

# Introduction

## *The Illusion of Living in a Non-Racist Racist Society*

There is a saying in Puerto Rico, “gota a gota, se llena el vaso” (drop by drop, you fill the glass). In other words, one day at a time, little by little, things can be changed. In the United States, the “one drop rule” declared that a person with as little as 1/32 of African blood qualified as Black. It was how African Americans were socially othered and legally excluded. Along with the history of racial phenomena in twentieth-century Puerto Rico, you will find stories that are “drops of inclusivity.” These stories are some of the rare instances in which Afro-Puerto Ricans were included in the dialogue about race and the creation of the Puerto Rican national identity. Many of the stories have been left from history books. By documenting the instances where Black Puerto Ricans broke through racial hierarchies, where they were acknowledged as part of the national identity and history, we piece together the larger story of Afro-Puerto Rican perseverance but also acknowledge the slow march of incremental change. Collecting these “drops” gives us a fuller understanding of how far Afro-Puerto Ricans have come and inspires us to continue to work for racial inclusivity.

### Questioning Racial Myths

Over the last sixty-plus years, researchers have conducted sociological studies on race and racism in Puerto Rico. Although most of the research

tends to primarily address sociological issues, historical analysis of this time period has been sparse. Therefore, this book is an attempt to analyze the phenomenon of race from a sociohistorical and political standpoint. Examining the case of Puerto Rico provides methods to identify fluid racial discourse and practices that are not identifiable by other means.

Some of the scholarship has suggested that Puerto Rico has never been the setting of racial struggles and has never had deeply rooted collective prejudice from one race against the other. Instead, they posit that Puerto Rico has offered to the world an admirable example of social/racial harmony, where all men contribute in their effort to the development of the country. The problem with these assumptions is that they both deny the history of racism in Puerto Rican society and limit the ways Black Puerto Ricans can challenge the various forms of racial exclusion pervasive on the island.

This study assesses several changing racial formations and meanings in Puerto Rico from 1898 to 1965, with a focus on Afro-Puerto Ricans and their struggle to achieve the right of self-determination during the first half of the twentieth century. In this context, self-determination is the effort of a group that seeks validation within the current of an elaborate “cultural identity,” which encompasses a sense of belongingness based on certain commonalities, including nationality, ethnicity, and other cultural traits. In this sense, Puerto Rican cultural identity has gathered some of the components of its ethnic heritage, but selectively. For instance, the island triad known as the three roots (Taino-Indian, Spanish, and African), in constructing the Puerto Rican cultural and national identity, was exclusionary because the African component was left out or silenced. According to Chilean economist Jorge Larraín, in the process of modernization, “certain classes, institutions or groups” were excluded.<sup>1</sup> In sum, Afro-Puerto Ricans were excluded from the nation-building and modernization process, and their struggle for self-definition and inclusion is a result of that exclusion. In the Puerto Rican context, anti-Black racism is characterized and defined as a phenomenon of non-racist racism. But how can racism be non-racist? In Puerto Rican society racism is both covert and denied. This has debilitating consequences for Puerto Ricans of African descent in terms of their inclusion during the island’s national identity.

The perception of race is also examined within the national discourse that evolved in Puerto Rican society during the first half of the twentieth century. Theories describing racial formation processes attempt to explain

the evolution of racial consciousness in given societies. Such methods are used in this book to identify analytical structures that would be challenging to discover through other means.

