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## **Urban Erotics and Racial Affect in a Neoliberal “Racial Democracy”: Brazilian and Puerto Rican Youth in Newark, New Jersey**

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*This essay examines the power-evasive reduction of “race,” racial conflict, and racial subordination from the terrain of the social, material, and structural to the “private” realm of affect and emotions, in an effort to explain how neoliberalism operates in the everyday lives of U.S.-born Latino and Latin American migrant youth, particularly, young, working-class Puerto Rican and Brazilian women in Newark, New Jersey. A main argument of this project is that urban neoliberalism has been complicit in generating new racial configurations in the United States and that, in the case of populations of Latin American and Spanish-speaking Caribbean backgrounds, such articulations of difference have deployed a variation of “racial democracy” ideologies. This “cartography of racial democracy” gives credence to denunciations of racism or racial subordination as long as they are launched in the realm of intimate relationships and attraction—as aspects of “affect” or an “urban erotics”—that frequently overshadows and flattens the structures of urban neoliberalism that require that individual worth is measured in relation to how one “packages” oneself culturally to be profitable.*

*Key Words:* Race, neoliberalism, Brazilians, Puerto Ricans, youth culture, racial democracy, Newark

*“Sometimes I sit on the bus and I feel the person next to me pulling away, as if brushing against my skin would contaminate them. That happens a lot, with whites and morenos [Blacks] both. And you feel . . . you know, rechazo [rejection]. Eso duele mucho [that hurts]. That they think we’re worth nothing.”*

Susana García, 22, Puerto Rican, resident of Newark’s North Broadway neighborhood.<sup>1</sup>

This essay examines the power-evasive reduction of “race,” racial conflict, and racial subordination from the terrain of the social, material, and structural to the “private” realm of affect and emotions, in an effort to explain how neoliberalism operates in the everyday lives of U.S.-born Latino and Latin American migrant youth, particularly,

young, working-class Puerto Rican and Brazilian women in Newark, New Jersey. State retrenchment and deregulation along with the privatization of public spaces and privileging of free market approaches to development provide the bases on which arguments for efficient technologies of government are fostered under neoliberal economic and urban policies. Despite the dismantling of a social welfare state that is suggested as evidence of state shrinkage, it would be a fallacy to indiscriminately equate neoliberalism with a lack of government intervention or laissez faire market policies (Chomsky 1999; cf. Caldeira 2000). Instead, it is important to trace the qualitatively different kinds of intervention that neoliberal policies enable, particularly in light of industries, private corporations, and business interests that thrive on government subsidies. The uses of “urban development” and “safety” discourses are central to how neoliberalism operates in cities, particularly in cities with large concentration of racialized populations, like Newark, New Jersey. These discussions tacitly (and even explicitly) reference the presence of young people, particularly working-class youth of color, in public spaces. Inspired by the interest of corporations and private developers in Newark, the city government has made “urban development” a priority only secondary (and related) to increasing “safety.” Neoliberal techniques and government policies foster new definitions of “good citizenship” that oftentimes disjoint the citizen from the state (Maskovsky 2001) and establish “personal responsibility” as the main quality necessary for improving urban life.

A main argument of this project is that urban neoliberalism has been complicit in generating new racial configurations in the United States and that, in the case of populations of Latin American and Spanish-speaking Caribbean backgrounds, such articulations of difference have deployed a variation of “racial democracy” ideologies.<sup>2</sup> This “cartography of racial democracy” gives credence to denunciations of racism or racial subordination as long as they are launched in the realm of intimate relationships and attraction—as aspects of “affect” or an “urban erotics”—that frequently overshadows and flattens the structures of urban neoliberalism that require that individual worth is measured in relation to how one “packages” oneself culturally to be profitable.<sup>3</sup> Such “cartography of racial democracy” considers active, public denunciations of racist practices in the United States to be pointless, unproductive, or even unacceptable.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, that discussions of “race” and racism are circumscribed or gain credence primarily in the intimate realm should not be simplistically attributed to a “lack of racial consciousness” or a “false consciousness.” Rather, they appear to suggest that certain populations have witnessed the retrenchment of civil society and state intervention in the context of

immediate urban neoliberal practices and question the state's motivation to even engage discussions of social justice along racial lines. Urban neoliberalism has fundamentally altered the terms of antidiscrimination struggles. Young U.S.-born Latinos and Latin American migrants in Newark conceptualized denunciations of racism in ways that are fundamentally different (and at times incompatible with) the classical civil rights-inspired antiracism discourse that many African Americans and older Chicano and Puerto Rican generations championed under a different political context.<sup>5</sup> A working-class Latino pragmatism that matter-of-factly exposed the antiracist role of the state as a fiction superceded and framed discussions of racism among many Brazilian and Puerto Rican youth in Newark. In some ways, this position might arguably indicate a *greater* awareness of how white supremacy operates, particularly at a historical moment of heightened state surveillance, disciplining, and nativism.

The goal of this article is to begin to develop the conceptual framework for a theory that can illuminate the relation between a collectively constituted emotional commonsense, on the one hand, and the concentrations of authority, resources, and coercion under neoliberalism, on the other.<sup>6</sup> After a brief discussion of Newark's most recent neoliberal urban politics, the article introduces ethnographic material to analyze the intersection between the concept of "urban erotics"—the particular ways in which demographic configurations and segregation in cities and neighborhoods influence the interpretation of racial projects and representations in the everyday life—and the mapping of racial democracy onto the city's biracial landscape. A discussion of "racial affect," which here refers to the processes through which individuals located the racial projects of the nation-state in everyday evaluations of emotional propriety and adequacy, is introduced in the final section of the article. In particular, this section analyzes how sexuality was the main lens through which racial affect was deployed, articulated, and understood. Affect provided a form of reading "race" that privileged individual behavior and practice over considerations of social subordination and material inequality in cities. An important observation here is that while "racial affect" and "urban erotics" were embodied, socially produced values and in themselves forms of political economy, they were constructed and evaluated independently of their materiality. Their power lies largely on this presumed separation.

### **The uncertainty of place in neoliberal Newark**

After over half a century of severe population loss, disinvestment, job flight, and abandonment, Newark has sought to attract mobile capital

and labor under the “Newark Renaissance” banner since the 1990s. The Renaissance’s much-touted accomplishments have galvanized a business, government, and philanthropic elite that has been associated with the construction of the New Jersey Performing Arts Center and the Newark Bears’ minor-league baseball stadium, as well as the presence of new multinational corporations, the fortress-like FBI headquarters, and waterfront luxury apartment buildings. Poor people are spatially redistributed by using housing vouchers, preventing their sustained and effective political mobilization, as once-feared neighborhoods are transformed to attract middle-class residents in the context of a bifurcated labor market, a virtually dismantled welfare state, and strategies that do not require that each unit of public housing is replaced with another unit (Newman 2004).

Ever since the 1940s, poverty concentration was targeted as the cause rather than the result of deindustrialization, middle-class suburbanization, and pervasive racism in marketplace and public programs (City of Newark 1959). “Slum clearance” and “urban renewal” practices generated a great deal of uncertainty and displacement among the Newark poor and working-class residents who felt impotent to secure their livelihood and neighborhoods.

