

**Neither White nor Black:
The Politics of Race and Ethnicity
among Puerto Ricans on the Island
and in the U.S. Mainlandⁱ**

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In 1990, I directed an ethnographic study of the sociocultural causes of the census undercount in Barrio Gandul, a lower-class urban community in Santurce, Puerto Rico (Duany *et al.* 1995). At the beginning of our fieldwork, my colleagues and I sought to elicit our informants' constructions of their own racial identity by asking them what race they considered themselves to belong to. Responses to this seemingly innocuous question ranged from embarrassment and amazement to ambivalence and silence: many informants simply shrugged their shoulders and pointed to their arms, as if their skin color were so obvious that it did not need to be verbalized. When people referred to others' race, they often used ambiguous euphemisms (such as "he's a little darker than I"), without making a definite commitment to a specific racial label. Sometimes they would employ diminutive folk terms like *morenito* or *trigueñita* (literally meaning, "little dark-skinned persons"), which are difficult to translate into U.S. categories. For the purposes of this research, it seemed culturally appropriate to collect our impressions of people's phenotypes as coded in Hispanic Caribbean societies such as Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic. However, this procedure left open the question as to what extent the researchers' racial categories coincided with the subjects' own perceptions.

My field notes for that project are full of references to the intermediate physical types of many residents of Barrio Gandul, including *moreno* and *trigueño*. For statistical purposes, these terms are usually grouped under the generic label mulatto, but Puerto Ricans make finer social distinctions in their daily lives. For instance, our informants used the terms *grifo*, *jabao*, and *colorao* to refer to various combinations of hair types and skin tones. At least 19 different racial categories are currently used in Puerto Rico (see Table 1; see also Godreau 2000). Contrary to the collapsing of racially mixed persons in the United States into the nonwhite category, residents of Barrio Gandul recognized intermediate groups based on color and other physical characteristics. In American racial

terminology, most of our subjects would probably classify themselves as “other,” that is, as neither white nor black.

[Table 1 about here]

As Table 1 suggests, popular racial taxonomies in Puerto Rico cannot easily be reduced to the white/black antithesis prevalent in the United States. Puerto Ricans usually group people into three main racial groups—black, white, and brown—based primarily on pigmentation and other visible traits. Anyone with a light skin tone, European facial features, and straight hair can claim to be white, regardless of their ancestry. In the United States, the dominant system of racial classification emphasizes a two-tiered division between whites and nonwhites deriving from the principle of hypodescent—the assignment of the offspring of mixed races to the subordinate group (F. J. Davis 1998; Harris 1964). According to the “one-drop rule,” anyone with a known African ancestor is defined as black, regardless of their physical appearance. This clear-cut opposition between Puerto Rican and American conceptions of racial identity has numerous repercussions for social analysis and public policy, among them the appropriate way to categorize, count, and report the number of people by race and ethnicity.

The problem of classifying the racial identity of Puerto Ricans, both on the Island and in the U.S. mainland, has troubled scholars, census enumerators, and policymakers at least since the beginning of the 20th century. Two key issues have pervaded academic and public debates on race in Puerto Rico. On one hand, the proliferation and fluidity of racial terms reflect the widespread racial mixture of the Island’s population. On the other hand, census tallies report a growing proportion of whites in Puerto Rico between 1899 and 1950. Even though the census’s racial categories changed several times during this period, the white category remained the same, and the number of persons counted as white increased from one census to another.

In the United States, Puerto Rican migrants do not fit well in the conventional white/black dichotomy and therefore challenge the hegemonic discourse on race and ethnicity (C. Rodríguez 1994a, 2000). Recent research efforts by the U.S. Bureau of the Census have focused on determining why so many Puerto Ricans, as well as other Hispanics, choose the “other” category, when asked about their racial identity. In the 1990 census, more than 43 percent of all Hispanics declared that they belonged to a race other than white, black, American Indian, or Asian (Tucker *et al.* 1996). The existence of a large and growing segment of the U.S. population that perceives itself ethnically as Hispanic or Latino, while avoiding the major accepted racial designations, is indeed a politically explosive phenomenon. It is no wonder that the federal government has so far resisted public pressures to include a multiracial category in the census and other official documents. So have many African American, Latino, and Asian American lobbying groups, which perceive a threat to their numbers by creating further divisions within racial minorities. For these groups, checking more than one race in the census questionnaire means reducing their influence on public policy-making (see Schemo 2000).

The Myth of Racial Democracy in Puerto Rico and the Diasporaⁱⁱ

During the 1940s, anthropological and sociological interest in race relations boomed on the Island, especially by U.S. academics. This growing interest was related to the “American dilemma” centered on black-white tensions and persistent racial inequality in socioeconomic opportunities, despite the dominant creed in equality and justice for all (Myrdall 1944). For many scholars, Puerto Rico (along with Brazil) seemed to be a racial paradise. American social scientists were especially intrigued with the prevalence and popular acceptance of racial mixture in Puerto Rico. Compared to the southern United States, Puerto Rico appeared to be a racial democracy where blacks,

whites, and mulattos lived in harmony. Racial prejudice and discrimination seemed less pervasive and destructive on the Island than in the mainland.

Racial questions were not purely intellectual but utterly political, as American legislators and policymakers who visited Puerto Rico during the 1950s recognized. Arkansas Senator J. W. Fulbright declared that the Island was “an example of a racial solution” through education, while George William Culberson, Director of Pittsburgh’s Commission on Human Relations, reported that “there are no racial prejudices in the public life” of Puerto Rico (*El Mundo* 1958, 1959). Governor Muñoz Marín (1960) believed that racial tolerance was one of the greatest spiritual contributions that Puerto Rican migrants could make to the city of New York.

During the 1940s, several scholars contrasted the social construction of race in Puerto Rico and the United States (see, for instance, T. Blanco 1985 [1942]; Rogler 1940; Siegel 1948). One of the recurrent themes of this early literature was that the Island’s history and culture promoted racial integration, rather than segregation as in the United States and South Africa. Many observers noted that Puerto Ricans of different colors mingled freely in public activities and that many married across color lines. In particular, scholars underlined that light mulattos (known locally as *trigueños*) mixed with lower-class whites and were often accepted as white, even by the local elite (Rogler 1972b [1944]). Social distance between whites and blacks also seemed less marked in Puerto Rico than in the United States.

The main difference between the Puerto Rican and American models of racial stratification was not the treatment of blacks—who were accorded a subordinate status in both societies—but rather the mixed group. In Puerto Rico, *trigueños* could often pass for whites, whereas in the United States, an intermediate racial category (such as mulattos) did not even exist since the 1930 census. Although racial mixture also occurred in the mainland, the federal government did not officially recognize it, except as part of the black population (F. J. Davis 1998). The symbolic boundaries between

whites and mulattos were apparently more porous in Puerto Rico than in the United States.

