This chapter explores how the seminal work *El país de cuatro pisos* (1980) by José Luis González (1926–1996) challenged historiographers and ethnographers to critically examine the relationship between "race," racializing practices, ethnicity, and national identity in Puerto Rico. González argued that the formation of a Puerto Rican national identity could be divided into several tiers. The first of these was the Afro-Antillean tier. It constituted the basis of Puerto Rican society and culture and was rooted in the experiences of enslaved and free people of African descent who inhabited the island shortly after the arrival of the Spanish.

The second tier consisted of an influx of *extranjeros*, "white" Europeans, encouraged to migrate to Puerto Rico in the early to middle nineteenth century via the 1815 Cédula de Gracias in order to allay fears about a black takeover following the Haitian Revolution. Another objective was to *blanquear*, to whiten, the island with foreigners. Despite these attempts, as sugar plantations developed in the nineteenth century with black enslaved laborers from Africa and the Antilles and free black and *mulato* laborers who settled on the island, the Afro-Antillean component of Puerto Rican society and culture became further solidified.

The third tier emerged with the 1898 invasion of Puerto Rico by the United States. And the fourth, González argued, was grounded in the populist movements of the 1940s, a critical period in the construction of a Puerto Rican nationalist identity (see Quintero Rivera 1981[1979], J. González 1989[1980], 1986, Alvarez Curbelo and Rodríguez Castro 1993).

Juan Manuel Carrión (1993) argues that the tiered structural model of González is static and essentializing. He accuses González of adopting a hispanophobic stance in his effort to demonstrate that Puerto Rican culture is rooted in the experiences of enslaved and free blacks. He states (Carrión 1993:7) that just because blacks and *mulatos* for the most part occupied the island in the latter part of the eighteenth century, it does not mean that Puerto Rico is culturally African. He also states that González is exploiting in his work inherent contradictions found when the construction of an ethnic imagery has a racial component. Finally, by doing so, Carrión argues, González erroneously conflates race with culture. The four-tiered structural model simply does not work.

Carrión suggests, by contrast, that the *ajiaco* (*sancocho, callaloo*) metaphor in-
voked by Fernando Ortiz (1939) to describe the Cuban nationalist identity might be more appropriate. He states (Carrión 1993:9): “Cuban nationalist identity is a process always in formation where a number of cultural factors conjoin to create new forms.” Unlike González, Carrión argues that Ortiz does not dispense with the view that “la cultura proveniente de España constituye la ‘troncalidad’ de la cultura cubana (Spanish culture constitutes the root of Cuban culture).” Carrión does not dispense with this view, either.

Carrión’s criticisms of the static and essentializing view of culture presented by González are well taken; however, Carrión falls into the same trap. While González privileges the roots of African heritage in the formation of a Puerto Rican national identity, Carrión continues to give special consideration to Spanish culture. Contradictions loom large. Carrión’s posture cannot be maintained if, as he suggests, we are to adopt the *ajoaco* (*sancocho* in Puerto Rico) metaphor precisely because *sancocho* is a stew made up of spices, meats, and tubers from the Old World and the New. Moreover, the stew can no longer be separated into disparate elements. It is a creation of people of the Americas.

Puerto Rican nationalist practices draw upon an ideology of *mestizaje* (the sancocho) that is rooted in the blend of Spanish, indigenous, and African cultures. Upon first glance, it appears that a national emphasis on *mestizaje* in Puerto Rico promotes processes of social integration; however, there is still a hyper-privileging of individuals of European descent with phenotypic features associated with “whiteness.” As Miriam Jiménez Román notes in a critical analysis of race relations in Puerto Rico (1996:10),

There is the institutionally sanctioned and popularly reinforced belief in distinct races with identifiable, essential traits, with a corresponding notion of a “multiracial” society whose citizens enjoy harmonious relations, not least because of their evolutionary trek toward “whiteness.”

This contradiction was poignantly expressed in 1988 when Rafael Hernández Colón, governor of Puerto Rico at the time, placed himself in a compromising position when he addressed the Institute of Iberian-American Cooperation in Madrid. In what is now an infamous speech, he stated (El Nuevo Día, June 21, 1988, p. 45): “The contribution of the black race to Puerto Rican culture is irrelevant, it is mere rhetoric” (see Flores 1993, Torres 1995, Rodríguez Castro 1995).

Upon his return from Spain, Hernández Colón had to answer to charges of racism. In an article entitled “España, San Antón y el ser nacional (Spain, San Antón, and our national identity),” he stated (El Nuevo Día, June 6, 1988):

While in Central and South America indigenous cultures continue to enrich and form part of the national cultures of the respective countries (Mexico, Guatemala, Peru, Bolivia), in the Greater Antilles only archaeological artifacts remain.
Centuries ago indigenous peoples were assimilated by the Hispanic culture, and together with a rich African contribution, integrated our Puerto Ricaness.

While in some islands of the Caribbean or, for example, in a country such as Guyana, the black culture and its population was preponderant, in Puerto Rico given historical circumstances that scholars have already addressed, this rich heritage was assimilated, as in the case of the indigenous heritage, by the Hispanic culture, producing our national culture which cannot be classified as Taino, African, or Spanish, but as the harmonious synthesis of the three that constitutes the Puerto Rican identity. . . .