Given the degrees of territorial segregation of the Italian, Jewish, and African American residents of Newark in the 1950s, it is not surprising that urban politics also impacted racial relations, as the poorest, usually African American, residents were displaced from their rundown tenements in the Central Ward to areas of the city that had been marked as “Italian” or “Jewish” without any provision for their economic or social integration into those long-standing neighborhoods. In the 1960s and 1970s the entire Central Ward of the city, a predominantly African American neighborhood where Puerto Ricans had also begun to develop a community in the earlier stages of their migration to New Jersey, was declared a “blighted” area and bulldozed. Residents were displaced to other areas of the city to accommodate the New Jersey College of Medicine and Dentistry and the Newark Campus of Rutgers University (Hidalgo 1970; Jackson and Jackson 1972). Many of these Central Ward residents were relocated to housing projects that had been built at the expense of destructing local working-class neighborhoods, including Newark’s “Little Italy,” the fourth largest of such enclaves in the United States in the 1950s (Immerso 1997). It is not surprising that this set the tone for great hostility between poor and working-class Blacks and Italians, as well as other white ethnics, who also felt betrayed by a political Italian and African American elite consolidated under a formidable patronage system.

The area of the city that appeared less affected by such population reshuffling was the Ironbound neighborhood, where Portuguese migrated in large numbers in the 1970s and which, reinforced by a large Brazilian migration in the 1980s and 1990s, continues to be considered a quaint, commercially viable “ethnic enclave” of restaurants, cafes, and specialty stores that attract the middle-class from neighboring suburbs. Under contemporary neoliberal projects, the commodification of culture has played a central role in urban development, as the case of the Ironbound, considered Newark’s “Little Portugal,” has shown.<sup>7</sup> In the late 1980s the demographic dominance of the Portuguese Ironbound residents began to shift as more South American migrants, especially from Brazil, began to arrive in the area (Dines 1991; Patterson 2000).<sup>8</sup> In addition to the Ironbound, the North Ward area of North Broadway has the most numerically significant concentration of Latinos in the city. After the destruction of North Newark’s “Little Italy” for the development of a monumental public housing project, the North Broadway neighborhood of Newark had also been described as an “Italian enclave” akin to the Ironbound. By the year 2000, however, 62 percent of the area’s population was categorized as “Hispanic.” Puerto Ricans still constituted the largest Latino group in North Broadway, one of the seven neighborhoods of the North Ward, even though more migrants from the Dominican Republic and parts of South America, especially Ecuador, accounted for an increasingly diverse Latino population. Unlike the “quaint” Ironbound, North Broadway was racialized as a predominantly “Puerto Rican” or “Hispanic” area of vacant lots, high poverty rates, and disinvestment (Sidney 2004); this area was more emblematic of what Newark was “really like,” whereas the Ironbound is viewed as “exceptional.”

The Ironbound and North Broadway areas combined share most of the Latin American- or Spanish Caribbean-ancestry populations in Newark. While African Americans still constituted a majority of Newark’s population in 2000 (53.5 percent), Latinos represent the fastest growing group (30 percent) during this time, with Puerto Ricans still constituting the largest nationality group in Newark and New Jersey, a state that also has the highest percentage of migrants from South America in the United States (Kaiser Foundation, March 2004).<sup>9</sup> The increasing migration from South America is credited for halting the population decline that Newark had experienced for several decades. Newark remains a “majority minority” city, with whites—which includes mostly longtime Portuguese residents and some Italians who remained behind after the white flight of the 1960s—making up 26.5 percent of the city, concentrated mostly in the Ironbound and Forrest Hills areas of the East and North Wards,

respectively. Newark residents experienced the city in radically different ways than how it is nationally imagined.<sup>10</sup> The Latino and Latin American youth with whom I spoke, for the most part, lived Newark at the scale of the neighborhoods or even certain streets or mental territories within them, despite being aware of a broader image that others had of the city.

Over the past half century, at least, Newark has witnessed inordinately high levels of population displacement, infrastructural destruction, and redevelopment projects. While such processes produced considerable grassroots- and community-based opposition in the past, of which the city's 1967 riots are perhaps the most visible in the national imaginary (Hayden 1967), today such "revitalization" efforts do not seem to generate the same degree of community intervention. Instead, community development organizations themselves engage in market models of redevelopment that limit their autonomy and initiative to "fundable" projects. The retrenchment of the state under such neoliberal policies in Newark has been articulated through an aim to reduce concentrated poverty while not necessarily making individuals less poor (Crump 2003) or addressing issues of racism and social subordination. Unlike grassroots opposition in the past, community groups and nonprofits do not challenge the development agenda because they are "co-opted with 'side payments' . . . in the form of federal grant funds so their leaders . . . do not challenge prevailing economic arrangements" (Schulgasser 2002: 15). Newark's urban neoliberalism and its focus on market-driven strategies for poverty deconcentration rather than eradication has left the disenfranchised with few tools and a dearth of platforms through which to denounce everyday forms of racial prejudice, white supremacy, and economic subordination. The unwillingness to address individual disenfranchisement, particularly in light of projects intended to redesign the aesthetic (but not substantive) problems of the city, reduce the public, civic society; public denunciations of racial subordination lack a forum other than the most immediate realm of everyday intimate relations.

Two critical components of the broader political economy on which my analysis of a "neoliberal racial democracy" is situated, while not sufficiently developed in this essay, must be acknowledged here. First, the ethnographic narrative presented here is intrinsic to a condition of Black disenfranchisement in the United States. Such disenfranchisement is at the very root of the Black-Brown tensions alluded to here and surfaces when African Americans recognize how they have been historically slighted, oftentimes in favor of other immigrant groups (REF), since the times of slavery. Moreover, it is also critical to highlight that the physical absence of whites in my discussion of Newark,

an overwhelmingly Black and Latino city, ought to be seen in light of the structures that have been instituted by whites regardless of their absence. Thus, even in the wake of white flight, whites have cemented historical mental structure that persists and are often embraced by minority groups to characterize one another.

### **In search of a stereotype to love: racial democracy, urban erotics, neoliberalism**

In the largely Latino and Latin American neighborhoods of North Broadway and the Ironbound, women in particular were censored or praised for whom they dated, whom they disliked, and any perceived temperamental or cosmetic transformation that they might experience as a result of these choices of partner. It was also in such dating practices that the interstices of competing and complementary folk theories of race—of Latin American myths of “racial democracy” and U.S.-dominant systems of racial polarity, and how an individual “did” race in light of these systems—became most salient, discursive, and debated.<sup>11</sup> Many Brazilians and youth from the Spanish-speaking Caribbean seemed to subscribe to notions of a Latin American racial exceptionalism that considered Latin American and Caribbean societies to be “more accepting” of racial difference. According to these perspectives, everyone was “mixed” or originated from a racial triad or three-racial lines (African, European, and native indigenous populations) and nobody, no matter how light skinned or how dark, was ever really “purely white” or “purely black.” This was viewed as a laudable thing. Among young Brazilian and Puerto Rican women, in particular, a conceptions of “racial affect” and “urban erotics” were built upon rearticulation of Latin American and Hispanic Caribbean ideologies of “racial democracy” that rendered “race” unacceptable and morally reprehensible as an analytical category *when applied to a group*, while also creating a hyper-consciousness of “race” that induced *individuals* to repackage themselves as more desirable to the neoliberal projects by rejecting associations with both Blackness and whiteness in the United States (cf. Costa Vargas 2004; Hanchard 1994).<sup>12</sup>