An important subtheme of this literature was whether color distinctions in Puerto Rico were better interpreted as a racial or class hierarchy. The dominant position was represented by the Puerto Rican writer, Tomás Blanco (1985 [1942]:128), who argued that prejudice was “more of a social than a racial character in Puerto Rico” (see also Mintz 1966; Sereno 1947). In Blanco’s view, whatever racial prejudice may have been present on the Island was primarily a recent importation from the United States. Others, however, recognized the specifically racial nature of prejudice and discrimination in Puerto Rican society, as expressed through folklore, occupations, religion, courtship, marriage, and voluntary associations. Although different from the American system of racial classification, the Puerto Rican system still assigned blacks and mulattos a lower social rank than whites (see Gordon 1949, 1950; Rosario and Carrión 1951). A consensus emerged from these classic studies that Puerto Rican society is stratified in both class status and color gradations ranging from white to brown to black. Whether race or some other variable such as occupation, education, or residence determines one’s life chances continues to be debated.

Many researchers have been concerned with how Puerto Ricans define race or color; the two terms have been used as synonyms in much of the literature. Color distinctions in Puerto Rico involve a complex inventory of physical traits such as skin pigmentation, hair texture, nose shape, and lip form (Ginorio 1971; C. Rodríguez 1996; Seda Bonilla 1968; Zenón Cruz 1975). More than descent, phenotype defines racial identity in Puerto Rico, as in much of the Caribbean and Latin America. Socioeconomic variables such as occupational prestige and family connections can also affect a person’s racial identity. Contrary to the United States, ancestry is not the most significant variable in assessing race in Puerto Rico. Rather, as the American

sociologist Charles Rogler (1972a [1946]) noted long ago, Puerto Ricans place most emphasis on visual evidence of race as an individual's anatomic feature.

American social scientists have been fascinated by the proliferation, elasticity, and ambiguity of Puerto Rican racial terms. Rogler (1972b [1944]) was one of the first to write about the “confusion” among race, color, and class in Puerto Rico. He was frustrated by the weak correlation between racial terms and social interaction on the Island. The anthropologist Morris Siegel also perceived great confusion about the racial constitution of the Island's population. Siegel (1948:187) recognized that Puerto Ricans are “terribly color-conscious” and that they pay much attention to visual cues to determine if a person is white, black, or an in-between type like *trigueño* or *jabao*. Furthermore, many scholars found that “money whitens” on the Island: the wealthier a person is, the more likely she will be classified as light-skinned or simply as white, regardless of her physical appearance. Like Brazil and other Latin American societies, Puerto Rico developed a “mulatto escape hatch” that allowed persons of mixed ancestry some upward social mobility (Degler 1971; Wade 1997).

Based on fieldwork conducted during the late 1950s and 1960s, Eduardo Seda Bonilla (1968, 1973) argued convincingly that most Puerto Ricans use phenotype rather than hypo-descent as the main criterion for racial identity. Like many Latin Americans, Puerto Ricans tend to distinguish three basic physical types—white, black, and brown—defined primarily by skin color, facial features, and hair texture. Furthermore, whereas Americans pay close attention to national and ethnic background in defining a person's identity, Puerto Ricans give a higher priority to birthplace and cultural orientation. Among other features of the Puerto Rican discourse on race, Seda Bonilla noted the public recognition of racially intermediate types, the reduced social distance among contiguous categories, and the frequency of racial mixture.

Another common practice on the Island is a strong desire to whiten oneself (“*mejorar la raza*”), a tendency also known as “bleaching” (*blanqueamiento*). For

decades, the vast majority of the Puerto Rican population has been classified as white, despite the high incidence of *mestizaje* (racial mixture). As Maxine Gordon (1949) pointed out long ago, census statistics since the mid-19th century show the continuous rise of the white sector of the Island's population, at the expense of the black and mulatto sectors. Recent estimates of the white group on the Island range from 73 percent (Seda Bonilla 1980) to 80 percent of the population (Encyclopaedia Britannica 1994), with an additional 8 percent black and 19 percent mulatto in Seda Bonilla's count. These statistics are open to debate because of the flexible boundaries between racial groups as well as the lack of current official data on the Island's racial composition. (In 1960, the U.S. Bureau of the Census dropped the racial identification question for Puerto Rico.) However, the available census figures suggest that most Puerto Ricans perceive themselves as white rather than as black or mulatto, and that this is an increasing trend.

Race has been a difficult research topic in Puerto Rico because of the generalized view that it is not a significant issue. As José Colombán Rosario and Justina Carrión (1951:88) put it, "the discussion of the problem of the black [has] been kept in a humid and unhygienic obscurity." Most of the earliest and most influential authors on the topic agreed with Rogler's assessment (1972b [1944]:55) that "race competition, tension, and conflict are not conspicuous processes in most Puerto Rican situations," as they are in the United States. In a famous turn of phrase, Tomás Blanco (1985 [1942]:103) compared racial prejudice in Puerto Rico to "an innocent children's game." According to Siegel (1948:3), "The island is one of the few places in the world where interracial harmony has been achieved in high degree . . . the more overt and vicious forms of racism are largely absent." More recent writers have continued to downplay racial prejudice and discrimination in Puerto Rico (see Arana-Soto 1976; F. J. Davis 1998; Fitzpatrick 1987; Hoetink 1967; Mintz 1966; C. Rodríguez 1974; Wolfson 1972). It is still extremely difficult to break through the "conspiracy of silence" that

surrounds racial politics in Puerto Rico—what one author called “the prejudice of having no prejudice” (Betances 1972, 1973).

One of the earliest critics of standard views of race relations in Puerto Rico was an American sociologist, Maxine Gordon (1949, 1950). She argued that historical and cultural factors—such as the absence of racial violence and the prevalence of racial intermarriage over several generations—fostered the belief that there was no racial prejudice on the Island. However, she found instances of racism in various Puerto Rican institutions, such as college fraternities and upper-class private clubs. Unfortunately, her thesis was poorly documented; it was largely based on anecdotal evidence from secondary sources, not on systematic fieldwork. As a result, Gordon’s work could not seriously undermine the established discourse on race in Puerto Rico.