This ideological perspective became the cornerstone of the quincentenary commemoration on the island in 1992 with one caveat: there were two worlds instead of three. The commemorative event was called “Encuentro de dos mundos (An Encounter between Two Worlds).” By recognizing the Americas, this so-called encounter departed from the 1908 celebration, “El Cuarto Centenario de la Civilización Cristiana (Four Hundred Years of Christian Civilization),” a celebration held shortly after the North American invasion of Puerto Rico. These commemorative events, among others, were riddled with contradictions as tensions surfaced and other cultural practices and interpretations oscillated between a collective identity and an identity primarily rooted in the Spanish or Spanish and Amerindian past (see Rodríguez Castro 1995:22). There was, however, a common thread. The Spanish encounter with Africa and the forced and violent encounter of enslaved Africans with the Americas in each of these historic events was deliberately concealed.

As Torres and Whitten indicate in the general introduction to this volume, processes of pernicious pluralism activate and perpetuate the clash of three symbols of nationalism as mestizaje, indigenismo, and blanqueamiento in Latin America and the Spanish-speaking Caribbean. Powerful symbols of nationhood coupled with ideologies of mestizaje and blanqueamiento exemplify the Puerto Rican paradox. The “mixture” is embraced, provided that the essence of Puerto Rican society and culture is still rooted in Spain and later in the Americas. The Caribbean dilemma is also writ large. As John Nunley (1993:290) notes in his analysis of Trinidadian culture and callaloo,

Just as the soup improves in taste, becoming sweeter as diverse ingredients blend, so has Trinidadian culture become better as it has increased in diversity. . . . Cultural diversity, though it sometimes causes severe social tensions in the community, remains positively valued.

While Puerto Ricans on the island have tended to focus on the blend in particular historical moments, in other contexts they have sought to establish and maintain boundaries between groups that are racially defined.

Carrión (1993:9) is quite right when he says, “Puerto Rico, no cabe negarlo, es una nación mulata (We cannot deny that Puerto Rico is a mulatto nation).”
However, the crux of the matter is that Puerto Rico is *mulato* as a nation *cuando nos conviene* (when it is convenient to be so). The ethnographer’s challenge, then, is to demonstrate historically and ethnographically how racialized social and cultural categories are invoked without conflating race and culture despite the fact that *en la vida cotidiana* (in everyday life) they are constantly conflated.

In an insightful overview, “The Persistent Power of ‘Race’ in the Cultural and Political Economy of Racism,” Faye V. Harrison (1995:47) notes that as critiques of race as a biological concept were launched, anthropologists adopted a “no-race” posture and therefore did not address why racism continues to exist. Anthropologists, she argued, focused on ethnicity and “for the most part, euphemized or denied race by not specifying the conditions under which those social categories and groups historically subordinated as ‘racially’ distinct emerge and persist.” She further stated (Harrison 1995:48): “Other analysts showed how ethnicity and race can be interrelated but distinct dimensions in the formation of individual and group identity, and how depending on the context, one dimension may modify or take precedence over the other.”

In the past, scholars who compared the racial–color continuum in Latin America and the Spanish-speaking Caribbean to the racial bifurcation in the United States and elsewhere demonstrated how race and class are interrelated (Hoetink 1967, Mintz 1971, Duany 1985). However, for the most part, these scholars argued that class relations in Latin America and the Spanish-speaking Caribbean took precedence over race relations, and thereby they failed to analyze how discourses about class relations euphemize race and provide a means to deny the existence and persistence of racist practices.

The purpose of this chapter is to work against the silencing of a critical discourse on race relations and color prejudice in Puerto Rico. I discuss precisely how ideas and perceptions of self and other are reproduced and/or changed over time in a racist and class-based society. I go on to suggest the ways by which we may begin to critically analyze how the historical terrain and the contemporary Puerto Rican cultural landscape are racially mapped in daily discourse, a discourse that continually seeks to silence and marginalize *el puertorriqueño, que ej prieto de beldá*, the Puerto Rican who is really black.

I further propose to show how members of communities defined by others as black challenge the criteria by which they are so defined by drawing upon a wide range of their experiences. As they celebrate their black identity, they draw upon contradictory and complementary paradigms that emphasize their cultural autonomy. In other social contexts they emphasize their identity as *negros* and *mulatos* who constitute an integral part of the nation, *la gran familia puertorriqueña*, the great Puerto Rican family (Quintero-Rivera 1981, Rodríguez Juliá 1983, 1988).

I argue that the great Puerto Rican family *ej prieta de beldá* as opposed to this same family as *es prieta de verdad*. The negative ascriptions associated with black-
ness are brought to the fore in this contrast between vernacular Spanish and standard Spanish.

The use of the black vernacular as opposed to *la lengua castellana*, the Spanish language, by the black Puerto Rican poet Fortunato Vizcairondo in the poem titled *¿tu agüela, ónde ejíó?* and in the title of this essay ironically contests racist ideologies that seek to silence *el negro y el mulato*. An engagement with cultural practices that are stereotypically viewed as unrefined, culturally lacking, or confined to the realm of popular culture reveal that Puerto Rican nationalist ideologies simultaneously “whiten” and “darken” the Puerto Rican cultural landscape.