In 1898, the United States invaded the island. United States' colonial regime added another level to the colonial system and reinforced the island's political and intellectual elites' racial narrative.<sup>2</sup> In this regard, *Drops of Inclusivity: Racial Formations and Meanings in Puerto Rican Society* examines whether Puerto Rican society, regardless of its exposure to American racial policies, subscribed to its own brand of racial narrative. This racial narrative is defined as the social construction of the Puerto Rican nation as raceless or where racial dialogue is "silenced," while at the same time Black Puerto Ricans are erased from the national identity formulation. Furthermore, the racial formula invented by the elites rearticulates the Puerto Rican society in such a way that the Afro-Puerto Ricans are racialized by the absence of whiteness in their blood as perceived in the colonial Spanish society.<sup>3</sup> Ironically, in Puerto Rican society race is not only biological; it is intertwined with class status and culture. On this principle, Afro-Puerto Ricans have been subjected to exclusion, disenfranchisement, marginalization, and folklorization.<sup>4</sup>

### Disentangling Racism

In Puerto Rican scholarship, the history of slavery tends to be limited to the legal institution of slavery, failing to explore how the shadow of slavery continued to perpetuate negative stereotypes and stigmas against Black Puerto Ricans. The formulation of racial equations and discourses are linked to the island's history of enslavement. The history of slavery, as Isar Godreau and colleagues point out, is "instrumental in the reproduction of national ideologies of *mestizaje*."<sup>5</sup> Literary critic Arcadio Díaz Quiñones, who wrote a preeminent essay in Tomás Blanco's *El prejuicio racial in Puerto Rico*, asserts that the history of slavery led to perpetual socioeconomic disadvantages for the Afro-Puerto Rican population. Looking at the scholarship on the subject in the United States, sociologists Michael Omi and Howard Winant also observed the linkage between slavery and racialization. They contended that "racial" legacies of the past—slavery and bigotry—continue to shape the present.<sup>6</sup> For the purpose of this study, these three approaches are our starting point for recognizing the connec-

tions between slavery and Blackness, racialization and social exclusion.

Studies on race and racial exclusion cannot be conducted without assessing the economic strategies used by the government and non-government institutions. Pivotal to this study is assessing the modernization of the island, which was a priority for the Partido Popular and Governor Muñoz Marín's administration (1949–1965). I contend that the economic model adopted in Puerto Rico by the Muñoz Marín administration carries with it a racial equation and practices (social and institutional). What makes the case of Puerto Rico noteworthy is precisely its political and economic relations with the United States (geopolitical status), and how the neocolonial rule has re-formed Puerto Ricans' racial identity. Focusing on the process of modernization and industrialization brings a different angle to the developmental theory, which tends to overemphasize economic achievements and overlook the intersections between race and class. Omi and Winant discussed the relevance of a "nation-based" paradigm to understand the legacy of colonialism. It entails the idea of nation-building and modernity by aggressively creating economic programs, social/cultural narratives in which individual or groups that are not of European ancestry or whites are commonly perceived as a threat to the nation-building project. They are either absorbed by the nation-building propaganda or simply left out from the equation. Therefore, I apply this paradigm to U.S.-Puerto Rican relations in order to delve deeper into the symbiotic combination of colonial structure and a supposed raceless society.

These strategies are related to the process of racialization or the attribution of a racial/biological characteristic to an individual of a group, which turns out to be problematic when whiteness becomes a synonym for privilege and power, while blackness is marked for exclusion. But to what kind of historical interpretations should one refer that can be useful for public policymaking or to understand the dynamics in a society that every day is turning more and more white while blackness is suppressed and rejected? In the case of Puerto Rico, the idea of a non-racist and raceless society implies operating as a nation with one focus, that is, "Puerto Ricanness" while historically and institutionally excluding Black Puerto Ricans.

### Exporting Racial Hierarchies

When Europeans (in this case, the Iberians) came to the Americas, they already had experience with other ethnic groups, specifically Muslims and

Jews. As clearly discussed by James Sweet's seminal study on race relations in the Iberian Peninsula, the Spanish had developed a racial hierarchy that could serve as a reference point to the racial model they exported to the Americas. One may assume the co-existence between Iberians with Muslims and Jews gave the Spanish some degree of tolerance. However, after the expulsion of the Moors, and the forced conversion of the Jews, Spain became more intolerant against non-Catholic ethnicities.<sup>7</sup> Amidst this situation, people of "olive-skinned" complexion became targets of ethnic hostilities, reinforcing ethnic divides.