In the mid-1960s, Puerto Rican social scientists began to question the conventional wisdom that racial prejudice was absent on the Island. Juan Rodríguez Cruz (1965:385) cautiously acknowledged “the existence of [racial] discriminatory practices in certain spheres of Puerto Rican society,” such as private schools, the University of Puerto Rico, private enterprises, voluntary associations, and residential neighborhoods. Seda Bonilla’s cited work was part of an emerging academic consensus that racism did, indeed, persist on the Island. Reviewing the literature from the United States, Samuel Betances (1972, 1973) sharply criticized the myth of racial integration in Puerto Rico. However, the most sustained attack on Puerto Rican racism came from the literary critic Isabelo Zenón Cruz, whose two-volume treatise denounced the “constant and systematic marginalization” (Zenón Cruz 1975:23) of black Puerto Ricans as second-class citizens in elite and folk poetry, as well as in other areas of national culture. Although his work provoked an intense polemic on the Island, it did not foster new ethnographic or sociological fieldwork on race relations. It did, however, spark a new wave of revisionist research on the history of Puerto Rican slavery (see Díaz Quiñones 1985; Kinsbruner 1996; Scarano 1984).

Although the empirical evidence on racial politics in contemporary Puerto Rico continues to be scanty, some progress has been made. Several studies have documented that blacks are a stigmatized minority on the Island; that they suffer from persistent prejudice and discrimination; that they tend to occupy the lower rungs of the class structure; and that they are subject to an ideology of whitening through intermarriage with lighter-skinned groups and a denial of their cultural heritage and physical characteristics (Kantrowitz 1971; Picó de Hernández *et al.* 1985; Seda Bonilla 1973, 1980; Zenón Cruz 1975). The latter ideology helps to explain why an increasing proportion of Puerto Ricans has reported their race to be white over time, despite the absence of massive immigration to the Island during the first decades of the 20th century. Many authors have noted the unreliable nature of census data on the racial composition of the Puerto Rican population (T. Blanco 1985 [1942]; Cabranes 1979; Fitzpatrick 1987; Rodríguez Cruz 1965; Rogler 1940; Siegel 1948). To date, no published studies have yet explored the congruence between popular representations of race in Puerto Rico and the official racial categories of the United States. Recent ethnographic fieldwork on racial issues has concentrated on Afro-Puerto Rican coastal communities and their cultural contributions to national identity (Godreau-Santiago 1999; Moira Pérez 1998; Torres 1998).

In addition, scholars have questioned whether the dominant white/black dichotomy can capture the complex racial situation of the Puerto Rican diaspora. Since World War II, massive migration from Puerto Rico to the U.S. mainland has pitted two racial classification systems against each other: the Puerto Rican one, based largely on physical appearance, and the American one, based largely on ancestry. Thus, when Puerto Ricans move to the U.S. mainland, they confront a different construction of their racial identity (Fitzpatrick 1987; Ginorio 1979; Montero Seplowin 1971; C. Rodríguez 1974; Seda Bonilla 1980). In the 1940s, C. Wright Mills and his colleagues (1950) found that one of the main problems of Puerto Ricans in New York City was racial prejudice

and discrimination. They noted that adaptation was particularly difficult for racially intermediate types (such as the so-called *indios*) and blacks, who were more prone to return to the Island than whites.

The dominant opposition between whites and nonwhites in the United States does not do justice to many Puerto Rican migrants, who have African as well as European backgrounds and range phenotypically across the entire color spectrum from black to brown to white.ⁱⁱⁱ As a result of their racial heterogeneity, Puerto Ricans in the United States are often lumped together with black people. Those with mixed racial ancestry lose their intermediate status in a white-nonwhite dichotomy. Light-skinned immigrants are sometimes called “white Puerto Ricans,” whereas dark-skinned immigrants are often treated like African Americans. Most are simply classified as “Pororicans,” as if this were a distinct racial category.^{iv} Like other ethnic minorities, Puerto Ricans have been thoroughly racialized in the United States (see V. Rodríguez 1997; Rodríguez-Morazzani 1996).

The work of New York-based Puerto Rican sociologist Clara Rodríguez has dominated recent thinking on race among Puerto Rican migrants. Based on the analysis of the Public Use Microdata Sample of the 1980 census as well as her own survey results, Rodríguez reports that many members of the Puerto Rican community in New York resist being classified as either black or white and prefer to identify themselves as “other.” In the 1980 Census, 48 percent of New York City’s Puerto Ricans chose this category, including alternative ethnic labels such as Hispanic, Latino, Spanish, and Boricua (C. Rodríguez 1989, 1990, 1992; Rodríguez and Cordero-Guzmán 1992). In 1990, nearly 46 percent of all Puerto Ricans in the United States classified themselves as “other” (Rodríguez 2000). Hence, many Puerto Rican migrants and their descendants continue to employ a tripartite rather than a dual scheme of racial classification. Contrary to Seda Bonilla’s (1980) prediction that they would split along color lines, most migrants reject their indiscriminate labeling as members of a single

race (see also Ginorio 1979). Rather than splintering themselves into white and black, Puerto Ricans recognize that they are a multiracial people.^v

Rodríguez's work points to the need for further research and reflection on the conflicts and negotiations between popular and official representations of Puerto Rican identity. More recently, Víctor Rodríguez (1997) has argued that Puerto Ricans in the United States have been racialized through close association with African Americans. From a different perspective, Roberto Rodríguez-Morazzani (1996) suggests that mainland Puerto Ricans have attempted to avoid identification as black or nonwhite in order to escape their negative racialization. I would argue that a similar process took place on the Island between 1899 and 1950, when the U.S. government attempted to impose its bipolar view of race on the Puerto Rican population. This effort mostly failed, as suggested by the continued use of a system of racial classification that differs markedly from that used in the U.S. mainland.^{vi}

In sum, the Puerto Rican model of race relations has several distinguishing features. Unlike Americans, most Puerto Ricans do not consider racial identity primarily a question of descent. Like other Caribbean and Latin American people, Puerto Ricans emphasize physical appearance as the main manifestation of racial identity (Hoetink 1967; Seda Bonilla 1968). As a result, a person of mixed racial background is not automatically assigned to the black group in Puerto Rico. Rather, racial classification depends largely on skin color and other visible characteristics such as the shape of one's mouth, nose, and hair. Also, variables related to social status (income, occupation, and education) are taken into consideration. Unfortunately, Puerto Ricans have developed an elaborate racist vocabulary to refer to racially stereotyped characteristics—especially the idea that kinky hair is “bad” (*pelo malo*). Furthermore, Puerto Ricans usually distinguish blacks from mulattos, whereas Americans tend to view both groups as colored or nonwhite. In contrast to the U.S. model, which tends to be dichotomous, the Puerto Rican racial model is based on a three-fold scheme.

Finally, because of the proliferation of multiple and fluid physical types, Puerto Rico has not established a two-tiered institutionalized system of racial discrimination such as that of the United States. For example, lower-class urban settlements in San Juan, like Barrio Gandul, are not strictly segregated by color but primarily by class (Duany *et al.* 1995). Nonetheless, racial prejudice on the Island is expressed in myriad forms—such as folk humor, beauty contests, media portrayals, and political leadership. In all of these areas, whites are usually depicted as more intelligent, attractive, refined, and capable than blacks. As Seda Bonilla (1968:592) has underlined, both the Puerto Rican and U.S. models “commit the inhuman error of assigning intellectual, moral, or social superiority to some racial categories over others.” Puerto Rico, as well as the United States, has been dominated by an ideology of white supremacy and black inferiority since the days of colonial slavery.