Despite this critical commentary on Puerto Rican society, *¿tu agüela, ónde ejíó?* has received national and international acclaim. Poems such as these are recited and performed in contexts where a Puerto Rican nationalist heritage is celebrated provided that the celebration of blackness is limited to the expressive realm. Such a strategy obfuscates the intent of the author, and of the performers of the piece. Blackness is not only manipulated, it is rendered powerless.

*Racialized Terrains*

The cultural mapping of the landscape in Puerto Rico is critical because it is racialized and class based (Jackson and Penrose 1993). In Puerto Rico the opposition between the coast and the interior and between coastal/urban and rural laborer positions are subsumed by the tripartite classification of *el negro*, *el blanco*, and *el jíbaro* in society. In Puerto Rico, a mythico-historical figure, called *a jíbaro* and represented by a light-skinned peasant living in the mountainous interior, seized the Puerto Rican imagination. He has become the bearer of a nascent Puerto Rican identity and symbolically represents blacks who are marginalized.

I conducted anthropological fieldwork intermittently from 1984 through 1988 on the southeastern coast of Puerto Rico. The boundaries where the communities of Maunabo, Patillas, Arroyo, and Guayama begin and end were not readily apparent given the similarities in the geographical and cultural landscape, but subtle differences are mapped out in the architectural landscape, place names, and roadways.

The southeastern coast can be divided into the wet littoral valley encompassing the towns of Yabucoa and Maunabo and the alluvial plains extending from Patillas to Ponce. Maunabo is closely aligned with municipalities to the east. Given its terrain, however, it is also an integral part of the cultural geography and landscape of Patillas Arroyo and Guayama, its neighbors to the west. The central mountain ridge blocks access to these communities; they are relatively isolated. When sugar reigned, these communities were accessible via the sea. With the demise of the sugar industry, they remained spatially, socially, and economically marginal. However, throughout the history of these communities an intricate web
of social relations can be teased out of the landscape. This web extends into the present.

The Afro-Antillean peoples of the southeastern coastal towns of Maunabo, Patillas, Arroyo, and Guayama were to be the population for study in this region. They are people who yearn for recognition on their own terms. Such a yearning is manifest in an imagery that challenges the Puerto Rican imagination. This imagination constitutes a collective cultural identity that primarily emphasizes Spanish heritage and secondarily that of indigenous Caribbean, always privileged over African descent. The whole southern coast is populated by dark-skinned black people of Afro-Antillean descent, and their recognition requires Puerto Rico to come to grips with the phenomenon of blackness.

Before we can critically engage in an analysis of the intersection of race, class, and social status in Puerto Rico, we need to critically examine the historical terrain for the reference points established vis-à-vis negro, blanco, and jíbaro during the Spanish colonial era. It is with these colonial categories that euphemisms for race emerged and became located within Puerto Rican economy, society and culture.

Historical Background

Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, black people, slaves and their kindreds, constituted the coastal labor force on the sugar plantations as well as the urban labor force that met the needs of the “white” plantation owners and the creole elite. Black people, who were descendants of freed slaves or maroons living on the coast in subsistence-oriented fishing communities or in the interior of these coastal municipalities as rural laborers, were recognized only when they represented a threat to the established social order.

The 1815 Real Cédula de Gracias contributed to the economic growth of Puerto Rico and promoted the development of the valley of Guayama. There was a major influx of extranjeros, foreigners, in the area. Many settled in the barrio of Arroyo with their capital, black slaves, and technology. Among the foreigners were French planters who had fled Haiti after the revolution of 1804. They sought to recover their losses by engaging in the production of sugar on the southeastern coast of Puerto Rico (Sued Badillo 1983:72, J. González 1981 [1979]:47). Other foreigners also settled in the valley of Guayama. However, they did not settle in the area on a permanent basis. Their objective was to acquire the wealth to be had from the production of sugar with the use of a slave labor force. As Charles Walker, a North American hacendado and owner of the Hacienda Concordia in Arroyo stated, “Los dueños de plantaciones son principalmente extranjeros e independientes de la gente del país, ya que todos usan trabajo esclavo (The owners of the plantations are primarily foreigners. They work independently of the people of the Island, since they all use slave labor)” (Sued Badillo 1983:89). The growth of plantations in Arroyo initially helped to sustain the subsistence
agriculture in the interior and the fishing communities on the coast and contributed to the development of an urban sector that served the needs of the planters. As foreigners appropriated larger parcels of fertile land in the coastal areas for the production of sugar, estancias, small farms dedicated to the production of goods for subsistence, were displaced. Maunabeños and Arroyanos who engaged in subsistence agriculture were forced to move farther into the interior of the municipality. Some of these laborers continued to engage in subsistence activities, while others became part of an urban labor force. These laborers engaged in carpentry, masonry, coopering, and iron work (Sued Badillo 1983:73).

In the mid-nineteenth century, Catalans, Corsicans, and Mallorcans settled in Puerto Rico. This second wave of foreigners, José Luis González (1981[1979]:50) argued, had a profound influence on race relations and the development of a Puerto Rican national identity. Catalans in particular became involved in commercial activities in the valley of Guayama. These merchants, government officials, and military officers constituted a conservative group that sought to maintain Spanish rule. As the most economically and politically influential people in the area, they maintained their social distance from other foreigners and from the free and enslaved laborers; these free and enslaved laborers were black people who contributed to the economic wealth of the area. This second wave of Europeans bought and settled on land in the interior of the island. They were primarily engaged in the production of coffee and other goods for export. Like their coastal counterparts, these entrepreneurs relied on a slave labor force. As black slaves became more difficult to acquire, however, European immigrants relied on the labor of the displaced peasants in the coastal areas and in the interior of the island (Scarano 1981, 1984).