Racial intolerance and racist practices were further hastened by the massive enslavement of Africans and their relocation in the Iberian cities and exportation to the Americas. In the Americas, the population of Africans and indigenous people outnumbered the Spanish, creating fears among the new settlers. Consequently, in their quest to legitimize their right to the land, the Spanish created a culture in which individuals sought to validate their ethnic/racial status and Christianity through "pureza de sangre," or purity of blood. Sociologists Michael Omi and Howard Winant added that once in the Americas, the "native" people challenged the Europeans' preconceptions of the human species. This affected the enterprise of the conquest. This realization of the "other" was a key element in the colonial society built by Iberians in the Americas.

Throughout history, racism has changed and evolved, both in its form and content, yet it has remained a dominant and pervasive force in virtually every society. The slave trade, introduced to the island in the sixteenth century, greatly influenced the dynamics of racial constructs in the society. In Puerto Rico, Spaniards created an enduring pyramidal society based on class and race hierarchies in which Spanish and Creoles (colonials of Spanish descent) held all positions of power and control. Castes that included racial mixtures among Taínos and Spaniards, or Spanish and Africans (free and enslaved), occupied a lower level. Enslaved persons were placed at the bottom of that system. That caste category classified people of color using descriptive nouns such as "mulatos," "pardos," "negros," and "morenos." Puerto Rican society has embraced these classifications which, at their core, all mean Black. Spaniards and Creoles could derive privileges from the system, meaning officials from the military, educated people, and planters belonged in this social class. Colored people who enjoyed freedom due to certain circumstances had to take whatever opportunities the system granted them.

In the eighteenth century, historical accounts showed that the island was a mixed society. In 1788, Fray Iñigo Abbad y Lasierra published a report about the island of Puerto Rico. In it, he describes the Black population of the island as follows:

The mulattos, who comprised the majority of the island's population, are the offspring of a white man and a Black woman. Their skin color is dark and unpleasant, the color of their eyes is muddy, they are tall and well built, stronger and used to work more than the white Creoles who treat them with disdain.<sup>8</sup>

The Abbad y Lasierra account was one of the first reports regarding the civil and racial status of the island. In addition to testifying that racial prejudice against people of African descent was quite evident, he seems to suggest that white Creoles were lazy. In other words, for Abbad y Lasierra, the Creoles were an inferior caste and Blacks were subhuman. His construction of Creole and Black character was based on their dynamics among themselves. Or as Arcadio Díaz Quiñones put it, Abbad's account suggests Puerto Rican society was transforming through conflicts with racial and social hierarchies.<sup>9</sup>

Race relations were tense and contentious on the island in the nineteenth century. The Haitian Revolution and the Spanish Wars for Independence contributed to the environment of tension, harassment, and persecution against Blacks (free and enslaved). For instance, under Governor Juan de Prim (1823–1837), a civil code known as *bando contra la raza africana* (edict against the African race) banned free Blacks from gathering or socializing in the city of San Juan and banned slaves from crossing from plantation to plantation. Although Blacks made up the majority of the population by the first decades of the nineteenth century, the phantom of Haiti was still a reminder to the planter-class that a similar situation could be repeated in Puerto Rico.<sup>10</sup>

In the 1810s, Spain's political reorganization triggered the drafting of a Spanish constitution known as the Constitution of Cádiz. Liberal Creoles in the colonies proposed that racial representation should be organized based on demographic proportions, creating a conflict because the population of Spanish America was proportionately bigger than Spain's. As a result of the concern of being outnumbered, by using the constitution as a legal weapon, indigenous people and people of African descent were