“The Whitest of the Antilles”:

The Racial Politics of Census Enumeration in Puerto Rico

One of the first official acts of the U.S. government in Puerto Rico after acquiring the Island in 1898 was to conduct a census of its population. The War Department was assigned that task in 1899. Since 1910, the Department of Commerce has been in charge of the census in Puerto Rico as well as in the U.S. mainland. Until 1950, the Bureau of the Census attempted to quantify the racial composition of the Island’s population, while experimenting with various racial taxonomies (see Table 2). The only category that remained constant over time was whites, even as other racial labels shifted greatly—from colored to black, mulatto, and other; back to colored and other races; then to nonwhite; and finally to Negro and other races. Regardless of the precise terminology, the bulk of the Puerto Rican population was classified as white from 1899 to 1950.

[Table 2 about here]

From the beginning of the 20th century, American observers remarked on the “surprising preponderance of the white race” on the Island (*The National Geographic Magazine* 1900:328). One travel writer called Puerto Rico “the whitest of the Antilles” (White 1898). In a widely distributed piece, Hill (1899:93) wrote that the Island was “notable among the West Indian group for the reason that its preponderant population is of the white race.” In a more academic book, he reiterated that “Porto Rico, at least, has not become Africanized, as have all the other West Indies excepting Cuba” (Hill 1903:165). Among other practical results, reports showing that the Island was predominantly white bolstered Congressional legislation conferring U.S. citizenship to the natives of Puerto Rico in 1917 (Cabranes 1979).

Table 3 compiles the available census statistics on the proportion of whites and nonwhites in Puerto Rico between 1802 and 1950. The Spanish censuses show that Puerto Ricans were about evenly divided between whites and nonwhites until the mid-19th century. Since 1860, the proportion of the Island’s population classified as white has increased steadily, except for the year 1899, when the first U.S. census registered a small decrease. Correspondingly, the proportion of people reported as nonwhites (including blacks and mulattos) has diminished, again except for 1899. According to these statistics, the Puerto Rican population has become increasingly whiter, especially during the first half of the 20th century.

[Table 3 about here]

What social factors account for this dramatic transformation of Puerto Rico’s racial composition? To some extent, the gradual lightening of the Island’s population

was due to European immigration, especially during the second half of the 19th century (Hoetink 1967). But the number of white immigrants was not enough to produce such a large shift in racial groups. Nor was there a massive outflow of black people at this time. Barring major population movements into and out of the Island until the 1940s, scholars have proposed several additional hypotheses. Rogler (1940:16) put forth one of the most popular explanations:

The Census includes as colored both full-blooded and mixed. The census estimate is probably low because many who are known to have colored blood are counted as white . . . Because of the absence of marked race prejudice, and also because of the tendency to deal with color as a class rather than a race phenomenon, the attitude of the community as a whole operates to reduce materially the percentage classified as colored and to classify many quadroons and octoroons as white.

While Rogler points out that light mulattos are often accepted as whites in Puerto Rico, he fails to acknowledge that “passing” also takes place in the United States, although it operates differently there and without official approval. Moreover, the whitening of the Puerto Rican population is hardly due to the absence of racial prejudice, but rather to its very presence: many people prefer to identify as white to avoid racial stigmatization. Nor is it a question of conflating color and class, although the two factors are closely linked on the Island as elsewhere. Finally, racial categories such as quadroons and octoroons are meaningless in contemporary Puerto Rico, precisely because it is practically impossible to determine the degree of racial mixture in much of the population (see Fitzpatrick 1987).

Rogler (1972a [1946]:62) provides a second explanation: “this apparent decline [in the nonwhite population] is probably the consequence of changing race conceptions

or, more specifically, the social definition as to who is a person of color. In other words, these percentages would suggest that many persons of color are moving into the white race.” I would accept the first premise of this proposition—that census categories reflect changing discourses on race—but would reject its second implication—that Puerto Ricans jumble together white and black people. On the contrary, the Puerto Rican scheme of racial classification is primarily concerned—perhaps even obsessed—with distinguishing various shades of skin color. Furthermore, I would argue that popular definitions of race in Puerto Rico clash with the categories imposed by the U.S. Bureau of the Census. Hence, the problem is not, as Siegel (1948:189) believed, that “the reliability of Puerto Rican racial classifications is open to serious criticisms.” *All* such classifications are historically contingent, culturally relative, politically contestable, ultimately arbitrary, and of dubious scientific value (see Omi and Winant 1994).^{vii}

The Bureau of the Census itself has offered a third explanation for the apparent increase in Puerto Rico’s white population: “the percentage of the population which was colored, according to the census returns, declined from 38.2 percent in 1899 to 23.8 percent in 1935. A part of this nominal decline, however, was without doubt the result of the gradual change in the concept of the race classification as applied by the census enumerators” (Administración de Reconstrucción de Puerto Rico 1938:17). I doubt that Puerto Rican census takers substantially changed their racial concepts during this period and therefore counted more colored people as white. Since 1899, enumerators have been recruited from the Island’s population and have presumably applied local standards of racial classification, based on their own observations. According to *The National Geographic Magazine* (1901:80), “The facts presented in the reports were gathered in all cases by the [Puerto Rican] people themselves, as the most intelligent of the better classes were induced to compete for positions as census-takers by the relatively handsome salaries offered by the U.S. government.” Until the 1960 census, enumerators in Puerto Rico as well as in the U.S. mainland usually judged their

informants' physical appearance as a visual cue of racial identity (Ruggles *et al.* 1997; Torres Aguirre 2000).

My own interpretation of the Island's changing racial composition between 1899 and 1950 focuses on the transactions between hegemonic and subaltern representations of race. From the beginning, the U.S. government attempted to divide the Puerto Rican population neatly into "two main classes, pure whites and those who are not" (Departamento de la Guerra 1900:57). In turn, Puerto Ricans insisted on distinguishing blacks from mulattos and blurring the boundaries between "pure whites" and "mixed blood." In 1930, the Bureau of the Census dropped mulattos from its count of the Puerto Rican population and lumped them together with blacks under "colored." This change paralleled the collapsing of blacks and mulattos into a single category in the U.S. mainland (F. J. Davis 1998; Domínguez 1998). Between 1900 and 1930, the U.S. census counted persons of mixed black and white ancestry as a separate group. But in 1940, such persons were considered black or Negro (see Table 4). On the Island, census enumerators tended to avoid the colored and black labels altogether and to identify their informants as whites. Thus, the official disappearance of racially intermediate types accelerated the movement from nonwhite to white categories on the Island.