The Growth of a "Nation"

Puerto Rico, formerly a colony of Spain, is a territory ("commonwealth") of the United States. It is neither state nor nation. Nonetheless, Puerto Ricans think of themselves as constituting una nación, a nation. Hereafter the word nation in English or nación in Spanish is used without quotation marks in the self-identifying Puerto Rican sense of the nationhood of its people. With this in mind we can understand the ambiguities and contradictions inherent in the cultural construction of "nation" within this island territory.

In the early to mid-nineteenth century the displaced black and mulato artisans, laborers, and subsistence farmers and the jibaros in the interior of the island did not constitute part of una nación. They were viewed by peninsulares, foreigners, and the growing criollo, creole elite, with contempt because they did not constitute a labor force that would readily meet the needs of the expanding plantations and haciendas. As a result, plantation owners, hacendados, and the professional elite in the urban areas supported local and regional policies and practices that controlled both the enslaved and the free labor force. González (1981[1979]:51)
poignantly summarized the effects of European colonization in the nineteenth century as follows:

The conquered on this occasion were not the indigenous Taínos, extinguished three centuries ago by the genocidal policies of the first conquest. They were the white inhabitants of the mountainous interior of the Island, a group that was out of touch with the civilized urban and semi-urban milieu of the coast. These mountainous peasants—the original jíbaros—became a massive labor force of agregados, sharecroppers, tied to the land via the institutionalization of the libreta, pass-book, a legal instrument created to satisfy the needs of a developing economy. The subsistence economy that prevailed in the region was soon displaced by an hacienda economy that focused on the production of coffee. The developing economy was in need of a labor force that was prohibited from migrating to other areas of the island. The hacienda economy provided the material base for the emergence of an elite Creole class.5

As the señoríal class, the hacendados, began to lay claim to Puerto Rico in opposition to the interests of the Spanish colonial government as well as against conservative merchants in the southern littoral, a nascent Puerto Rican identity began to take shape that reflected the values and beliefs of the hacendados. The Puerto Rican nation was constituted as a paternalistic class of hacendados who provided the jíbaro with the means to engage in productive labor for the good of the nation. Blacks and mulatos were still not considered part of the emerging nation. Santiago-Valles (1994:44) stated there were two major factors that influenced how these laboring classes were defined. First, even until the 1830s, many of the enslaved laborors had been born in Africa. Second, the development of sugar plantation in the eastern and southern coasts relied on slave labor from the English and French Caribbean. He further stated:

The racialization of these topographic and class boundaries was not as coherent or as tidy as the post-1940s historiography has legendarily assumed. The latter tended to imagine a "white" peasant majority nostalgically representative of Puerto Rican national culture vs. a handful of "dark" coastal laborers who were in but not of the Island. On the contrary, important segments of this mountainous peasantry were of mixed African and Iberian heritage, harking back to the period between the sixteenth and late eighteenth centuries when runaway slaves (of both sexes) settled and intermingled with fugitive galley prisoners and former soldiers of various backgrounds and with remnants of the indigenous population. (Santiago-Valles 1994:44)

Historical data demonstrate that free black and mulato laborers constituted a majority in the municipalities located in the southeastern littoral. They not only engaged in subsistence activities on the coast; they also constituted a black ye-
manry that lived in the mountainous interior of Guayama, Arroyo, Patillas, and Maunabo (see Wooster 1930).

By positioning jíbaros on the haciendas in mountainous interior of the island and negros and mulatos on the plantations on the coast, the historical contributions of free black people prior to the abolition of slavery and thereafter is left unwritten.

Puerto Rican Historiography

Puerto Rican historiography and ethnography have focused primarily on the effects of changing political and economic forces in the development of Puerto Rican society and culture. Until recently, few scholars have attempted to grapple with the political-economic structures and the intricate webs of symbolic representations that constitute and are constituted by culture (L. González and Quintero Rivera 1984, L. González 1992, Santiago-Valles 1994). The oppositions between the plantation and the estancia, the coast and the mountainous interior, urban and rural, slave and free yeoman, black and jíbaro, economy and livelihood, permeate the historical and ethnographic literature on Puerto Rico and form part of everyday discourse among Puerto Ricans (Lewis 1983, Mintz 1974a, 1974b, J. González 1981[1979], Quintero Rivera 1987, 1988).

These symbolically charged categories perpetuate the construction of a black identity that is tied to a coastal plantation economy that relied on a black and enslaved labor force and a romanticized jíbaro identity of “white” peasants in the mountainous interior of the island who engaged in subsistence activities and were later incorporated as agregados, sharecroppers, on the expanding coffee haciendas. Because people conceive of history selectively and are constrained by relations of power, alternatives to these oppositional categories are scarcely found in the historical and ethnographic literature.

For example, historiography and its fixed categories did not allow for the growth of a free black yeomanry engaged in subsistence activities in the mountainous interior of the municipalities on the southeastern coast of Puerto Rico and elsewhere. But the historical data clearly show that there was a larger percentage of free blacks and mulatos as compared to black slaves in the southeastern coast of Puerto Rico. The existence of free black and mulatto communities that were adjacent to the sugar plantation economy or whose residents participated in it as temporary laborers needs to be explored further.