A critical aspect of the production of racial affect and urban erotics in Newark involved the virtual reduction of difference to “morality,” “temperament,” and “values” so that racial tensions were, above all, value judgments that were frequently disassociated from visible local concerns. The relationship between Brazilians and Portuguese in the Ironbound and between Dominicans and Puerto Ricans in North Broadway, for instance, were generally singled out in both areas to illustrate presumed temperamental, emotive, and moral differences



between the groups, to serve as a barometer of the state of intergroup relations, and to highlight both hostility and collaboration across racial and ethnic lines. Discussions about difference among Latino groups were explained as differences of affect and temperament, evaluated in the areas of gender and sexuality, and articulated in decidedly spatial ways. When I asked Mirta Arroyo, a Puerto Rican ESL teacher in her sixties who had taught at high schools in both the Ironbound and North Broadway, to compare the two schools, she stated that the problems at both schools were remarkably similar: "Now more Brazilians are coming in [to the Ironbound high school] and Brazilians are very sexual, very loose, you know. In that sense, they are like the Dominicans here. . . . That's why many Portuguese are leaving [the Ironbound] after the Brazilians started coming, just like many Puerto Ricans are leaving [North Broadway] because of the Dominicans."<sup>13</sup> The distinctions between these qualities of interaction were also at times suggestive of how individuals viewed their group's racialization prospects in the United States (cf. Bashi and McDaniel 1997). Despite a great ambivalence toward the "Latino" identity, and their outright rejection of a self-identification as "Hispanic," Brazilians in Newark oftentimes worked as domestic workers or in the construction sector alongside other U.S.-born Latinos and Latin American migrants, and even the Portuguese language did not seem enough of a distinguishing marker to separate them from other migrants.<sup>14</sup>

Affective relationships sometimes provided a porous space in which to acknowledge partial forms of belonging rather than sustaining rigid views of "insider" and "outsider," precisely because of the inherent ambiguity of emotionally charged contexts.<sup>15</sup> In such instance, perceived group boundaries could be altered by someone's acquired *intimate* knowledge of a "culture" or could be limited by what was seen as someone's interest in "cultural co-optation." Mariana Oliveira, a Brazilian high school senior who played on the Ironbound high school's volleyball team, commented about a beloved Portuguese coach: "Coach is Portuguese, but he's married to a Brazilian girl. He is with Brazilians all the time because he is a bilingual teacher and is always with Brazilians . . . He likes that we're warmer, friendlier people. He fell in love with a Brazilian and he knows her family, friends." Such moments represented were viewed as moments of possibility in an otherwise tense relationship between Portuguese and Brazilian women (Ramos-Zayas 2008), in which Brazilians maintained their well-protected "Brazilian"-ness as something "innate" that acquired value when validated, in this case, by the Portuguese (and a Portuguese man at that).<sup>16</sup>

Conversely, Brazilian youth viewed intimacy with Blacks in very different terms, and even in light of a threat of cultural "co-optation."

For instance, Maura Silva, a U.S.-born Brazilian student at the Ironbound high school, noted: “Black Americans like to take capoeira, samba, eat our foods. They think we are pretty, and that’s why the [African American] women don’t like us. I see them at the [eating] places around here. I went to a capoeira school once, because a friend of mine was trying to get a job with them, and they looked at us like they are the Brazilians and we didn’t belong there.” I asked her why she thought this was and she responded: “They think they’re more Brazilian than we are, because they think that only if you’re dark, you can be Brazilian, you know? And I’m dark, but not as dark as they are. But in Brazil you also have blonde [hair], blue eyes too! I never went there again.” The perception that African Americans might have a specific investment in imagining Brazil in terms of a trans-Atlantic Blackness was not always articulated in those terms but appeared occasionally in conversations about commercial activity in the neighborhood. When African Americans participated in the Brazilian cultural activities of the Ironbound, they were viewed as trying to capitalize on their Blackness to draw connections to Afro-Brazilian populations in Brazil but also reassessing their local dominance in “immigrant” Newark. They were simultaneously perceived as questioning the authenticity and integrity of a “color-blind” Brazilian-ness and Brazilians’ social aspirations in the United States

Despite claims that Newark is becoming a “multicultural” city, it is critical to recognize that white and Latino residents alike developed “socially meaningful cartographies” (Morrissey 1997) that are necessarily constituted against a centrality of a diverse Blackness in which African Americans represented both a powerful political elite—under a series of Black mayors since 1970—and a highly stigmatized “underclass.” While evaluations of racial tolerance drew from a cartography or racial democracy that tended to privilege the realm of intimate relations, these racial configurations were absent in discussions that were perceived as threatening the successful commodification (and commercialization) of “Brazilian culture.” In Maura’s assessment of Blacks’ consumption of what she considered “Brazilian” cultural practices, it was not the consumption per se that was questioned. Rather, a greater concern was that a potential market niche built around a particular vision of “Brazilian culture” would be usurped under a form of pan-Africanism from which white Brazilians would be excluded. The fact that Newark is a city in which African Americans experience both a tragic crisis of structural and financial resources and high visibility in the political arena—as well as a city in which a diverse Black population includes various generations of Southern Black families and populations from the Caribbean and continental Africa—only exacerbates

the protective boundaries around which “Brazilian culture” is predicated.<sup>17</sup> In this sense, Brazilians have an implicit awareness of what Charles Hale (2005) has called “neoliberal multiculturalism,” the fact that neoliberal politics do not negate but selectively recognize ethnic claims in order to safeguard dominant relations in the nation (cf. Comaroff and Comaroff 2000).

Nevertheless, spatial configurations of “racial mixing” operated at multiple scales—including within neighborhoods, citywide, and transnationally—also contributed to perspectives on an “urban competency” (Ramos-Zayas 2007) that out-of-group dating could confer. The ability to possess the implicit social knowledge of another “culture” provided a form of cosmopolitanism that resonates with Robert Park’s claim that “[in the city] all suppressed desires find somewhere an expression” (1967[1929]: 18). Conversations with Melissa Rivera, Michelle Sánchez, and Giselle Coutinho, young women I met in the Ironbound, are illustrative of this. The three of them expressed a desire to date people from outside their group and to some degree even avoided dating men from their own groups. They specifically interpreted this desire in terms of personal discovery, intellectual growth, and as a symbol of change in one’s life, respectively:

*Melissa (US-born Puerto Rican, resident of North Broadway):* I like to date people from other places, not only Puerto Ricans. Because, you know, you’re Puerto Rican and, all of a sudden, you go out with someone who is Dominican or something other than Puerto Rican. And you’re like ‘Wow.’ It’s so different and yet it’s so alike. Your world opens up beyond your box.

*Michelle (US-born Dominican and Puerto Rican, resident of the Ironbound):* I’ve always dated Brazilian guys. My ex-boyfriend is Brazilian. My current boyfriend is Brazilian. Everybody thinks he’s Dominican and Puerto Rican

*AY:* So was this a coincidence or do you look for Brazilian guys when you date?

*Michelle:* I like Brazilian men . . . I knew my boyfriend was Brazilian because I noticed that he was in the Portuguese bilingual class . . . and he was too dark to be Portuguese and his accent was different.

*AY:* Did you have a particular impression of Brazilians before dating your first Brazilian boyfriend?

*Michelle:* I was always interested, but I became more interested in my boyfriend’s life. I wanted to get to know what’s Brazil about . . . When I go to my boyfriend’s house, his family cooks me a Brazilian meal, put on the Brazilian channel for me and they make me watch the Carnival. I’ve gone with them to the Brazilian feast in New York, and all that

*AY:* Have you ever dated a Dominican or a Puerto Rican guy?

*Michelle:* Never. Not interested.

*Giselle Coutinho (Brazil-born, resident of the Ironbound):* I don't want to end up with someone who is Brazilian. I don't want to marry a Brazilian guy.

*AY: Why not?*

*Giselle:* Because I came from Brazil. And I'm going to come all the way here to end up with a Brazilian guy? I want someone from another culture . . .