[Table 4 about here]

In short, the U.S. government sought to apply a binary race model to a multiracial situation in Puerto Rico. As an official report to the local House of Representatives noted, "the population is extremely mixed and there are not just two colors but rather an infinite number of hues" (*El Mundo* 1945). Although the census recognized that most colored people were mulattos rather than "pure blacks" (the term used by the census), the dominant discourse on race silenced that trend after 1930 (see Table 5). From an American standpoint, only two distinct races existed in Puerto Rico—white and black

(variously called Negro, colored, or nonwhite). Well into the 1940s, the Bureau of the Census claimed that racial terms “probably need no definition” (U.S. Department of Commerce 1946:2). However, it instructed local enumerators to classify persons of mixed ancestry as colored rather than white (U.S. Department of Commerce 1943a:100). As a U.S. Department of Commerce (1963:ix) report understated, “It is likely that the commonly held conceptions of race among Puerto Ricans in Puerto Rico, among Puerto Ricans in the United States, and among other persons in the United States are somewhat different, and there was a considerable variation in the classification.” For instance, the census categorized persons of mixed ancestry according to the race of the nonwhite parent, following the rule of hypo-descent (U.S. Department of Commerce 1953a:53-V). In contrast, Puerto Ricans classified them primarily according to their physical appearance. Whereas the census insisted on distinguishing only two groups, white and nonwhite, Puerto Ricans continued to use three or more categories, including *trigueño*, *moreno*, *indio*, and other folk terms. Many people in Puerto Rico contested the racial practices articulated by the Bureau of the Census.

[Table 5 about here]

The racial politics of census enumeration in Puerto Rico reveal a sharp discrepancy between self-representations and representations by others. In 1899, nearly two-thirds of all Puerto Ricans were considered to be white. By 1950, almost four-fifths were classified as white. However, many Americans—including visiting scholars and public officials—mistrusted such statistics, believing instead that the Island’s colored population was much larger than suggested by the census. Some Puerto Rican authors granted that the majority of the local population was composed of mulattos (T. Blanco 1985 [1942]; Rodríguez Cruz 1965). In 1960, the federal government eliminated any references to race or color from the census of Puerto Rico,

apparently because it considered such references to be unreliable and practically useless. A brief note in the 1950 census reads: “There is considerable evidence which indicates that color is misreported [in Puerto Rico]. The comparison of the ‘white’ and ‘nonwhite’ total from census to census reveals the tendency of the enumerator to report persons with varying amounts of Negro blood as ‘white’” (U.S. Department of Commerce 1952:viii). Racial statistics on the Island did not generate a portrait compatible with the dominant discourse on race in the United States.

For other reasons, the Puerto Rican government attempted to erase race from most official documents on the Island. According to the Director of the Office of the Census of the Puerto Rican Planning Board, the race question was dropped because the Commonwealth’s constitution prohibits discrimination by race or color, and because the local government is not required by law to collect racial statistics in order to provide public services (Torres Aguirre 2000). In 1978, the Office of Legal Affairs of the Puerto Rican Planning Board stated that “the most adequate and convenient solution for our economic, social, and cultural reality is not to include the question about racial determination in the 1980 census questionnaire” (Mercado Vega 1978:3). Between 1960 and 1990, the census questionnaire in Puerto Rico did not ask about race or color.

However, the 2000 census included a racial self-identification question in Puerto Rico and, for the first time ever, allowed respondents to choose more than one racial category to indicate mixed ancestry. With few variations, the census of Puerto Rico used the same questionnaire as in the U.S. mainland. This decision was a response to intense lobbying by Governor Pedro Rosselló’s administration to include Puerto Rico in federal census statistics, along with the 50 states (see Mulero 1999). It remains unclear how islanders responded to the new federally-mandated categories on race and ethnicity. It is clear that many of these categories—such as African American, American Indian, Asian, Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander—are irrelevant to most of the Puerto Rican population.

White, Black, or Other?

The Racialization of Puerto Rican Migrants

If classifying the race of Puerto Ricans on the Island was complicated, the task became even more daunting to government authorities in the U.S. mainland. Since the beginning of the 20th century, the Bureau of the Census has frequently altered its racial designation of Puerto Rican and other Hispanic immigrants. For instance, the census counted Mexicans as a separate (nonwhite) race in 1930, white between 1940 and 1970, and of any race they reported between 1980 and 1990. Until 1970, most Puerto Ricans living in the United States were considered to be white, “unless they were definitely Negro, Indian, or some other race” (Domínguez 1998). In 1980, the census introduced two separate self-identification questions, one on Hispanic origin and one on race, based on the premise that Hispanics could be of any race. Consequently, the federal government encouraged Puerto Ricans to classify themselves primarily as Hispanics rather than as white or black.

Table 6 presents census data on the racial composition of Puerto Ricans in the United States from 1940 to 1990. (Before 1940, it is practically impossible to obtain separate cross-tabulations for Puerto Ricans and race in the United States.) First, the proportion of mainland Puerto Ricans who reported to be white decreased drastically since 1970, largely as a result of the inclusion of the new Hispanic category. In 1990, the proportion of Puerto Ricans who classified themselves as white (about 46 percent) was less than half the 1970 figure (nearly 93 percent). Second, the proportion of black Puerto Ricans has remained extremely low since 1950 (between 4 and 8 percent). Third, those reporting other races jumped from less than 3 percent in 1970 to nearly 46 percent in 1990. Thus, the data suggest that, over the past two decades, Puerto Ricans in the United States have changed their racial self-perception from a predominantly

white population to a hybrid one. Contrary to Puerto Ricans on the Island, those in the mainland reported that they were becoming less white in the last three censuses.

[Table 6 about here]

Let me review some possible reasons for this change and then offer my own explanation. Several authors have argued that Puerto Ricans in the United States tend to reject their labeling as black, nonwhite, or colored, because that would mean accepting an inferior position within American society. From this perspective, the migrants assert a separate cultural identity to evade rampant prejudice and discrimination against African Americans (Fitzpatrick 1987; Montero Seplowin 1971; Rodríguez-Morazzani 1996; Seda Bonilla 1968; Wolfson 1972). Although this argument may help to explain why many dark-skinned Puerto Rican migrants do not identify themselves with African Americans, it misses two basic points. First, about the same proportion of Puerto Ricans on the Island and in the mainland classify themselves as black (between 4 and 8 percent, according to the 1920 census and Seda Bonilla's [1980] count). Second, proportionally fewer Puerto Ricans in the mainland than on the Island classify themselves as white when offered an opportunity to declare other races. The key question then becomes why so many U.S. Puerto Ricans chose the "other" category in the last two censuses.

