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Black Behind The Ears: Dominican Racial Identity From Museums To Beauty Shops



Synopsis

Black behind the Ears is an innovative historical and ethnographic examination of Dominican identity formation in the Dominican Republic and the United States. For much of the Dominican Republic's history, the national body has been defined as "not black," even as black ancestry has been grudgingly acknowledged. Rejecting simplistic explanations, Ginetta E. B. Candelario suggests that it is not a desire for whiteness that guides Dominican identity discourses and displays. Instead, it is an ideal norm of what it means to be both indigenous to the Republic (indios) and "Hispanic." Both indigeneity and Hispanicity have operated as vehicles for asserting Dominican sovereignty in the context of the historically triangulated dynamics of Spanish colonialism, Haitian unification efforts, and U.S. imperialism. Candelario shows how the legacy of that history is manifest in contemporary Dominican identity discourses and displays, whether in the national historiography, the national museum's exhibits, or ideas about women's beauty. Dominican beauty culture is crucial to efforts to identify as "indios" because, as an easily altered bodily feature, hair texture trumps skin color, facial features, and ancestry in defining Dominicans as indios. Candelario draws on her participant observation in a Dominican beauty shop in Washington Heights, a New York City neighborhood with the oldest and largest Dominican community outside the Republic, and on interviews with Dominicans in New York City, Washington, D.C., and Santo Domingo. She also analyzes museum archives and displays in the Museo del Hombre Dominicano and the Smithsonian Institution as well as nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century European and American travel narratives.

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Customer Reviews

Candelario has an excellent collection of essays here that examine how Dominican's identify in order to have the most success, and how government actions have not allowed them, oftentimes, to fully accept their African heritage despite obvious African roots. Very interesting work.

I wrote a rather lengthy (for me anyways) review yesterday! What happened? it still says no reviews. Either way... very good book. I found it fun to read yet very substantive and informative. I like the sociological perspective. A must read for any Dominican, especially those, like myself, who moved to the north east and grew up uncertain about who I was racially, with others ascribing race to me which I did not identify with. Great historical and ethnographic research. enlightening to say the least. Some sociological concepts may be hard for some to totally comprehend, but this does not make or break this book, it actually makes it better for me, having my degree in sociology.

I was married to a Dominican man (RIP) and we live in the DMV (DC, MD, VA area) and I also know some of the individuals she mentioned in the book in the area. I am familiar with the Dominican issues regarding racial identity. I believe the issues are more prevalent once a Dominican leaves Dominican Republic and live their lives in the USA. The author, Ginetta E. B. Candelario (my former last name from my marriage was also Candelario) really hit on all aspects of the identity issues.

Great for reading for everyone

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