excluded from political participation. For instance, Article 18 of the Cádiz Constitution established and declared Spanish citizenship to all men born in Spain and its territories who could trace their lineage back to Spain.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, Article 22 stipulated that peoples of African descent were considered Spanish citizens as long as they were conceived within a legitimate marriage, if they served the country, and stood out as respectable citizens.<sup>12</sup> The Constitution of Cádiz is a clear example of how the Spanish colonial system used a legal document for the benefit of its white citizens. This constitution was perhaps the first attempt of the Spanish colonial government to disenfranchise Blacks and the indigenous population and to prevent them from political participation, disguising racism under the moral and religious principle of “legitimate union.” Under this criterion, it would have been challenging for many Black Puerto Ricans who were the product of nonconsensual relationships between a Creole and an enslaved person or a domestic worker to gain citizenship. Similar ordeals existed for a Black Puerto Rican couple who did not have the money to pay the fees for a wedding ceremony in the Catholic Church.<sup>13</sup>

Economic and political environments in some of the Spanish colonies in the Americas led some liberal planters to advocate for the abolition of slavery without confronting those who still saw this practice as a reputable business, whereas others argued that the island was dependent on free labor. In this instance, the colonial government reached an agreement that would implement the gradual emancipation of the slaves with the commitment, to some degree, to compensate the planters for their “loss.”

Finally, on March 22, 1873, slavery was abolished. However, these freed men and women suffered more obstacles when they attempted to integrate into free society. Leading scholarship has demonstrated freed people of color faced difficulty when they sought to be recognized as free laborers. They lacked access to land, and more importantly, their status of *libertos* or freed men and women created another layer of stigmatization. Although they were technically free, the society was not ready for them and the system did not welcome them.<sup>14</sup> The *libertos* found themselves competing for work with free white laborers who were under the *libreta* system, which was a laboring code stating laborers must carry a notebook where employers logged in their working hours. Comprehensive studies on the post-emancipation period describe the economic and social abandonment suffered by the Afro-Puerto Rican segment of the population.

The previous historical analysis provides insight into how racial ideology and racial prejudice evolved in Puerto Rican society before 1898. These accounts of anti-Black attitudes, strict racial hierarchies, and codified exclusion across the centuries of Spanish occupation illustrate that the dynamics of race and racialization were embedded in the Puerto Rican society prior to the arrival of the Americans.

### Using “Slippery” Language

Discussions about cultural identity and ethnicity are the means through which race and racism issues among Puerto Ricans are directly addressed. These issues have been complex, enigmatic, and often disguised by denial and silence. This book uses the term “race,” which according to Omi and Winant, “signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies.” They also pointed out that even though the concept of race implies the classification of people based on skin color and genealogy, they cautioned “for the purposes of racial signification is always and necessarily a social and historical process.” Racism is employed as an ideology of hierarchical power based on race. Racial discrimination and racial prejudice constitute racism in action. Racialization refers to the assignment of a racial meaning to a population group or an individual. Racial formation is used in the context of designating a particular sociohistorical process where categories are “created, inhabited, transformed and destroyed.”<sup>15</sup>

Anthropologist Isar Godreau in her 2008 article *Slippery Semantics* studied the different examples of how Puerto Ricans express racial classifications. She defined “slippery semantics” as “a recurrent linguistic inconsistency in racial identification process that takes place when people use different systems of logical grids of racial classification during a single conversation.”<sup>16</sup> Godreau’s study helped to conceptualize the instances in which Puerto Ricans engage in “racial” conversations without identifying themselves as “racist” or being subjected to “racial discrimination.” This inconsistency is challenging, especially when one aims to examine the instances where racism took place.

In this book, the term “Black” is used to identify Puerto Ricans of African ancestry. It is used interchangeably with the terms Afro-Puerto Rican or Afro-Boricua. Ironically, in Puerto Rico, the social devaluation



of blackness is itself a form of denial through distancing. This practice is rampant in Puerto Rican popular and elite culture, historical narratives, political discourses, various social practices, and everyday speech.<sup>17</sup> Traditionally, the elite's folkloric and paternalistic sense of Black "inclusion" has been accompanied by the silence and exclusion of Blacks from the narratives of Puerto Rican history and culture.<sup>18</sup> In that sense "drops of inclusivity" is similar to the "exception to the rule" situation in which certain Black Puerto Ricans are allowed to "make it" and then used as the yardstick by which to measure all the other Black Puerto Ricans who "do not make it," implying that they are lacking rather than acknowledging that systemic racism prevents them from making it.