Clara Rodríguez believes that Puerto Ricans in New York City continue to define their racial identity according to a color continuum from white to black. As in Puerto Rico, this continuum is based on phenotypic categories ranging in pigmentation, hair form, and facial features. Surprisingly, few of her Puerto Rican interviewees reported that they were "other" because of racial mixture as such. The majority stated that they had chosen the "other race" option because of their culture, family, birthplace, socialization, or political perspective. However, most respondents placed themselves in

racially intermediate positions between black and white. They rarely used conventional U.S. terms to describe their racial identity and preferred to say that they were Spanish, Puerto Rican, Boricua, or *trigueño* (C. Rodríguez 1990, 1992, 2000; Rodríguez and Cordero-Guzmán 1992). From this perspective, the growing use of the term “other” among Puerto Rican and other Hispanic immigrants reflects their disapproval of the American racial classification system.^{viii}

Despite its eloquence, this thesis raises some unresolved issues. As Rodríguez (1997) recognizes, the meaning of census racial categories has shifted greatly for Puerto Ricans and other Latinos in the United States. Thus, it is difficult to simply juxtapose American and Latin American discourses of race and to suggest that the latter are more attuned to large-scale racial mixture and conceptual fuzziness. Recent trends suggest that both types of discourses may be converging: American black/white relations have been complicated by the growth of “brown” groups such as Asian Americans or Latinos, while Latin American race relations, at least in Brazil, are increasingly polarized between whites and nonwhites (Winant 1994).

Furthermore, the rise of new ethnic/racial labels, such as Hispanics and Latinos, has numerous implications for the self-definition of Puerto Ricans and other Latin American immigrants in the United States (see *Latin American Perspectives* 1992; Oboler 1995). Among other repercussions, the official adoption of the Hispanic label by the Bureau of the Census and other federal government bureaucracies means that Puerto Ricans are often treated as racially distinct from both non-Hispanic whites and blacks. Calling oneself a racial other is driven as much by outside political forces as by one’s traditional practices, as Rodríguez suggests. The quasi-racial use of the term Hispanic has led Puerto Ricans to move away from the black/white dichotomy in the United States.

Finally, many Puerto Ricans choose the catchall “other” as a proxy for brown or tan, that is, as neither white nor black, but an in-between color (Fitzpatrick 1987). As

several researchers have found, migration to the U.S. mainland tends to produce a “browning effect” (Ginorio 1979; A. R. Martínez 1988; C. Rodríguez 1996), as opposed to the whitening of the Island’s population. The contemporary racial politics of Puerto Ricans in the United States may therefore represent a rupture, rather than a continuity, with dominant discourses on the Island.

Recent studies by the Bureau of the Census provide empirical support for this alternative conception of the othering trend among Puerto Rican migrants (Tucker *et al.* 1996). The 1995 Current Population Survey supplement included four panels with separate and combined Hispanic origin questions, with and without a multiracial category. More than 70 percent of Puerto Ricans in the United States identified as Hispanic in a combined race and ethnicity question. Only 7 percent chose the multiracial category in the separate race and Hispanic origin panel, while less than 3 percent did so in the combined panel. However, more than 32 percent of the respondents classified themselves as “all other” when they were asked separate race and ethnicity questions, as they are currently formulated in the decennial census.

The Current Population Survey, conducted annually in March by the Bureau of the Census, allows one to construct a brief time series on this issue (see Table 7). Between 1992 and 1995, the proportion of U.S. Puerto Ricans who classified their race as other increased from less than 5 percent to more than 15 percent. However, when the Bureau of the Census eliminated the other category, the proportion of whites rose from less than 80 percent in 1995 to nearly 91 percent in 1999. The percentage of blacks nearly doubled during this period, from less than 5 percent to almost 8 percent. Throughout the 1990s, only between 1 and 2 percent classified themselves as American Indian or Asian. These data confirm that an increasing number of Puerto Ricans prefer to label themselves as neither white nor black, when they have another option presumably indicating mixed descent.

[Table 7 about here]

In sum, recent census figures suggest two main trends in the racial self-identification of Puerto Ricans in the United States. On one hand, mainland Puerto Ricans classify their “racial” identity primarily as Hispanic, regardless of federal government policy stating that Hispanics can be of any race. Most Puerto Ricans prefer to place themselves in an intermediate position between white and black, even when offered a multiracial option. On the other hand, if forced to separate their Hispanic origin from their racial identity, many Puerto Ricans choose to call themselves other. This option seems to provide a third alternative, conceptually equivalent to brown, which eludes the white/black dichotomy altogether. Either as Hispanics or as others, Puerto Ricans in the United States are increasingly racialized. Rather than repudiating the dominant American scheme of group classification, as Rodríguez claims, mainland Puerto Ricans may be assigning new meanings to existing racial and ethnic categories.^{ix}

Conclusion

During the 20th century, the problem of defining, describing, and classifying the racial composition of Puerto Ricans was officially addressed in two main ways. On the Island, the Bureau of the Census did not collect any racial statistics between 1950 and 2000, largely because they were incompatible with the dominant U.S. scheme of racial classification. Furthermore, Commonwealth officials were not interested in dividing the Puerto Rican population by race, but in uniting it in a common ethnicity. In the mainland, the 1980 census asked people to identify themselves as either Hispanic or not Hispanic, and then as white, black, American Indian, Asian, or other. Whereas census enumerators counted most islanders as white, the majority of New York Puerto Ricans

now consider themselves to be neither white nor black, but other. Many use Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin as racial self-designators. The increasing racialization of such pan-ethnic terms has numerous implications for American society, such as the possible broadening of a bipolar racial order into a tripartite color scheme including white, black, and brown (see Winant 1994).

The study of race relations in Puerto Rico traditionally counterposed the Island's racial discourses and practices to those of the United States. Whereas Puerto Ricans defined race phenotypically, Americans used the principle of hypo-descent. While the Puerto Rican system recognized physically intermediate types, the American system dwelled on the dichotomy between white and black. In contrast to a high degree of racial mixture and integration in Puerto Rico, race relations in the United States were characterized by segregation and conflict. This binary opposition led many scholars to minimize racial prejudice and discrimination on the Island prior to the importation of the U.S. racial model (see T. Blanco 1985 [1942]; Mintz 1966; Rogler 1940; Sereno 1947; Siegler 1948). After an initial wave of studies portraying Puerto Rico as a racial democracy in the 1940s, a critical perspective emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s denouncing the persistence of racial inequality and exclusion on the Island (Betances 1972, 1973; Picó de Hernández *et al.* 1985; Seda Bonilla 1968, 1973; Zenón Cruz 1975; see also Gordon 1949, 1950; Rosario and Carrión 1951). However, academic discourse on Puerto Ricans and race has been limited during the past two decades, both in the Island and on the mainland (C. Rodríguez 1997). The "conspiracy of silence" continues today as a result of the lack of recent fieldwork and official data on Puerto Rican racial politics.