In these instances, partners or potential partners were turned into the sexual objects of desire, a strategy that somewhat compromised the possibility of experiencing the potential partner's subjectivity (cf. Murray 1999: 169). Lacanian perspectives make desire the central premise upon which understanding is based; it is what drives people's attempts to make meaning and is the essence of interpretation. These perspectives remind us that the narrative of desire is a culturally constituted means through which the longing for a publicly complete image of personhood may be achieved, thus also implying a sense of incompleteness or something lacking (Lacan 1977; see Fuery 1995: 8). Melissa enjoys what she sees as an ability to "get along with" someone from a "different culture" in another part of the city; it is this kind of competency in cultural stereotypes that account for her belief that she can experience boundaries of "otherness" as fluid, rather than static, as they are generally viewed in Newark. In Michelle's case, the boyfriend's family becomes a source of curiosity with all the characteristics associated with static ideas of "Brazilian culture" in another part of her own neighborhood. For Giselle, the interest in dating anyone from outside of one's group had to do not necessarily with an avoidance of compatriots, as was the case for Michelle, but a symbol of greater transnational incorporation into the United States. Considering her background growing up in Belo Horizonte and Governador Valadares, in the "interior" Brazilian state of Minas Gerais (and sometimes catalogued as "hick" or less cosmopolitan than Rio de Janeiro or São Paulo), this was also a symbol of cosmopolitanism. Dating a Brazilian when one is from Brazil did not "make sense" according to this logic, because one of the perceived expectations and advantages of migrating was the possibility to become competent and fluent in a new sociocultural context and dating or intimate relations are the most definitive way of testing this competency.<sup>18</sup> Curiosity and spontaneity—in cases of striking conversations that lead to relationships—cannot be ruled out in these exchanges, which were frequently characterized in terms of loosely articulated comments that vacillated from spontaneous desire to fate, from flings to expectations of commitment, and which sometimes

directly challenged epistemology with the question of whether these exchanges have unfolded differently according to the racial group which would be one's ultimate "object of desire."

Noteworthy in these conversations is the tacit absence of references to African American men, despite Newark's demographics and the fact that many of the young women with whom I spoke measured genuine racial openness in terms of a Latina or Latin American woman's willingness to date Black men, as Migdalia Rivera and others claimed.<sup>19</sup> A Puerto Rican student at a high school in North Broadway, Migdalia was one of the many informants to articulate this: "I think Hispanic families are very racially opened. They will accept you as long as you give us respect, you know? Because we are [racially] mixed, so we're used to that. My aunt is married to a Black guy and my family is crazy about him. He eats our food, dances salsa, he says a few words in Spanish."<sup>20</sup> Relationships between U.S. Latinas and Black men were oftentimes cited as "evidence" that Latinos were not racist, though, as will be examined below, many of the presumed acceptance of Black men required an unapologetic rejection of Black women as "aggressive," "hyper-masculine," and "untrustworthy." Interracial relationships between Latinos—or, more often, Latinas—and Blacks and intergroup relationships between various Latin American nationalities served a similar function in these youths' attachment to what Donna Goldstein terms an "erotic racial democracy:" that is, how intimate and emotive relationships become the barometer of "true" anti-racism and embodiments of racial openness (1999: 571).<sup>21</sup>

The distinction between the relationship with African Americans and intimate connections among Latinos of different nationalities suggest a particular form of "urban erotics" that dictated both attraction and the volatility of interracial readings under tacit neoliberal conditions. Adriana González, a young Puerto Rican woman who commuted from North Newark to attend the "better [public] high school" in the Ironbound, explained that the only hesitation she would have about dating a Black guy would be having to deal with his mother. Adriana remarked: "I can go to a Puerto Rican house, you know, for a birthday, and they go '*come, con confianza*' ('eat, make yourself at home'). [With] the Blacks you got to be [nervous, uncertain tone]: 'Oh my God, does his mother like me? Is she going to invite me in? What is she thinking?' You know?" Even when Adriana dated Black men, the presence of Black women in this man's life always seemed to interrupt a full sense of "*confianza*." Aware of the frequent despondent comments that Puerto Ricans and Dominicans made of each other, I asked Adriana if she thought this would be the case with the mother of a Dominican man. She explained: "Puerto Ricans and Dominicans have their own

thing too, but I think it would not be like with the *morenas* [Black women]. Because with a Dominican you fight about who's dressing like a hoochie-mama or whatever . . . or fighting over who puts more *adobo* [seasoning], you know [laughing]. But with the *morenas*, if you look at them the wrong way, forget it." The interaction between Puerto Ricans and Dominicans seemed to be grounded in mutual misinterpretation and misconceptions that, ironically, *increased* a sense of familiarity—a lighter form of bantering (suggested by the reference to seasoning food)—between the two groups. While these relationships were sometimes saturated with mutual "mistrust," there was always-already a familiar affective stereotype through which they were legible to each other.<sup>22</sup> These relationships of "familiar" difference were qualitatively different from the tentative, uncertain, and potentially volatile relationship with the Black mother of Adriana's narrative, and with Black women in general. It's the assumption of "not knowing," the fact that "anything could happen" that characterized the relationships between Latinos and Blacks in Newark, and particularly the relationships between Latina and African American women.<sup>23</sup>

Noemí (from North Broadway), Evelyn, and Vivian, three Puerto Rican seniors who attended high school in the Ironbound, engaged in a conversation that was remarkably typical of how most U.S.-born Latinas viewed Latino-Black relations in almost exclusively gendered terms. In fact, race was only legible through discussions that were explicitly about women or sexuality, particularly in intimate relationships and friendships. The expression of racial affect involved a patterned process of identifying a stereotype, acknowledging the nuances not captured by the stereotype, and reformulating a more nuanced yet equally stereotypical image:

*Noemí:* I don't feel too much tension between Puerto Ricans and Blacks because since I grew up around Blacks all my life and I have family that is Black. One of my aunts is half Black half Puerto Rican so we are always together. But I think Black guys like Puerto Rican women. It's always a black guy with a Puerto Rican or Latino woman, not so much a Black woman with a Puerto Rican man.

*Evelyn:* I think there is some tension though. My mom works for Essex County so she has a lot of African-American friends. But she never trust them too much, because they be talking about her . . . not all because I do have Black friends . . . but I guess it goes back in time when like the [Black] women used to say that all the Black men liked the Puerto Ricans that we try to take their men, you know. [The Black women would say] 'Oh well she has pretty hair I don't like her.' They get jealous of our body shape,

face, the fact we got better hair than they do, they don't have no hair. We don't wear no fake hair and they do. You know, you can do anything with this hair; they have to buy theirs. That's kind of a big deal to them.

*Vivian:* It's true because since Blacks have nappy hair and stuff like that and Puerto Ricans have curly and natural hair [pointing to her own curly hair].

*Noemí:* I still have nappy hair!

*Vivian:* Well, my hair isn't all that straight either, but . . . You could manage with it rather than Blacks, and Blacks like have to have like weaves with curls and stuff that has curly hair.

*Evelyn:* Even my mom is guilty of that, like she had gotten her micro braids done and she's itching like [laughing] so "*yo no sé cómo esas morenas los tienen como por dos meses, ya yo me voy quitando esta mierda.*" [I don't know how these Black women have these on for like two months. I'm going to take this shit off right away].

*AY:* So is this all about the hair?

*Vivian:* It really is all about the hair! [laughing]

*Evelyn:* We got some Puerto Rican girls here with J.Lo bodies. So the guys be like 'Wow, look at her.' Brazilians have nice bodies too, but Black guys don't see them in the same way or are not as close to them as they are to Puerto Rican girls.

*Noemí:* Well, Black girls got nice bodies too, but us Puerto Rican look better. We are a little bit light skinned and you could see it better.

*AY:* *See it better?*

*Noemí:* Well, the skin looks softer.