Furthermore, in this book, the use of the term "blackness" will also reflect the degree of contestation to define and redefine one's identity, as argued in Goudreau's 2015 study. She deconstructs the folkloric imaginary (scripts of blackness) of Afro-Puerto Rican culture and establishes how these scripts of blackness are historically intersected with class, gender, and personal/community perceptions of racial identity and national ideologies.

### Unwrapping Racial Tolerance

Puerto Rico's racial complexity has two main historical roots. First, throughout the nineteenth century, the political elite rejected the idea of an absolutist colonial society, claiming the presence of a national or local culture devoid of racial divides. It constructed the notion of the *la gran familia puertorriqueña*, or great Puerto Rican family. The notion of the great Puerto Rican family, originating in the late nineteenth century, is part of the island's social discourse. It became further solidified as members of the Creole elite sought to establish their Puerto Rican identity in opposition to the new colonial power, the United States. In fact, Hilda Lloréns's study *Imagining the Great Puerto Rican Family* (2014) provides an excellent analysis of ideological construction of the racial tolerance and its ramifications. The study offers excellent examples of the state institutions' role in fostering the image of Puerto Rican society as racially inclusive.

Second, the United States' acquisition of the island added another layer to the colonial rule, one based on racial narratives and hierarchy, which were readily embraced by a segment of the Puerto Rican middle and upper classes, namely the elites.<sup>19</sup>

The United States undermined the elite's national grand design, thereby triggering an identity crisis, which was openly manifested from the political and literary points of view. The United States' form of racism, which is based on a rigid black or white paradigm, combined with little or no knowledge of the island's racial reality (the cultural dominance of a mixed-race population), disrupted the social imaginary of "racial harmony." During this period, the elite were forced to create another social structure by twisting and romanticizing Puerto Rican identity into a Hispanic one. However, the "new Puerto Rican" did not include the indigenous peoples and Puerto Ricans of African ancestry. In fact, a national identity was forged by narrowly emphasizing what is labeled as *el jibaro* (white peasant).

### Re-Tracing the Racial Debate

Literature on racism, racial discrimination, and racial classification in the Caribbean, Latin America, and the United States is quite significant. There is a bewildering array of approaches to the idea of "race" and classification pursued by the governments and peoples of these geographical areas.<sup>20</sup> There are two opposing arguments regarding race across disciplines. On the one hand are arguments showing the presence of racial prejudice.<sup>21</sup> On the other hand are those that contend that racism does not exist in Puerto Rico.<sup>22</sup>

The idea that there is no racism in Puerto Rico is disputable. Sociologist and educator Samuel Betances dismantles this belief when he exposes that several factors account for the mistaken belief that no race prejudice exists on the island: (1) the notion that Iberian slave laws were more liberal and humane than slave laws of other nations; (2) the belief that the absence of excessive violence and cruelty in the history of Puerto Rican race relations also indicates an absence of racism in Puerto Rico; (3) the belief that racial factors are not significant in determining the social and class patterns of discrimination; (4) the belief that race discrimination and race tolerance cannot exist simultaneously in the same family or culture, thus, the citing of mixed marriages in Puerto Rico as evidence of the absence of race prejudice; (5) the effort of American writers to find in Puerto Rico an example of a place where the problems between the races have been solved; and (6) the fact that constant comparison of race relations in Puerto Rico with race in the United States has led to misleading conclusions.<sup>23</sup>

Proving racial discrimination in a society that claims the contrary represents an intellectual challenge. Among the academic community, there are a variety of measures to document the presence and effects of racism and racial discrimination. For this research, both quantitative and qualitative methods are used. In addition, social scientific literature; news resources; reports from the local government; international, public, and private sources; judicial decisions; biographies; and media accounts are consulted. Revisiting the process of modernization from a more comprehensive perspective has uncovered racist practices that could be mistakenly passed as normal or simply as cultural practices.