Jíbaros negros were located on the coast as well as in the interior of coastal municipalities of the island. The fusion of jíbaro and negro in Puerto Rico radically alters the ways by which these categories have been essentialized in the Puerto Rican cultural imagination precisely because this union represents a movement toward blackness. Processes of blanqueamiento are negated. The jíbaro is no longer just a white-skinned peasant; he is a jíbaro negro. The mythico-historical figure is also a female. She is a black jíbara. Some were tied to the plantation and hacienda economies, others were engaged in subsistence strategies and practices to ensure their livelihood, and still others were part of each of these economies (see Ortiz 1940, Steward et al. 1956, Price 1966, Whitten and Friedemann 1974, Whitten 1974). Rather than arguing that free blacks, mulatos, and jíbaros became landless laborers and sharecroppers following abolition, it can be argued that enclaves of free blacks and mulatos also existed and developed prior to and following the emancipation of slaves in Puerto Rico.

Once we gain such a perspective, blacks and mulatos are perceived not as marginal to but rather vital to the development of the nation. This seriously revised perspective differs from previous interpretations of historical data because it does not simply define black people as former slaves and laborers who became assimilated as members of the nation. It challenges scholars to critically assess how blacks and mulatos throughout the history of Puerto Rico engaged in strategies to gain acceptance by nonblacks, on the one hand, while maintaining their black autonomy, on the other hand, in particular and specifiable social and economic arenas.

Reinterpreting History, the Family, and the Nation

The association between the great family and the nation harks back to the development of a Puerto Rican nationalist ideology in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This ideology was symbolically represented as la gran familia jíbara, the great jíbaro family, with the hacendado as the paternalistic and benevolent head who provided his children with means by which to engage in productive labor for the good of the nation. As the criollo elite sought to establish a nation in opposition to the Spanish colonial government, the subordinate but transformed jíbaro represented the nation. Manuel A. Alonso’s novel, El gíbaro, captured the imagination of the criollo elite, a mythico-historical imagination that failed to reflect the racial and socioeconomic composition of nineteenth-century Puerto Rico. As J. González (1981[1979]:57) stated,

El gíbaro, as we all know, is a collection of picturesque customs. This description fails to shed light upon the existence of numerous black and mulato inhabitants in the Island. However, the account does reveal a fundamental reality, the criollo class Alonso represented was not able to project its vision of the Puerto Rican
identity to include the various segments that constituted the basis of Puerto Rican society.

The image of la gran familia jíbara became further solidified in the early twentieth century as members of the creole elite sought to establish their Puerto Rican identity in opposition to the new colonial power, the United States. Within this context, the Puerto Rican family consisted of the creole elite, the jíbaro, and the marginalized black laborer on the coast. The creole elite and the nonblack laborers defined blacks and mulatos as displaced laborers who were now part of the nation. Given the demise of the sugar industry and the encroachment of U.S. economic and political interests in the area, the argument was made that all members of the Puerto Rican family suffered under U.S. tyranny.

Blacks and mulatos themselves, however, were actively involved in political struggles to assess and define the extent to which they were truly part of the Puerto Rican nation. Black and mulato people in many ways understood that they were within the geopolitical boundaries of the nation but were not really considered part of that cultural construction. They were the family members who, Fortunato Vizcarondo argued, were hidden from view; hidden because they revealed that the jíbaro, "el prieto de beldá," the great family, hence the nation, is truly black. The criollo elite understood that a lack of cohesion among the laboring classes undermined their attempts to promote and maintain national solidarity. Within this context la gran familia puertorriqueña, the ideology of mestizaje and processes of blanqueamiento came together to undermine attempts toward the development of a black consciousness (Whitten and Torres 1992, Torres 1995; also see the general introduction to this volume).

The Racialization of the Social and Economic Terrain

In contemporary discourse and practice an opposition between San Juan (Puerto Rico's capital on the north coast) and la isla, the island, forms part of everyday discourse (Quintero-Rivera 1987). When the question ¿De dónde eres? (Where are you from?) is posed, the reply is either De San Juan or De la isla. Communities dentro de la isla, within the island, are considered less cultured than communities located in the San Juan metropolitan area. And communities located on the coast are considered even less cultured. Jíbaros, country peasants, reside in the rural areas, and darker-skinned people live on the coast. The oppositions are even further delineated in localized settings. This dichotomy notwithstanding, people throughout the southeastern coast of Puerto Rico recognize the existence of black communities in the coastal areas as well as in the interior of Maunabo and Arroyo, where I conducted ethnographic fieldwork.