Between 1899 and 1950, the U.S. Bureau of the Census computed the number of white and nonwhite people in Puerto Rico. In spite of changing racial categories, as well as their popular contestation, the census found that Puerto Ricans were becoming whiter over time. The bleaching of the Island's population can be partly explained by the

tendency to incorporate light mulattos (*trigueños*) into the white category, as well as the common belief in “improving one’s race” through intermarriage with lighter-skinned persons. But the main reason for the transformation of Puerto Rico’s racial composition was the growing polarization between whites and others (variously called black, Negro, colored, or nonwhite) in the census. The American scheme of racial classification did not coincide with local discourses and practices, which paid more careful attention to gradations in skin color and recognized multiple physical types in between white and black, such as *trigueño*, *indio*, and *jabao*, as well as the more exotic *café con leche*, *piel canela*, and *blanco con raja*. Such fine social distinctions could not be captured by a bipolar racial model.

Since 1940, the Bureau of the Census has been faced with the challenge of counting a growing number of Puerto Ricans in the continental United States. At first, most Puerto Ricans were considered to be whites whose mother tongue happened to be Spanish. By 1980, the census had adopted “Hispanic” as a quasi-racial term and encouraged Puerto Ricans and other Latin American immigrants to identify with that category, rather than with non-Hispanic whites or blacks. In 1990, an even larger proportion of Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, Dominicans, and other Hispanics reported that they belonged to other races (*Latin American Perspectives* 1992; C. Rodríguez 1992, 2000). For U.S. Puerto Ricans, “other” has multiple semantic connotations, including *trigueño*, tan, brown, Spanish, Hispanic, Latino, Boricua, or simply Puerto Rican. Contrary to the whitening of the Island’s population during the first half of the 20th century, mainland Puerto Ricans underwent a browning tendency during the second half of the century.

Throughout this paper, I have argued that the popular racial categories used by Puerto Ricans on the Island and in the diaspora depart from dominant American racial codes. Although the official racial terminology in the United States has changed over time, the two main categories—white and black—have remained relatively stable,

distinct, and opposed to each other (Domínguez 1998). The presumed purity and homogeneity of the white and black races, however, clashed against the prevalence of racial mixture among Puerto Ricans. The multiplicity of physical types, produced by seemingly endless combinations of skin color, facial features, and hair texture, could not easily be accommodated within the U.S. hegemonic racial taxonomy. From the standpoint of the federal government, Puerto Ricans on the Island had to be labeled according to discrete racial groupings—or not at all. But most islanders insisted that they were white, even if they knew they had some African ancestry. In contrast, migrants to the mainland responded to a bipolar racial order by choosing a third alternative, *other*, which increasingly mirrored their Hispanic identity.

The politics of race and ethnicity among Puerto Ricans have wider theoretical and practical implications. This case study confirms that all racial classification systems are scientifically invalid as representations of human biological diversity. They are even less appropriate as explanations for social and cultural differences. Although some group variations related to skin, hair, and eye pigmentation, stature, and body form are hereditary, such variations are difficult if not impossible to categorize in a systematic way. Phenotypically, Puerto Ricans display the full range of characteristics traditionally associated with both whites and blacks. According to American standards, they should be counted as people of color because of their mixed ancestry. According to Puerto Rican standards, they should be considered white if they have a light skin color, thin lips, an elongated nose, and straight hair. It is sterile to argue that one scheme is right and the other wrong, or that one is morally superior to the other. Instead, both systems are historically and culturally grounded in racist projects originating in colonialism and slavery (see Omi and Winant 1994).

The practical implications of this analysis are ominous, especially for racial counting efforts such as the census. Adding a multiracial category to existing forms, or allowing respondents to choose more than one racial category, will probably not

improve the accuracy of the census of Puerto Ricans on the Island or in the mainland. Introducing a racial self-identification question in Puerto Rico will most likely open a Pandora's box. If past experience serves as a guide, most people—perhaps more than 90 percent—will check the “white” box on the questionnaire. If islanders follow the trend favored by migrants to the mainland, they might choose neither white nor black, but other; or they might opt for both black and white. Then again, many Puerto Ricans could define themselves according to multiple racial categories. In the 1998 status plebiscite, Puerto Ricans had to choose among four alternatives: the current Commonwealth, free association, independence, or statehood. The largest proportion of voters supported “none of the above.” Perhaps, to recycle that formula, the best response to the racial question in the 2000 census would also be “none of the above.”

Notes

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TABLE 1
 MAJOR FOLK RACIAL TERMS
 USED IN PUERTO RICO

<i>Term</i>	<i>Approximate meaning</i>
<i>Blanco(a)</i>	White
<i>Blanquito(a)</i>	Literally, little white; figuratively, elitist, upper-class
<i>Colorao(a)</i>	Redheaded, reddish skin
<i>Rubio(a)</i>	Blonde
<i>Cano(a)</i>	Blonde, fair-skinned
<i>Jincho(a)</i>	Pale-skinned; sometimes used pejoratively
<i>Blanco(a) con raja</i>	Literally, white with a crack; white with some visible black features
<i>Jabao(a)</i>	Fair-skinned with curly hair
<i>Trigueño(a)</i>	Literally, wheat-colored or brunette; usually light mulatto

<i>Moreno(a)</i>	Dark-skinned; usually dark mulatto
<i>Mulato(a)</i>	Mixed race; rarely used in public
<i>Indio(a)</i>	Literally, Indian; brown-skinned with straight hair
<i>Café con leche</i>	Literally, coffee with milk; tan or brown-skinned
<i>Piel canela</i>	Literally, cinnamon skin; tan or brown-skinned
<i>Prieto(a)</i>	Dark-skinned; usually derogatory
<i>Grifo(a)</i>	Dark-skinned with kinky hair; usually derogatory
<i>De color</i>	Euphemism for black; usually meaning black
<i>Negro(a)</i>	Black; rarely used as a direct term of reference
<i>Negrito(a)</i>	Literally, little black; usually used as a term of endearment

TABLE 2
 RACIAL CATEGORIES USED
 BY THE CENSUS OF PUERTO RICO,
 1899-1950

<i>Year</i>	<i>Categories</i>	<i>Number of persons</i>
1899	White	589,426
	Colored	363,817
1910	White	732,555
	Black	50,245
	Mulatto	335,192
	Other	20
1920	White	948,709
	Black	49,246
	Mulatto	301,816
	Other	38
1930	White	1,146,719
	Colored	397,156
	Other races	38
1935	White	1,313,496
	Colored	411,038
1940	White	1,430,744
	Nonwhite	438,511
1950	White	1,762,411
	Negro	446,948

	Other races	1,344
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Sources: Administración de Reconstrucción de Puerto Rico (1938);
Departamento de la Guerra (1900); Department of Commerce (1913,
1921, 1932); U.S. Department of Commerce (1943a, 1953a).

