widely among them. On the other hand, there are also important convergences and congruities that warrant attention and justify a unified approach, as exemplified engagingly in the book by Puerto Rican cultural critic Yolanda Martínez-San Miguel, *Caribe Two Ways: Cultura de la migración en el Caribe insular hispánico* (2003). For one thing, in addition to the looming Hispanophile ideological presence to this day, there is the aforementioned “troubles” with the African heritage present in differential ways in each national history, a factor that becomes perhaps even more salient in the diaspora context in the United States. Further, as *Caribe Two Ways* highlights so well, there has been an ongoing and intensifying migratory interaction among the countries all alone, and the presence of mutually interlocking diasporas in each country, most visibly a prominent Cuban and a massive Dominican enclave in contemporary Puerto Rico. Of greatest importance for the present study, of course, each country has a huge diaspora community in the United States, each of them then implicated in the newly denominated “Latino” diaspora with its towering significance in the present-day culture wars. Indeed, it can be said that for reasons of political and colonial history the Hispanic Caribbean has been closer to and more directly ensnared in twentieth-century U.S. social reality than any of the other Caribbean cultures, this in spite of the language difference not present or as significant in the case of West Indian diasporas.

There is thus ample fascination in focusing analytic attention on the impact of the Caribbean Latino diaspora(s) as they come home to roost in their troubled island nation homelands, unsettling their entrenched cultural presumptions, and perhaps pressuring them, however unwittingly, into more direct interaction than has been possible in the archipelago of origin. Here again, as is so often the case, it is from the “outside,” from the transnational vantage of exile and diaspora, that the most penetrating vision of the national culture becomes possible.

But in order to gain a full understanding of the deep challenge represented by the migratory countercurrent it is necessary to think the concept of diaspora, and of cultural remittances, in the most expansive manner possible. Issues of economic development, entrepreneurial achievement, or energetic civic participation are all significant, to be sure, which is why they have been so preponderant in much transnational analysis to date. But the role of the cultural, in the sense of “the work of the imagination” as expounded so incisively by Arjun Appadurai and Stuart Hall, needs to be centered in this challenging interpretive project. The cultural, as in cultural remittances,
means ideologies of racial and sexual identities as they intersect and collide with dominant national and class narratives. These aspects are perhaps best studied on the basis of personal testimony and lived social experience, so what follows, in chapter 4, will be a sampler of stories recounting cultural changes and challenges in this sense. But the cultural aspect also embraces the creative and expressive dimensions of social life as manifest in the poetry, musical styles, and visual iconography of group representations. The latter part of the book, chapters 5 and 6 and the Coda, will present some perspectives on the remittance of Caribbean Latino musical, poetic, and artistic styles and practices to the home countries, and their powerful, potentially transformative impact.