

EMISFÉRICA

Candelario, Ginetta E.B. *Black Behind the Ears: Dominican Racial Identity from Museums to Beauty Shops*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2007. 340 pages. \$84.95 hardcover, \$23.95 paper.

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Ginetta E. B. Candelario's book *Black Behind the Ears* provides an extensive and insightful analysis of the history of Dominican racial identity both in the Dominican Republic and in the United States. Positing this process of racial identification as the effect of a dialectic between anti-Haitian racism, U.S. imperialism, and Dominican nation-building, the author concludes that the resultant Dominican indigenism can be understood as a "strategic ambiguity." This indigenism is a response to "competing ideological codes that frame blackness, whiteness and indigeneity in the Americas," (162) rather than a simply static internalized racism. Interested in examining identity as it is manifested discursively, symbolically, and bodily, Candelario employs a variety of methodologies in order to work against what she refers to as the "monolingual" assumption that roles are mutually intelligible for performer and audience in the dramaturgical models used by sociologists. Central to her thesis is the claim that Dominican identities are "embodied, displayed, enacted, and perceived according to their context" (8), and Dominicans thus are able to engage in what she calls "ideological code-switching." It is precisely because she looks at identity as discursively prescribed, as well as how it is individually enacted in different geographical locations, that such a diverse methodological approach is useful. Her methods therefore range from discourse analysis of travel writing and museum displays, to in-depth ethnographic research in a Washington Heights Dominican beauty salon, to photo elicitation.

Following a clearly written and engaging introduction, Chapter 1 offers a critique of travel narratives about the Dominican Republic and Haiti, arguing that as opposed to other Latin American nations whose nation-building was constructed in opposition to Spanish colonial power, Dominicans additionally constructed their identity in opposition to the French colony and later the black nation of Haiti. Furthermore, because of U.S. expansionist interests in portraying the Dominican Republic of the 19th and 20th centuries as simultaneously safe enough to invest in and yet in need of Anglo civilization, the travel narratives coming from the United States played an important role in the ideological work of making Haiti "blacker and blacker" just as they progressively rendered the Dominican Republic "whiter and whiter" (36). Candelario's close reading of a number of primary sources shows how these travel writers used language to construct Dominicans as antithetical to Haitians, while also providing a sense of the implicit contradictions in many of these narratives and thus in the discourses they spawned.

Chapter 2 deals with the way in which anti-black, pro-indigenous ideologies espoused by foreign travel narratives were subsequently read by Dominicans as auto-ethnographic and

used to inform local historiographies without questioning the context in which they were written. Here, Candelario looks at the Museo del Hombre Dominicano as a site for the enactment of these discourses. Using language that resonates with performance scholars, she argues that by focusing the permanent exhibit on the artifacts of the island's native inhabitants, the museum provides the Dominican public with tangible evidence of their Indo-Hispanic past allowing for a seamless narrative from pre-Colombian to Dominican. This results in a bodily internalization of this history, thereby eclipsing histories of slavery and conquest.

Throughout most of the book Candelario finds that the ideological discourses described in the first chapter often remain salient amongst members of the diaspora despite contact with other non-Dominican communities; however, she provides a contrary example in Chapter 3. Further highlighting the ways in which the institutionalization of indigenism on the island is the result of highly subjective and constructed narratives, she relates in this chapter the experience of Dominicans in Washington D.C. Candelario finds in looking at the Smithsonian's Anacostia Museum exhibit, *Black Mosaic*, that this particular community of Dominicans expresses a sense of solidarity with African Americans, identifying as black at the same time that they maintain a strong sense of Dominicanidad. Moving the book's focus to Dominicans in New York in Chapters 4 and 5, Candelario utilizes the thick description of a participant observer in a Washington Heights salon along with photo elicitation to signal the importance of Dominican beauty salons as cultural institutions acting in the service of perpetuating Dominican indigenism. By creating bodies (hairstyles) that visually perform an Indo-Hispanic look, these salons construct historical Dominicanidad, situating Dominican ideals of beauty in the space between African Americans and white Americans. Furthermore, by focusing on hair culture, Candelario situates racial discourses in conjunction with discourses of gender and class as well.

The book's last section in which the author describes her experience at Salon Lamadas is particularly interesting and the many months of ethnographic research in this location seem to merit more space in the book. While the entire volume including the notes is nearly 300 pages, it is quite readable, making it ideal to assign in undergraduate or graduate courses on race and ethnicity or performance. The book is exemplary for the way in which it demonstrates that the category of race is discursively ascribed while also showing how self-perceptions of race move between internalized and externalized discourses of identity. Finally, *Black Behind the Ears* provides model scholarship for shaping and effecting such an inquiry.