Even those who recognize that there is discrimination based on color believe claims cannot be prosecuted because there are no effective mechanisms to investigate it, neither in the private sector nor in government institutions. Marcos A. Rivera Ortíz, a prominent Black Puerto Rican attorney and activist, argues that despite the attempts of many people to denounce being victims of racism, the judicial system in Puerto Rico rarely has ruled or sentenced anyone for this crime. Rivera Ortíz's work shows that racism is hard to prosecute because Puerto Rican society has internalized that its citizens are not racist. Supporting Rivera Ortíz's claims, the legal scholar Tanya K. Hernández finds that in Puerto Rico, despite the existence of a legal framework for addressing racial discrimination cases, very few such cases were filed in the period from the 1940s to 2001.

Another fact to consider is the trend of "whitening" that the census shows among the Puerto Rican population. The island did not gather racial data, including in the census, from the years 1960 until 2000. However, there was already a pattern of decrease among the Afro-Puerto Rican population in the census of 1899. By not having racial data for fifty years, the figure of the 2000 census suggests that the Puerto Rican white population is an overwhelming majority. Although the 2010 census shows a slight increase among the Black Puerto Rican population, they are still in the "minority." For instance, the census of 2000 shows that 80.5 percent of the population considers itself white, while 8 percent of the population classifies itself as Black/African American. Curiously, in the 2010 census, 75.8 percent of the population identified itself as white and 12.4 percent as Black/African American, an increase of 50 percent from the census figures of 2000. The numbers could suggest that Puerto Ricans of African ancestry are more comfortable with declaring their race. However, the numbers still do not translate into inclusion and acceptance.

Table I.1. Selected Figures from the U.S. Census of Puerto Rico, 1899–2010

Year	Category	Number of persons	Percentage
1899	<b>Total</b>	<b>953,423</b>	
	White	589,426	61.8
	Colored	363,817	38.2
1910	<b>Total</b>	<b>1,118,012</b>	
	White	732,555	65.5
	Colored	385,457	34.5
1920	<b>Total</b>	<b>1,299,809</b>	
	White	948,709	73.0
	Colored	351,100	27.0
1930	<b>Total</b>	<b>1,543,913</b>	
	White	1,146,719	74.3
	Colored	411,038	23.8
1940	<b>Total</b>	<b>1,869,255</b>	76.2
	White	1,430,744	76.5
	Nonwhite	438,511	32.5
1950	<b>Total</b>	<b>2,211,000</b>	
	White	1,762,411	79.7
	Negro	446,948	20.5
	Other races	1,344	0.1
1960	<b>Total</b>	<b>2,349,421</b>	
2000	<b>Total</b>	<b>3,650,195</b>	80.5
	White	3,064,862	8.0
	Black/African American	302,933	20.2
	Other	440,815	11.5
2010	<b>Total</b>	<b>3,725,798</b>	
	White	2,825,100	75.8
	Black/African American	461,498	12.4
	Indian/Alaska	19,839	.53
	Asian	6,83	0.2
	Native Hawaiian	379	0.1
	Some other race	289,905	7.8
	Two or more races	122,246	3.3

From 1960–2000, the US censuses taken in Puerto Rico did not include demographic information based on race. Table adapted and updated from Jorge Duany, *The Puerto Rican Nation on the Move: Identities on the Island and in the United States* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 247. All data from US Department of Commerce, United States Census Bureau, 1899–2010.