As the southeastern coast is racially mapped by Puerto Ricans, barrios, municipalities, and regions are also socially and culturally defined as negro, black. At the
local level there is an opposition between *arrabales* and *caseríos*, on the one hand, and *urbanizaciones* on the other. Most Puerto Ricans, particularly those who do not reside in the area, believe that poor, dispossessed, and dark-skinned Puerto Ricans reside in *arrabales*, sectors of towns or villages with substandard housing, and in *caseríos*, public housing complexes. While there is a whole range of pheno-
typical variation in these housing facilities, a disproportionate number of black people reside there and they are blamed for many of the social ills present in the community.²

The working poor, the working class, and the middle class live in *urbanizaciones* in the urban area. Puerto Ricans quickly associate the name of an *urbanización* with the class status of the people who reside there. Even though there is a whole range of pheno
typical variation in these housing developments, the people there are not categorized as *gente negra*, black people. The residents of *urbanizaciones* are perceived to be socioeconomically better off, better educated, and *mas culto* (more refined) than residents of *caseríos*. In fact, the working poor in the *urbanizaciones* are not always economically better off than those living in *caseríos*. However, their social status is higher precisely because they are located in a particular sociogeographical space, that of the *urbanización* as opposed specifically to the *arrabal* or *caserío*.

Maunabenos and Arroyanos define themselves primarily as Puerto Ricans from particular regions or communities within a municipality. This sense of belonging to a particular place is closely tied to their national identity, on the one hand, and to their social identity, on the other. People often remark, *Soy d'aqui* (I am a native). Others say, *Soy de Guayama, pero llevo quince años en Maunabo* (I am from Guayama, but I have spent the last fifteen years in Maunabo). These individuals refer to their place of birth as a primary identity referent, despite the fact that they reside elsewhere.

As Puerto Ricans engage in discursive practices they situate themselves and others within a racialized terrain and a particular social framework that once again oscillates between a collective identity and one rooted in a particular cultural heritage. People are categorized based primarily on physical attributes, family ancestry, geographic location, class, and status. Individuals who are pheno
typically black may be accepted by the larger society, but their acceptance is conditional on cultural “lightening.” This is so because it is assumed that the person has engaged in culturally adaptive strategies that promote *mestizaje* and *blanqueamiento*. *Mestizaje*, the ideology of racial mixture, is an integral part of national discourse and practice throughout Latin America and the Spanish-speaking Caribbean. In Puerto Rico, the ideology of *mestizaje* acknowledges the contributions of people of African, indigenous, and Spanish descent in the formation of the nation, but it also maintains and promotes racialist ideas and practices.

The process of *blanqueamiento* specifically encourages Puerto Ricans to iden-
tify with the *mestizo*, the *jíbaro* as oriented toward lighter skin, and culture. By
employing these ideologies of *mestizaje* and *blanqueamiento* to gain conditional acceptance by nonblacks, racism is perpetuated. These ideologies and processes of “whitening” refer to whiteness and blackness in cultural terms. Whiteness is associated with *la cultura*, culture. The view here is that upward mobility cannot be achieved if a black identity is maintained because there are negative cultural ascriptions associated with blackness. *Gente negra*, black people, are perceived to be culturally unrefined and lack ambition. As Torres and Whitten state in the general introduction,

*Culture* is an ambiguous but important term. In Spanish, the feminine article *la*, as in *la cultura*, elevates a concept to something refined, European, civilized. When one goes to an expensive opera in Bogotá, Colombia, for example, wearing “fine” clothes and speaking in a “refined manner,” one is participating in *la cultura* and one is *muy culto*, very civilized. Today, in most Latin American societies, to affix *cultura* to blackness without the article *la* is to demean traditions and life-ways to something “vernacular,” worthy of study by folklorists but insignificant in processes leading to higher and higher levels of Latin American civilization.

Such a perspective does not negate the existence of black culture but confines it to the realm of the “popular.” In the Puerto Rican context, by defining black cultural contributions within the context of slavery and the expressive realm, naturalized stigmata that set black people apart from the rest of Puerto Rican society are continually reproduced.

Class stratification in Puerto Rico is delineated because people incorporate markers of social status that include geographic locality, family lineage, social and moral conduct, and current socioeconomic status (Lauria 1964). Individuals with similar family backgrounds, economic status, political affiliation, and phenotypical variation in the family are considered equals. Income, occupation, education, social relationships, and material wealth are all taken into account in identifying the economic and social standing of individuals and their families. This view of a local-level stratified system blurs distinctions and perpetuates the view that socioeconomic status overrides concerns regarding an individual’s racial and family heritage. But indicators of social status are racialized. The people of the southeastern coast of Puerto Rico, where I conducted ethnographic fieldwork, are well aware of family histories and economic successes or failures. They ideally state: *Todos somos iguales, algunos más blanquitos otros más trigueños* (We are all equals, some of us are whiter and some of us are darker).

For example, Maunabeños and Arroyanos, who are not classed as *gente de bien* or *gente de dinero*, elites, often look with contempt upon the old elite, *blanquitos*, because such members of the upper stratum firmly hold onto their hereditary status. In particular, those people who are classed as elite because they have acquired wealth and claim to be white are often ridiculed. Fortunato Vizcarrondo’s penetrating question is invoked: *¿Y tu abuela dónde está?* (and your grandmother,
where is she?). Individuals *de una buena familia*, from a good family, with refined tastes who do not flaunt their hereditary or monetary status are considered ideal.

By collapsing racial and class distinctions under the broad concept *una buena familia* or *una buena persona*, Puerto Ricans can neatly avoid the extent to which issues of race, gender, and class permeate everyday life. However, in casual conversations issues of race and class and a sense of place come to the fore. When a farmer and landowner from the interior boasted about the acquisition of a fine horse, he was asked, “¿Quién te lo vendió? (Who sold it to you?)” The man replied, “De un hombre de la costa, negro pero bueno. (From a man on the coast, a black one, but a good one.”) In other words, by definition coastal people, negros, are bad unless they engage in behaviors or activities associated with gente buena.