This patterned search for the expression of racial affect appeared in most conversations. It involved an initial questioning of the most simplistic forms of the stereotype ("I do have Black friends, relatives"); then providing "evidence" of why the stereotype existed ("Black women used to say that Black men liked the Puerto Rican [women]"); the "evidence" was used to reinscribe another stereotype, of Puerto Rican/Latina women as seductress and the undesirability of Black women ("We don't wear no fake hair and they do"; "Puerto Ricans have J.Lo bodies"). The most significant aspect of the conversation happens towards the end when the evidence is on the table and there is a brief moment of acknowledgement of potential similarities between Black and Puerto Rican women (when Evelyn confesses that her mom had "micro braids" and when Vivian mentions that "Black girls have nice bodies too"). Even after noticing the commonalities that emerge from the very "evidence" that purported to suggest racial difference, Puerto Rican (and Brazilian) superiority is reasserted in the end. Any of these girls could "pass" for light-skinned, African American women. The

“inappropriate” affect of Black women existed in tandem with the view that relationships between Black men and Latinas were evidence of racial tolerance under “racial mixing” and racial democracy ideologies; thus, this focus on mixing also served as linchpin of community and sensual life.

The privileged image of the Puerto Rican (and Brazilian) “seductive mulata”—a construct fundamental to views of racial democracy and *mestizaje* (or *mestiçagem*)—is deployed in contradistinction to a less desirable image of Black womanhood. What is critical here, however, is that these images have very specific repercussions in the political economy of sex work and “culture of poverty” arguments in the United States. In Newark, these images have very specific repercussions for the production of an unregulated sex work industry built conceptions of “the exotic,” in which Brazilian women (along with other “Hispanics”) have played a subordinate role. In the case of Brazilians, such images of a seductive mixed-race woman have contributed to narratives of “loose” versus “traditional” which are central to how Brazilians and Portuguese viewed each other in racialized gendered terms in the Ironbound. In the case of Puerto Ricans, hypersexuality has been historically conceived as a potential liability to the state, as insinuated in images of the “welfare queen” premised on implications of promiscuity (Ramos-Zayas 2004, forthcoming). Nevertheless, the way in which race is culturalized and attributed emotive characteristics through a racial democracy discourse gives credence to some perspectives of heteronormative views of racial mixing, while condemning others as responsible for generating violence in the street (while never challenging those who are acting on behalf of capital in the city).

### **“Inappropriate [racial] affect” in the city: manifesting race through sexuality**

A key component of how “race”—at times rephrased through a prism of racial democracy as “culture”—was central to views of affect also involved evaluations of “inappropriate affect,” instances in which reconfiguring expectations of “appropriateness” in the choice of partners resulted in anecdotes of failed relationships or bad marital situations. Conceptions of inappropriate affect supplied cautionary tales of romantic relationships leading to downward mobility, particularly when one fell for someone of the “wrong group.” Common narratives of “forbidden love” involved Latino and Latin American youth hiding their dating partners from their families, usually because these partners were of the “wrong race,” stories of people moving to the suburbs so that their daughters could “marry a white guy,” and concerns over



relationships driven by a partner's need to "*conseguir papeles*" or "*procurar os papéis*" (to get papers or become "legal") by marrying a U.S. citizen. Despite these characterizations of forbidden or utilitarian relationships, however, the leading form of inappropriate affect converged in discussions of Black women, who were viewed as aggressive, either for their perceived or actual involvement in incidents of physical violence, in the case of Black lesbians, or for their judgmental morality, in the case of older churchgoing African American women. Among Latinos and Latin American youth, discussions of city violence oftentimes accentuated the centrality of African American women or even Black female gangs, which sometimes served as coded or explicit assumptions about Black women being "lesbians."<sup>24</sup> Given the class and national variations represented among Blacks in Newark, it is remarkable that the one commentary regarding Blacks that most young Puerto Ricans and Brazilians expressed had to do with "aggressive" Black women.

At twenty-one, Alexandra Castro, a Puerto Rican woman who had graduated from the North Broadway high school and lived in North Newark, appeared unusually mature for her age. After various stints working as a security guard for an insurance company, as a stacker for Home Depot, and a paralegal in a firm in downtown Newark, Alexandra had spent more time teaching karate at an agency she co-owns with her "wife" Isabel. They were well-respected mentors to community youth who were only a few years younger in age, but who seemed ages apart in terms of having a clear sense of their path in life. On a nice summer day in 2006, I met with Alexandra in the Ironbound to give her feedback on the first few pages she had written on a book she was hoping to publish some day. Instead, the first thing Alexandra wanted to talk about was how Ashley, one of the young Puerto Rican women in her karate class, had been "jumped" the previous week. "She was jumped? What happened?" I asked, though stories about young women "being jumped" by other young women had become almost commonplace through the time of my fieldwork. Alexandra continued to explain, still visibly upset:

What happens is this: Ashley's on the phone with me and she can hardly breathe. 'Alex, Alex, they're chasing me.' And I'm like 'What? Who's chasing you? What's going on? Where are you?' But then I hear, 'They're after me. They're after me!' and a click, no more signal on the phone. So I'm going crazy here. Not knowing what's happening . . . As it turned out, these girls, these *morenas*, these Black girls were running after her, because one of them likes her. So Ashley was like 'I'm no gay, but even if I were gay, I wouldn't go for you!' It was four girls trying to take her

down to the ground, but Ashley fought back. She did what she'd learned in karate and didn't allow herself to be brought down. If they had pinned her down, they'd have beat her up to death! Because it was four girls beating her up and then four other girls in the corner, checking to see who's coming . . . This morning I sent someone to go by the school and the girls were expelled, but I'm still pissed off."

Talk of girls "being jumped" or "jumping" other girls were so common among most of the Latino and Latin American students with whom I spoke both in North Newark and the Ironbound, that I felt this was a good opportunity to ask Alexandra more explicitly about this. "Why would they choose Ashley in particular? Is it always the same girls that are the jumpers or how do they know who they're going to jump. I really have no clue about any of this," I confessed to Alexandra, knowing that she already suspected that I had never thrown a punch in my life. "It's always the *morenas*. They had a thing for Ashley. Because, you don't understand, Ashley is very popular. She's pretty, she's really smart, so they fell in love with her," Alexandra explained. "So, because they like her, that's why they jump on her," I continued. Ignoring what I noted as an inconsistency, Alex simply continued to say: "*Morenas* here are like that. And they were all bigger girls too. [AY: *So all of them were morenas?*] Yes . . . that's usually how it is."

The conversation with Alexandra made me go over my fieldnotes and transcripts again, only to realize how many references to "lesbian gangs" or "aggressive Black lesbians" or "Black female gangs" in the hundreds of pages of data I had. I had dismissed some of the data as "urban legend" before realizing how ubiquitous these narratives of violence and sexuality were to the fabric of systems of difference, race, affect, and relationships among young people in Newark. For instance, Zaida, a young woman who was oftentimes confused for African American, had arrived from Puerto Rico a year before I met her in a bilingual class at the Ironbound high school: "I have no problem with Black guys. They always try to speak a little Spanish, say '*mamichula*' and things like that [laughing]. But I can't stand Black women. They are arrogant and like to fight. They look at you, at the fact that you speak Spanish, and they hate you for that. They don't like your color . . . They have their own style, way of walking, *machúas* [unfeminine, butch]," Zaida commented. "What do they fight about," I asked Zaida. She and Lucía, a Colombian student in the same bilingual class, answered in unison: "About everything!" And Lucía added: "If you look at them, they fight you. If you brush against them, they fight you. When I get on the bus, I look to the floor, look out the window, but I will avoid looking at them . . . The *morenas* are like guys. They get together with

women and travel in gangs.” Likewise, Ana Tereza, a Brazilian woman who had arrived from Belo Horizonte in the late-1990s, explained: “The thing that I learned here was the trouble with Black people. You are looking at someone and they’re like ‘What you looking at?’— very aggressive.” And to make sure I was following her description of the situation, she clarified: “And don’t think it’s the guys that I’m talking about. Nooooo . . . it’s the women! And you can’t show them you’re afraid, because they’ll fight you even more. They’re very masculine. They don’t look like women, the shape of their bodies are like men’s bodies.”

