Hilda Lloréns

Imaging the Great Puerto Rican Family: Framing Nation, Race, and Gender during the American Century. Lanham MD: Lexington Books, 2014. xxviii + 259 pp. (Cloth US\$ 95.00)

This book looks at representations of race in painting, photography, posters, and film by “Americans (‘outsiders’) and Puerto Ricans (‘insiders’)” from 1890 to the late twentieth century (p. xx). Hilda Lloréns examines *la gran familia puertorriqueña*, the image of sameness and national unity that denies racial and class differences, by crossing disciplinary boundaries to carry out “an archeology of the joints, the junctures, the crevices and the interstices of the social fabric” (p. xxi). Using this methodology, she exposes ambiguous, contradictory, and paradoxical constructs of nation, national culture, and race, revealing the changing representations of race and national identity throughout the twentieth century, underscoring transformations and continuities, and creating a narrative that enriches an understanding of the complexities of the discourses of racism as well as the contestations and affirmations of black identity.

While American photographic discourse in the early twentieth century constructed Puerto Ricans as Taíno and African, located in the “natural” world, paradoxically Puerto Rican artists deployed a white *jíbaro* and the black woman as worker and servant. “American outsiders” construct Puerto Ricans as nonwhite, but in Puerto Rico the *jíbaro*, symbol of national identity, is presented as white, and the category of blackness is feminized in the image of a black servant. Later (1921–51), *National Geographic* photographers represented Puerto Ricans as *jíbaros* or tropical Whites associated with notions of cultural degeneracy, while Island artists such as Miguel Pou and Oscar Colón Delgado painted black subjects with increasing regularity. With the rise of cultural nationalism and film narratives of blackness from 1948 to 1970, Lloréns documents the cultural spaces that Blacks occupied as constituents of the Puerto Rican nation, most notably in the work of Rafael Tufiño. At the same time, cultural nationalism promoted by Governor Luis Muñoz Marín and the Popular Democratic Party upheld the (white) *jíbaro* as the iconic image of the Puerto Rican.

The Institute of Puerto Rican Culture (ICP), created in 1955 and headed by Ricardo Alegría, was in charge of promoting Puerto Rican national culture. Lloréns argues that the national identity it envisioned was the hegemonic idea of racial harmony achieved through the mixing of three foundational races: Taíno, Spanish, and African—a paradigm that evades the topics of race, racism, and slavery. As Lloréns explains, racial mixing makes blackness something of the past, and locates it only in specific geographic areas or outside the national

territory. Lloréns also attributes to Alegría the master narrative about Loíza as a black town preserving African traditions that have disappeared from other Island communities, a narrative that casts Loíza and its inhabitants under the orientalist gaze described by Edward Said. At the same time, she acknowledges the important contributions of Alegría's archeological and ethnographic research on pre-Columbian culture and African heritage. This raises questions about the legacy of a generation of researchers on race and racism. Although not mentioned by Lloréns, one of Alegría's close collaborators on the history of Loíza was Eladio Rivera Quiñones, a black Loiceño from a generation of academics concerned not only with the study of African heritage, but also with racism, a topic that Lloréns finds lacking in Alegría's work.¹ Overcoming the obstacles of poverty where Blacks have been historically overrepresented, figures such as Rivera Quiñones became part of an intellectual community in the 1950s and 1960s to which only a handful of Blacks were able to gain access while suffering racist marginalization within the university. In spite of this, Rivera Quiñones occupied high-level administrative positions, including the presidency of the University of Puerto Rico. The way this generation discussed racism within this context requires further research.

Lloréns documents the absence of black women in the imagery of the great Puerto Rican family—represented as workers and servants, seen under the masculine gaze of the *mulata* as an object of sexual desire, and depicted as black grandmothers who represent the hiding away of black ancestry from the national photo album. She identifies a dominant discourse of the Puerto Rican nation that marks the jíbaro as a central (male) figure and blackness as peripheral. Further research could involve the intersections of nation, race, and sexuality in the gendered conception of the jíbaro male (represented as white, peasant, pure, resistant, hard working, central to the economy, and Puerto Rican) versus blackness (female, enslaved, tainted, submissive, lazy, erotic, and African). Lloréns engages the complex and contradictory images of nation, gender, and race, all set within the history of Puerto Rico and its colonial relationship with the United States. Her narrative invites a much-needed debate about the construction of race, racism, and nation in Puerto Rico.

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1 On Rivera Quiñones, see Isabelo Zenón Cruz, *Narciso descubre su trasero* (1974).