**A Black Identity: The Family and the Nation**

In Puerto Rico, respectable families known as gente buena constitute the nation. In the southern littoral many blacks and mulatos are asserting their identity as part of the nation but are aware of the fact that socioeconomic survival means developing strategies and exercising options that may contradict national, collective, and self-interests (Silvestrini 1989). In addition, Maunabeyes and Arroyanos migrate and develop subsistence strategies to benefit their families and by extension their communities and the nation. By engaging in behaviors that strengthen family ties, they challenge the status quo.

Karen Fog Olwig (1993), in her study of continuity and change in an Afro-Caribbean community of Nevis, argues that many of the social and economic problems that plague a community on Nevis are resolved to a great extent within the Nevisian transnational community. Irresolvable conflicts in the local society are resolved in the transnational context because individuals seek to improve their socioeconomic conditions elsewhere. Since Afro-Caribbean culture remains critical to the transnational community, maintaining social relations and engaging in exchanges from distant locations affect the local community. Fog Olwig (1993:156) states: “the mutual rights and obligations that tie Nevisians situated in distant locations together in global networks are thus informed by Afro-Caribbean culture, in particular its family system. The cultural identity which sustains the Nevisian global community draws, to a considerable extent, on the Afro-Caribbean rural life which has formed the context within which Afro-Caribbean life has emerged.”

In the case of Puerto Rico, particularly in the communities within which focused, social and economic problems are only partly resolved by outward migration. There is simply no guarantee of socioeconomic success abroad, and individuals may or may not be able to elevate the social and economic status of their families on the island. Individuals who are successful, though, assert their Puerto Rican identity by traveling to and from the island on a regular basis, by
maintaining local family and community ties, and by demonstrating to others that they have resisted assimilation by adhering to local family values.

Decades of short-term and long-term migrations to the U.S. mainland and return migrations to the island have had many effects on localized communities. Family members who send remittances and consumer goods to relatives living in Puerto Rico try to elevate the social status of their family members in three principal ways. First, they demonstrate that they are hard-working individuals who have acquired success abroad. Second, as sociable and respectable members of a family, they fulfill their responsibilities toward them by providing them with consumer goods and economic resources. Third, the consumer goods in and of themselves become markers; they stand as emblematic symbols of a higher class and social status. However, elite or middle-class nonblacks consider these goods not as gifts but as purchases that place the families in severe debt and further support the stereotypic view that poor black people cannot manage resources properly and are therefore always in debt. All Puerto Ricans, however, participate in a consumer culture that affects their values and ideas, social relations, and exchange patterns (see West 1992).

As previously discussed, Puerto Ricans draw upon a host of criteria to categorize an individual or a group of people. Consequently, social relations and exchanges can be interpreted in complementary and contradictory ways. The expanded family network and the strategies black people engage in to improve their socioeconomic conditions contradict the prevailing stereotype view that black people are poor, lazy, and dependent. It can also perpetuate the view that black people engage in behaviors that are associated with Puerto Rican culture in general and not with stereotyped black culture. By so doing, familial practices among blacks can still be viewed stereotypically as disorganized, even though there is strong evidence to the contrary.

The multifaceted discourse on the family, the nation, blackness, and mestizaje is complicated even further. The U.S. presence on the island, migration to the mainland, and return migration to the island provide the impetus to challenge racist and class-based ideologies. As Maunabeños and Arroyanos have been exposed to discourses on race in the mainland and have been categorized as “minorities” and “people of color,” they have become the more conscious of alternative ways by which to represent themselves.

As these challenges take place, problems in the local communities and throughout Puerto Rico are viewed by most Puerto Ricans as a result of negative external influences of los norteamericanos, and by return migrants who introduce such ways to the island. There is no acknowledgment that ideas that challenge and contradict the national ideology are rooted in the continual struggle of many black people on the island to assert their identity as members of the nation (Chatterjee 1993, Handler 1988, Dominguez 1989, Fox 1990).

At present, a Puerto Rican nationalist identity that continually places emphasis on the “harmonious synthesis” of whites and indigenous and black people
throughout history fails to convince people who define themselves as black that they are equal partners in the making of the nation. They are conscious of the fact that mestizaje can never be fully achieved because nonblacks do not accept the fact that negros, mulatos, trigueños, jabaos are all truly members of the nation.

The people of the southern littoral who embrace an ideology of blackness argue that most Puerto Ricans are not willing to accept the quality of blackness and hence most dark-complexioned people as part of the Puerto Rican cultural construct of nation. Such people, they argue, place a premium on strategies and practices that promote blanqueamiento. More important, these people of color argue that black people who struggle to affirm their contributions to la gran familia puertorriqueña want to do so on their own terms and not under the conditions set by nonblacks. As Whitten (1995) states in his discussion of ethnogenesis, cultural hegemony is not absolute. There are “people who do not entirely share nation-state ideologies of culture, personality, and society and consciously began to enact counter hegemonic strategies, increasing their own sense of distinct history and altered destiny.”