Oftentimes, U.S.-born Latinas, particularly Puerto Ricans, admitted or even bragged about having “beaten some *morena* up” or “kicked somebody’s ass.” But, in these stories, they emphasized that they had been responding to a provocation (usually by a Black woman), not perpetrating the act. Even other Latina lesbians, like Alexandra, viewed Black women’s homosexuality as “aggressive,” and, despite having interviewed some Latinas who self-identified as “lesbian,” rarely did any of them express a shared solidarity with Black women. Evaluations of “inappropriate” affect, while most frequently encapsulated in discussions of “aggressive Black lesbians” or “lesbian gangs,” were also ubiquitous to discussion of same-sex desire more generally. Discussions of sexuality among the young Latin Americans and especially, U.S.-born Latino youth were so frequent that they merit some discussion, particularly as they relate to the urban erotics of neoliberal Newark and one’s own existence as a public subject.

A great deal of everyday uncertainty regarding one’s living conditions existed among young Puerto Rican and Brazilian women in Newark. Households moved a lot for a number of reasons, including a system of housing vouchers to promote relocation (usually to allow for the construction of market-value housing or luxury apartments), the inability to pay rapidly increasing rents (especially in the Ironbound), or other personal family situations, like parental separation or increasing street violence in one’s immediate residential area. Despite the array of reasons, which usually involved several forms of neoliberal maneuvering on behalf of private developers or government projects, Latino and Latin American youth marked those movements through assessments of “good” versus “bad” neighbors, who deployed “proper” or “improper” behavior. These evaluations of propriety, which often involved judgment on the affective capabilities of the new populations one encountered, were always altering one’s immediate space, sense of safety, and perception of mobility opportunities. Bus rides, empty lots, sites of demolition and reconstruction, a new Starbucks that rendered a neighborhood “safe for latte,” or a Dunkin Donuts that intruded

upon Old World-style cafes were structures that provided a particular engagement with and readings of social difference. When “race” was read as “culture,” devoid of other structural aspects behind the very edifices encountered in everyday life, racism was qualified as having to do with views of “inadequate” racial affect. Among a younger generation of Latinos and Latin American migrants, sexuality became a critical lens through which such views of racial affect became articulated and legible. In this context, tracing discussions of sexuality becomes an important epistemological tool in analyzing the culturalization of race under a neoliberal racial democracy paradigm.

Explicit discussions of sexual identity in light of an emotional commonsense of race followed three inter-related themes. First, students and faculty in the Ironbound high school agreed that “being gay,” and same-sex desire more generally, was more accepted and visible in the school that had been the case even in the not-so-distant past. This was not the case at the high school in North Broadway, where very few students had openly identified as “gay” or “lesbian” while in high school. Alexandra, one of the few lesbians who were “out” while a student at the North Broadway high school, mentioned: “Nobody was out at [the North Broadway high school] when I was there. *Las buchás* [akin to “butch lesbians”] only! But those were the only ones. Everyone else came out after they graduated. So I hear stories now: ‘Did you know that so-and-so is gay?’”

Among the Latino students who were open about their sexuality at the North Broadway high school, a racial consciousness was the filter through which a consciousness of oppression against sexual minorities developed. For instance, when Alexandra had presented her senior project on gay marriages, several teachers, many of whom were older Italian men and African American fundamentalist Christian women, explicitly made sounds of disgust. One of them, an African American female teacher in her fifties, uttered the common phrase: “God intended marriage to be between a man and a woman!” After the presentation, when a few other Latino students asked her sympathetically if she was ok, given the heated reaction to her project, Alexandra remarked that it was “always white old men and those Black church women that make their ignorant comments.”<sup>25</sup> The white Italian men were expected to react as they did. The images of Black women were generation-specific, since most of the older Black women were viewed as socially conservative and lacking compassion because of their religious, church-going personas, while most of the younger women are viewed as “lesbian” or people who liked to fight. Both images, however, are suggestive of violence.<sup>26</sup>

A second, related theme involved evaluations of “authentic” versus “pretend” sexualities. Edwin, an “openly gay” Puerto Rican senior who

worked as a part-time hairdresser in the Ironbound, echoed what other teachers and students at the Ironbound high school had told me: "Everyone wants to be gay now! It's become like a trendy thing, especially in these past few years." At the North Broadway high school, a school whose very history was interlaced with stories of how mounted Newark police entered the cafeteria in the aftermath of the Branch Brook Park Puerto Rican riots of 1977 (Ramos-Zayas, forthcoming), issues of sexuality were articulated through narratives of discrimination and oppression; at the Ironbound high school, sexual orientation was sometimes viewed as a "trendy identity" that corresponded to white middle-class engagement with "gay" as a potential market niche (cf. Decena 2008).

Jen Carvajal, a young Cuban teacher at the Ironbound high school, commented: "You have those [students] who are legitimately gay and have come to realize they're gay. They admitted they were gay and got all the ridicule for it. A kid like Tony. He's like 'Miss Carvajal, I don't even know how to act like a guy. I'm just feminine.'" Being "gay" was presented as an emotional stereotype that must necessarily involve trauma, frustration, or analysis, or otherwise it was not genuine. Descriptions of "legitimately gay" students appeared in contradistinction to the view that some Latino and Latin American youth, particularly the women, selectively "performed" same-sex desire to the service of heterosexual normativity; that is, "to get guys," as Evelyn, a Puerto Rican student at the Ironbound high school, claimed. She narrated: "A girl might think 'Oh he's hot, I'm going to get with this other girl in front of him to get him interested.' Last year there was this one girl. One month she loved boys. She was like 'Oh, I'm so in love!' Then the next month she was like 'I'm gay.' And then the next month she was crying in the bathroom because some guy broke up with her."

Latina women who identified as "gay" could be considered either "really gay" or "pretend gay," but this fluidity was not available to Black women, whose sexuality was defined exclusively in terms of a perceived "aggressiveness." In these particular cases, some teachers and fellow students failed to consider the potential dangers, or even outright street violence, that may have motivated some young women to avoid a public identity as lesbian or, more generally, the ways in which "teenage girls viewed their own sexual desire as dangerous" (Tolman 1994: 336). Likewise, with Latino and Black men, particularly those who lived in the projects in the outskirts of the Ironbound, there was the general view that it was difficult to "tell" because of their "tough" demeanor. Evelyn's friend, Cristina, who is Puerto Rican and Dominican, commented: "There was this gay guy that I know that he said, 'Well, you know, other guys that you know in the projects,

they try to be all tough and chop? I've had them.' Sounds like latex does make a difference. I started looking at them like, Whoa, who am I dating here?" The "ability to tell" suggested one's cosmopolitanism and "urban competency" (Ramos-Zayas 2007). But equally empowering and suggestive of an urban competency was the ability of "knowing what not to know" about public secrets, since this demonstrates "not only that knowledge is power but rather that active not-knowing makes it so" (Taussig 1999: 6).