TABLE 3
 RACIAL COMPOSITION
 OF THE PUERTO RICAN POPULATION, 1802-1950
 (IN PERCENTAGES)

<i>Year</i>	<i>White</i>	<i>Nonwhite^a</i>
1802	48	52
1812	46.8	53.2
1820	44.4	55.6
1827	49.7	50.3
1830	50.1	49.9
1836	52.9	47.1
1860	51.1	48.5
1877	56.3	43.7
1887	59.5	40.5
1897	64.3	35.7

1899	61.8	38.2
1910	65.5	34.5
1920	73	27
1930	74.3	25.7
1935	76.2	23.8
1940	76.5	23.5
1950	79.7	20.3

^a Includes black, colored, mulattos, mixed blood, and other races.

Sources: Administración de Reconstrucción de Puerto Rico (1938);
Departamento de la Guerra (1900); Department of Commerce (1913,
1921, 1932); U.S. Department of Commerce (1943a, 1953a).

TABLE 4
 MAJOR RACIAL CATEGORIES USED BY THE CENSUS
 OF THE UNITED STATES, 1900-2000

<i>Year</i>	<i>Categories</i>
1900	White, Black, Mulatto, Indian, Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, Hindu, Korean, Mexican
1910	White, Black, Mulatto, Chinese, Japanese, Indian
1920	White, Black, Mulatto, Indian, Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, Hindu, Korean
1930	White, Black, Mulatto, Indian, Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, Hindu, Korean, Mexican
1940	White, Negro, Indian, Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, Hindu, Korean
1950	White, Negro, Indian, Chinese, Japanese, Filipino

1960	White, Negro, American Indian, Japanese, Chinese, Filipino, Hawaiian, Part Hawaiian, Aleut, Eskimo
1970	White, Negro or Black, Indian (Amer.), Japanese, Chinese, Filipino, Hawaiian
1980	White, Negro or Black, Japanese, Chinese, Filipino, Korean, Vietnamese, Indian (Amer.), Asian Indian, Hawaiian, Guamanian, Samoan, Eskimo, Aleut
1990	White, Black or Negro, Indian (Amer.), Eskimo, Aleut, Asian or Pacific Islander
2000	White, Black or African American, American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander

Sources: Office of Management and Budget (1997); Ruggles *et al.* (1997).

TABLE 5
 THE MULATTO AND BLACK POPULATION
 OF PUERTO RICO, 1899-1920
 (IN PERCENTAGES)

	<i>1899</i>	<i>1910</i>	<i>1920</i>
Mulattos	83.6	86.9	85.9
Blacks	16.4	13.1	14.1
Total colored	100	100	100

Source: Departamento de la Guerra (1900); Department of Commerce
 (1913, 1921).

TABLE 6
 RACIAL COMPOSITION OF PUERTO RICANS^a
 IN THE UNITED STATES,^b 1940-1990
 (IN PERCENTAGES)

<i>Year</i>	<i>White</i>	<i>Nonwhite^c</i>	<i>Other</i>
1940	86.8	13.2	--
1950	92	8	--
1960	96.1	3.9	--
1970	92.9	5.3	1.8
1980	44.2	3.9	51.8
1990	46.4	7.8	45.9

^a For 1940, refers only to persons of Puerto Rican birth; for other years, includes persons of Puerto Rican birth or parentage.

^b For 1980, refers to New York City.

Includes Negro or black, Native American or Indian, and Asian and Pacific Islander.

Sources: C. Rodríguez (1989, 2000); U.S. Department of Commerce (1953b, 1963, 1973).

TABLE 7
 RACIAL SELF-IDENTIFICATION
 OF PUERTO RICANS IN THE UNITED STATES
 IN THE CURRENT POPULATION SURVEY, 1992-1999
 (IN PERCENTAGES)

<i>Race</i>	<i>1992</i>	<i>1993</i>	<i>1994</i>	<i>1995</i>	<i>1996</i>	<i>1997</i>	<i>1998</i>	<i>1999</i>
White	89	89.1	81.5	79.3	91.8	88.9	90.9	90.6
Black	6.4	4.4	6.1	4.8	7	10.7	7.4	7.9
American Indian ^a	0.1	0.5	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.1	0.7	0.3
Asian ^b	--	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.9	0.3	1	1.2
Other	4.5	5.6	11.8	15.3	--	--	--	--
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

^a Includes Eskimo or Aleut.

^b Includes Pacific Islander.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau (1999).

ⁱ I would like to thank Suzanne Oboler and Anani Dzidzienyo for their invitation to present this paper. Lillian Torres Aguirre and Roberto R. Ramírez provided access to

census data on race among Puerto Ricans on the Island and in the United States. Isar Godreau and Juan José Baldrich offered many useful comments to strengthen my argument.

ii This section draws drawn upon and expands an earlier review of the literature on race in Puerto Rico (Duany 1998).

iii As Isar Godreau commented upon reading an earlier version of this paper, racial categories can never do justice to people, no matter how such categories are redefined. However, I would argue that the incongruence between racial self-perceptions and others' perceptions is much greater in the case of Puerto Ricans in the United States than, say, African Americans or European Americans.

iv In the 1950s, an official report by the New York City government made headlines in Puerto Rico because it distinguished Puerto Ricans as a racial type, separate from whites and nonwhites (*El Mundo* 1954).

v The memoirs of Bernardo Vega (1994 [1977]) document that Puerto Rican settlements in New York City at the turn of the 20th century were not strictly segregated by color. The residents of today's barrios continue to be racially heterogeneous.

vi For example, a recent application form to the Teaching Practicum at the College of Education of the University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras, inquires about "ethnic origin" and includes the following categories: "White," "Black," "*Trigueño Claro*," "*Trigueño Oscuro*," and "Other." I thank Isar Godreau for providing me a copy of this document.

vii Virginia Domínguez (1998) has recently reviewed changing racial taxonomies in the United States, especially as reflected in Hawaiian censuses during the 20th century. She found much categorical flip-flopping in U.S. concepts of race since the first census of 1790. Since 1900, the census has used 26 different terms to identify the racial composition of the American population.

viii Similarly, Benjamin Bailey (1999) found that young Dominican Americans in Providence, Rhode Island, variously describe their race as Spanish, Hispanic, Dominican, or Latino, but never as black or white.

ix As Angela Ginorio (1979:107) argues, the recognition of a third racial group such as brown or other to designate Native Americans, Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, and other Latinos does not constitute a fundamental challenge to the American system of racial classification. Rather, it merely adds another discrete category based on ethnic background.