On March 22, 1995, the people of Puerto Rico commemorated the 122nd anniversary of the abolition of slavery. Peggy Ann Bliss (1995) reported:

> Puerto Ricans will “bleach away” many of the physical traces to its African past by the year 2200, with the other Spanish-speaking Caribbean following a few centuries later. “Puerto Ricans are whitening (blanqueando) faster than any other mestizo (hybrid) country,” said Luis Díaz Soler, a specialist on island slavery. “In two centuries, there will hardly be any blacks in Puerto Rico.”

Anthropologist Ricardo Alegría echoed this sentiment by stating that in the Spanish-speaking Caribbean, Puerto Rico will “become white” faster than the Dominican Republic. Cuba, he argued, will slowly whiten, since Cuba liberated 300,000 slaves as compared to the liberation of 27,000 slaves in Puerto Rico. Remarks by learned scholars, particularly by scholars whose work has focused on slavery, the black experience, and Puerto Rican society and culture on the 122nd anniversary of the abolition of slavery, reveal the ways by which ideologies of blackness, mestizaje, whiteness, and processes of blanqueamiento permeate the academy, the media, and the Puerto Rican cultural landscape.

Contrary to these prevailing views, Puerto Ricans who define themselves as negros and mulatos argue that those who promote ideologies of mestizaje and blanqueamiento fail to consider that Puerto Rican culture is being darkened. As a result, many Puerto Ricans, they argue, fail to understand how black people have engaged in cultural practices that have truly transformed Puerto Rican culture, the nation, and its people.

In the blackened cauldron, el sancocho, the stew, is boiling over; black Puerto Ricans are continually creating themselves anew, as they continually engage in
debates about the rootedness of Puerto Rican culture, the Puerto Rican family, and the Puerto Rican nation.

Notes

1. Here is the original Spanish version:

Mientras en Centro y Suramérica las culturas indígenas siguen enriqueciendo y formando parte importante de las culturas nacionales de los respectivos países (México, Guatemala, Perú, Bolivia), en las Antillas Mayores sólo quedaron sus restos arqueológicos, biológicos y culturales que desde hace siglos fueron asimilados por la cultura hispánica, para junto a la rica contribución africana, integrar nuestra puertorriqueñidad.

Mientras en algunas islas del Caribe o países como Guyana, por ejemplo, la cultura negra y su población fue preponderante, en Puerto Rico, por las circunstancias históricas que ya han señalado los estudiosos, esa rica herencia fue asimilada, al igual que la indígena, por la cultura hispánica, produciéndos así nuestra cultura nacional que no puede ser clasificada como taína, africana o española, sino como la armoniosa síntesis de las tres, que es la puertorriqueñidad.

2. Musical celebrations in particular continually pay homage to the contributions of black people to Puerto Rican culture. This is expressed in the video Al compás de un sentimiento (1996). It is the most recent musical tribute produced under the auspices of El Banco Popular celebrating the life and work of Pedro Flores, an Afro-Puerto Rican who migrated to the U.S. mainland in the 1930s. The nationalist sentiments expressed in his lyrics emphasize a collective Puerto Rican identity. In this musical context Flores, like his Afro-Puerto Rican counterparts, is a Puerto Rican son precisely because he celebrates his Puerto Ricanness even though he is steeped in a black musical tradition and heritage and is living in the mainland.

3. This chapter focuses on ethnographic data gathered in municipalities located in the southeastern coast of Puerto Rico, where I conducted fieldwork in 1984 and 1985. The communities of study include the municipalities of Maunabo, Patillas, and Arroyo. See Torres (1995).

4. The 1842 Census revealed that Guayama's population consisted of naturales, 5,019; europeos, 170; de America, 329; canarios, 8; franceses, 413; ingleses, 27; daneses, 458; alemanes, 22; holandeses, 77; italianos, 71; and otras naciones, 3,797; for a total of 10,391. (Cited in Sued Badillo 1983:87)

5. Los conquistados en esta ocasión no fueron obviamente, los aborígenes taínos, extraviados hacia tres siglos por la política genocida de la primera conquista, sino el campesinado blanco que habitaba la región montañosa de la Isla, virtualmente incomunicada de la civilización urbana y semiurbana de la costa. Ese campesinado montaraz—los "píbaros" originales—se convirtió entonces en masa de agregados atados a la tierra por la institución de la "libretas," ejemplo elocuente de un instrumento legal creado para satisfacer las exigencias de un determinado desarrollo económico. Y es que la economía de substancia que había prevalecido en esa región fue remplazada por una economía de ha-
ciendas basadas en el cultivo de café, necesitada de mano de obra estable e impedida de
migrar a otras regiones. Esa economía de haciendas fue el sustento material de un nuevo
sector de la clase dirigente criolla.

6. The role and the contributions of black women to Puerto Rican society have yet to
be fully addressed in the scholarly literature. Groundbreaking analyses include Elisabeth

7. El gíbaro, que es como todos sabemos una colección de cuadros y costumbres, arroja
un escaso día sobre la existencia de la numerosa población negra y mulata del país, no
muestra una realidad fundamental, a saber, que la clase representada por Alonso no es
todavía capaz de proyectar su propia concepción de la identidad puertorriqueña a los
amplios sectores que constituyen la base social del país.

7. See Santiago-Valles (1994) for an analysis of how crime is gendered, racialized, and
class-based in Puerto Rican discourse.

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