A final important theme in discussions of same-sex desire in Newark involved the ways in which "being gay" acquired centrality as a public identity and was an open subject of conversation in a way in which "race" generally was not. A person of color's sexuality brought marginality and conceptions of "illegality" out of the closet in a way that "race"—in its racial democratic configurations—did not. These contexts involved violence, including street violence and legal, systemic violence like a brush with the law. The most referenced of such situations was the hate murder of Sakia Gunn, a 15-year-old African-American lesbian who was stabbed to death in the Central Ward of Newark on May 11, 2003, when she told two men who were harassing her that she was a lesbian. The men became angry and attacked her and the two women who accompanied her (El-Ghobashy 2003). Her case was evidence of violence not only against sexual minorities but also of a strong African American lesbian presence in Newark.<sup>27</sup>

An even more immediate instance in which "gay" had become a public identity involved three Latino students who attended the local public high school in the Ironbound. When I arrived at the Ironbound high school one morning, Michelle Sánchez, Mike Rivera, and Evelyn García were rehashing the incident they had experienced the previous morning after they had left the school building to go to their respective internships as part of a "work experience" requirement. As Evelyn explained, they had stopped by one of the small cafeteria-style restaurants in the Ironbound. And Michelle continued: "So we are getting something to eat and the truancy officer [who monitors students for tardiness] comes up to Mike and moves to his side and calls him 'gay.' He said 'No because he's gay.'" Mike added: "But get this: There were two teachers from [the Ironbound High School]. Mr. D'Agostino and Silva and they did nothing." Still trying to figure out the incident, I asked: "So the officer just came up to you and said 'You're gay'? Just like that?" And Mike explained: "Yes. He said something to the effect that we were tardy or not supposed to be there, which was not even true, but . . . Then he said that he was talking to the three of us, 'the two girls and the gay guy.' I just left the place. I couldn't believe it. The two teachers just sat there. They were also calling me that."

A critical aspect of the incident involved the issue of surveillance to which young people of color, particularly young men, were subjected to in the Ironbound. For instance, in April 2006, the Ironbound Improvement District organization hired off-duty police officers to “address student rowdiness” on Ferry Street, the main commercial artery of the neighborhood. The organization was concerned about “large numbers of students from ESHS harassing shoppers, littering, and damaging property on Ferry Street as they wait to catch buses in their way home after school *to other parts of the city*” (Ironbound Development Corporation 2006; emphasis added). The emphasis on how these students “did not belong” or “did not live” in the Ironbound appeared throughout the organization’s communiqué; in the Ironbound, out-of-placeness almost invariably suggested “Blackness” so that the bodies criminalized on the streets—those who interrupted neoliberal commercial activity and social mobility aspirations and the well-being of “the shoppers”—were those of young men of color.<sup>28</sup>

More significant, though, was the fact that Mike had never addressed his own sexuality publicly and it is the “truancy officer” who names him “gay,” thus taking away his subjectivity by calling him into existence in a particular (and, in the Newark public sphere, extremely dangerous) way. The issue here was not really Mike’s relationship to his own sexuality or sexual identity. Both Michelle and Evelyn had always “assumed” that Mike was gay, and even Mike assumed that they knew this about him. They had a very intimate friendship that dated back to having grown up in the “Ironbound’s ghetto,” as they jokingly called the area surrounding the residential projects at the outskirts of the East Ward. What made the incident problematic was the enunciation, or having someone else—and a disciplining agent at that—name him into existence as a “gay” man, a term that may or may not have been how he himself identified himself (Decena 2008).<sup>29</sup>

Another instance in which a public “gay” identity was considered in light of “immigration” policies and affect was narrated by Faviola Costa, a Brazilian senior from Governador Valadares. She was one of the many people who felt that there were many gays and lesbians at the Ironbound high school. Faviola situated a public “gay” identity in the terrain of an international migration system that was familiar to her, as she once narrated the story of how her twelve-year-old cousin, who had been caught in a Mexican prison for a few weeks before being deported back to Brazil.<sup>30</sup> For Faviola, a “gay identity” acquired greater visibility when she heard her uncle, who lived in Mount Vernon, New York, talking about a gay asylum case involving a Brazilian man. She recalled: “I don’t remember what specifically was the situation, but

from what my uncle told me the Brazilian gay had gotten permission to stay here, with all the papers, because he was going to get killed in Brazil. He said that. It could be true, because in Brazil it is not like here where everyone is 'I'm gay, I'm gay.' So it's easier here."<sup>31</sup> The reason why Faviola's uncle might have been aware of the migration of sexual minorities from their countries of origin to the United States could also be that in the first asylum on the basis of sexual orientation case that was successfully argued involved a Brazilian man.<sup>32</sup> This suggests a hypervisibility of the sexuality of straight Brazilian women and of gay Brazilian men, whereas Brazilian lesbians and straight men remained less visible.<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, it also suggests that Brazilian migrants had transitioned from being an "invisible minority" (Margolis 1994) to being victims of nativism and deportation in Newark and throughout the United States.<sup>34</sup>

In the case of U.S.-born Latinos and Latin American migrant youth in Newark, sexuality—and the speculations and stereotypes around same-sex desire—were central to discussions of race as they unfolded in the public realm and were situated in the emotive terrain even in light of interventions by a disciplinarian ("Homeland Security") state. Ultimately, neither the Black lesbians nor the Puerto Rican or Latino "gay men" had an option, as they were brought into hypervisibility either by renditions of "inappropriate affect," in the case of African American women, or by the interruption of their positionalities as "tacit subjects" (Decena 2008) by surveillance and policing. The difference here is that, in the case of U.S.-born Latinos and some Latin American migrant groups the focus on a higher moral ground of "racial democracy," a central constitutive feature of racial affect discourse, was deployed in contradistinction to an "aggressive Blackness." A form of urban erotics highlighted stereotypes of racial affect, not only as static portraits of discrete "cultural" groups but also as emotively charged renditions of desirability, belonging, and commercial viability.

## **Conclusion**

Characterizations of racial affect and urban erotics were manifested in moments that seemed (or were constructed as) instantaneous and unencumbered, and as interactions that appeared isolated from a before or an after (cf. Lefebvre 1991). In these instances, views of racial democracy became seamlessly compatible with dominant neoliberal politics, as both invalidated the racial and class subordination of certain individuals and the broader interests of capital and white supremacy. Conceptions of "racial affect" and "urban erotics" offered a



glimpse into the distinction that Maurice Bloch (1992) makes between what is said about social difference and what goes without saying, or the non-discursive practices that structure apprehension of social difference. Assessments of “propriety” and “desirability”—analyzed here as a politics of “racial affect” and “urban erotics”—situated volatile social conflict in the realm of emotions, sometimes blurring structural subordination into a string of unrelated personal instances of “aggression,” “hurt,” and vulnerability. The budding structuring of neoliberalism in Newark, with its ability to reduce the widening sociopolitical and material inequalities to personal relations and events, flattened and depoliticized the potential collaboration or alliances between the poor and working-class Latinos, U.S.-born and “immigrant,” and African Americans. This was the case even in an urban context in which whites constituted a numerical minority, a condition that requires that we revisit assumptions regarding the potential impact of demographic reconfigurations in the United States in the twenty-first century.