## Outlining Racial Exclusion and Drops of Inclusivity

The opening chapter, “A Revised Account of the New ‘Colored’ Possession,” describes the historical setting of the Spanish-American War and its consequences for Puerto Rican society. It analyzes the American perception of Puerto Ricans by focusing on the process of the creation of the “Other.” It uses contemporary documents of the period such as *Report on the Island of Porto Rico* by Henry K. Carroll (1899) and scholarship on the period to argue that the project of Americanization was a clear illustration of the racialization of Puerto Ricans.<sup>24</sup> It discusses the example of a Black Puerto Rican named Simón Mejil, who was the first Black islander to receive an official title by the Americans. Simón Mejil serves as an example of what may appear to be a progressive act in a society of marked racial hierarchies.

Chapter 2, “Reshaping Education, Race, and Citizenship,” focuses on the role of education as part of the socioeconomic strategies of the insular administration to improve the socioeconomic conditions of Puerto Ricans and the push for an Americanization project. Amid such a racial environment, Black Puerto Ricans took advantage of the opportunities to improve their social status by attending either segregated or racially integrated institutions of higher learning. For them, getting a degree in the United States translated to more than just socioeconomic status but also to having a voice in national politics.

The third chapter, “The Twisted Evolution of National Identity,” examines the evolution of national identity as it was reformulated by the intellectual class as well as the two main political leaders: Pedro Albizu Campos (head of the Nationalist Party) and Luis Muñoz Marín (founder of the Democratic Popular Party). It investigates the methods developed through political ideologies, such as populism and nationalism, that influenced the exclusionary discourse of race in society, which excluded Black Puerto Ricans. In the midst of this discourse, the Black-Puerto Rican organization *Liga para Promover el Progreso de los Negros en Puerto Rico* (League to Promote the Advancement of Blacks in Puerto Rico) became the leading voice in denouncing racism in Puerto Rican society.

Chapter 4, “Intersecting Race and Modernization,” focuses on dismantling the myth of racial harmony. It examines social contradictions through two court cases that ended with a landmark ruling. The discussions surrounding the cases illustrate that in Puerto Rican society, due to a long history of miscegenation, racial harmony indeed is a myth. The

chapter also looks at the role of educational and cultural institutions in constructing and reinforcing the myth of racial harmony.

Chapter 5, “The Voices of Modernity,” concentrates on the modernization of Puerto Rican society and economy. The island’s role in the fight over communism served to contextualize the lives of Ruth Fernández and Cecilia Orta. Both Black women used their careers—a singer and art teacher/artist, respectively—as vehicles to navigate the nuances of being Black women. The chapter provides a rare discussion of the 1962 visit of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. to Puerto Rico. The analysis focuses on the impact of his visit for Puerto Rico and how the intellectual class embraced his message of reconciliation and inclusion while practicing the opposite.

Chapter 6, “The Liga Opened Pandora’s “Black” Box,” revisits the League to Promote the Advancement of Blacks in Puerto Rico and their role in exposing racial bias in the government. The pivotal moment of the chapter is the analysis of the Senate hearings about racial discrimination in financial institutions against Black Puerto Ricans. Witnesses’ declarations reveal the different stand on race from the people affected by it and the offenders. The chapter also situates the issue by integrating foreigners’ views on the island’s racial discrimination and how local intellectuals reacted to it.

Discussing and documenting Puerto Ricans’ narrative of being either racially tolerant or raceless represents an intellectual challenge. When one looks at the island’s colonial history, it is evident that race and racism are a constant issue. What makes it fascinating to address these issues is how the element of comparison between the island and the United States’ racism has served to deny racism and deviate the attention to the island’s discrimination against Afro-Puerto Ricans. Despite attempts to exclude Black Puerto Ricans from the national identity and modernization of the island, as a Puerto Rican saying goes, “ellos no se quedaron da’o,”: they stroke back. In this book I hope to provide a different perspective of Afro-Puerto Ricans’ contestation and negotiation toward systemic racism. Each one of the stories included in the book demonstrates their resilience and ingenuity.