Everyday interactions in Newark were oftentimes limited to sharing the space of a bus, where touching or a casual brush against someone or even an exchange of glances was saturated with racial meaning, as Susana García’s quote at the beginning of this essay illustrates.<sup>35</sup> As many young people navigated areas of vacant lots and luxury condos, of construction and demolition, they also felt estranged from these market-driven urban configurations. The impact of neoliberalism needs to be analyzed at multiple levels. To fully grasp the consequences of its structure and policies, it is critical to consider how neoliberalism touches on the most intimate aspects of individuals’ lives. In Newark, Puerto Rican and Brazilian youth have come to understand their tacit placement in a market-driven urban context in light of a rearticulation of Latin American racial democracy ideologies; in particular, they have drawn on a tendency of racial democracy to read “race” as “culture;” deny racism by supplying evidence of “racial mixing;” and deployed views of “affect” and desire that center on evaluations of the “propriety” of one’s behavior. This market-friendly remodeling of the Latin American ideology of racial democracy is not only perfectly compatible with Newark’s neoliberal aspirations but, moreover, it is central to the consolidation of those aspirations in light of the city’s turbulent past and fragile racial landscape. The reduction of difference to the realm of emotion and the interpretation of race in light of evaluations of “behavior” are consistent with the neoliberal project, because they conceal the state retrenchment from a commitment to enfranchisement and legitimates its dedication to broadening its social control through surveillance and disciplining.

## Notes

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1. The interlocutors cited in this work were students and staff at two public high schools in Newark, one in the Ironbound and the other one in North Broadway. Public education is, of course, also a premiere site of citizen-subject making and neoliberal projects, but these discussions merit an attention that is beyond the scope of this article. This essay also heavily privileges the experiences of young women over those of young men, and I can see the limitation of engaging discussions of affect, emotion, and race from this perspective.
2. The Latin American concepts of “racial democracy” and racial “mixing,” generally deployed in contradistinction to a U.S. Black-white racial binary, have been source of academic and political interest since the early decades of the twentieth century (Telles 2004). Contemporary examinations of “race” in the United States have challenged that earlier bifurcation, by noting how the United States has become more “multicultural” or even suggesting that the racial binary might have been historically overstated or regionally specific all along (e.g., James Loewen 1988). Likewise, contemporary studies of “race” in Latin America have acknowledged that “racial democracy,” or comparable racial triad narratives in other regions of the Spanish-speaking Caribbean, was a nation-building myth that did not reflect harmonious social relations (Silverstein 2005; Skidmore 1993; Wade 2004; Warren and Twine 1997, 2002; Winant 2004). Rather than “compare” or even determine if these systems still exist as discrete ideologies, or have even converged, my goal is to examine how “*racial democracy exists as a folk theory of race*” among Latin American migrants and U.S.-born Latinos; how “racial democracy” is imagined in a different context and what purposes it is intended to serve or any cartography it might produce to navigate a new racial formation.
3. The literature on “the anthropology of emotions” is quite diverse, including extensive work on the linkages of emotion with power and social structure (see Lutz and White 1986). I am particularly inspired by Raymond Williams (1973), who argues that “structures of feelings” arose out of a given state of the productive forces and relations of productivity and the pursuit of a hegemonic cultural configuration to justify and organize these forces and relations. For Williams, structures of feelings are never static, but they constantly unfold as economic forces develop and political balances shift (see also Reddy 1999).
4. It is not my intention to reify notions of “the private” in opposition to “the public;” I realize that the extent to which such spheres are recognized as discrete, separate categories constitutes a socially and contextually contingent process. In fact, an

- aspect of the potency of neoliberalism in cities is precisely its reliance on the separation of “public” and “private” (see Lutz 1988).
5. I distinguish between “U.S.-born Latino” and “Latin American migrant” to highlight how, at times, being a U.S.-born racial “minority” and being an “immigrant” partly accounted for distinct positionalities vis-à-vis the U.S. nation-state, in general, and Newark in particular. Given the specifics of my work, the “U.S.-born Latinos” whom I am referencing here were mostly Puerto Ricans born and/or raised in the United States and most of the “Latin American migrants” were Brazilian.
  6. Like William Reddy, I am understanding “emotion” to be a category of exclusion that overlaps and forms other such categories, including race, gender, and sexuality, so that “what is emotional is not rational, and persons categorized as incapable of reason have invariably been seen as especially emotional” (1999: 257). In this sense, feelings change over time in tandem with projects of hegemony, while emotional speech, formally descriptive, is implicitly exploratory, shaping, and contractual. A normative style of emotional management is a fundamental element of every political regime, of every cultural hegemony” (Reddy 1999: 271).
  7. See di Leonardo (1984) di is not capitalized in bibliography. Which is correct?- lower case for an excellent critical discussion of the problematic concept of the “ethnic enclave,” particularly its reliance on “women’s work” and patriarchal ideologies to sustain notions of “culture” and “tradition” among Italian-Americans in Northern California.
  8. A detailed discussion of the forces that contributed to Brazilian migration to the United States, in general, and to Newark, in particular, deserves more attention than I can give here and are the subject of another project. Other works offer excellent discussions of Brazilian migration to various cities in the United States, including Boston (Fleischer 2002; Martes 2000); Framingham (Sales 1998); San Francisco (Ribeiro 1997); Los Angeles (Beserra 2003); New York (Margolis 1994; Meihy 2004); South Florida (Souza Alves and Ribeiro 2002); and Washington, DC (Botelho 2004).
  9. The Henry Kaiser Family Foundation. Pew Hispanic Center. Survey Brief: Latinos in California, New York, Florida, and New Jersey, March 2004. According to the report, 21 percent of South American immigrants live in New Jersey compared to 13 percent, respectively, in New York and Florida, the second-largest states with the highest concentration of South Americans. After New York, New Jersey is also the state where most Puerto Ricans (30 percent) and Dominicans (21 percent) reside.
  10. In “Roth, Race, and Newark,” Larry Schwartz (2005) eloquently argues that the stereotype of post-1965 Newark as crime-ridden, burnt-out city of Blacks contributes to a liberal, racist mentality about Newark as an unlivable city especially when contrasted to the “good old days” of the 1940s and 1950s. This Newark “golden era” is never examined as one built on long-term, cynical exploitation, racism, and deep, pervasive political corruption. Critical here, then, is Lefebvre’s assertion, with specific regard to the city and the urban sphere, that space may be “the setting of struggle,” but it is not only this: it is also “the stakes of that struggle” (Lefebvre 1991[1974]: 386). Moreover, as Appadurai claims: “The capabilities of neighborhoods to produce contexts . . . and to produce local subjects is profoundly affected by the locality-producing capabilities of larger-scale social formations” (1996: 187).
  11. The proposition of “doing” race was eloquently examined by Robin Sheriff, who noted two tendencies articulated regarding racism in Brazil: On the one hand racism was viewed as an overwhelming, inevitable force, that resided abstractly in society or was executed by people in power and authority; on the other hand, there was a perception that one could be able to avoid racist mistreatment by controlling one’s self-presentations—by “behaving well, serving others, wearing neatly pressed,

- conservative clothes and modest hairstyles” (Sheriff 2001: 73). See also John Jackson (2006).
12. “Racial mixture” was probably viewed very differently by Central and South American students whose racial cosmologies rendered indigenous populations as more visible and at times claimed an absence of African. For Brazilians and Puerto Ricans, the indigenous aspect of a racial triad appeared more as a symbolic component. Likewise, African Americans, both those from the U.S. South and Caribbean and African continentals, had different perspectives on colorism (based on degrees of “shades” of color under an overarching Blackness), while the Portuguese have historically subscribed to other ideas of “racial democracy” premised on the influence of the Moors in the Iberian peninsula (cf. Lubkemann 2002). Regardless of these particularities, it is important to emphasize that Blackness has never existed independent of United States, Latin American, or European nation-building projects. In the context of Latino Newark, miscegenation ideals were not only not incompatible with segregation but were in fact fundamental to sustaining notions of “difference” and a key feature of anti-Black beliefs and practices (cf. Dzidzienyo and Oboler 2005). These are the editors of a multiple-author book. Oftentimes, African American men were included even in intimate family settings, particularly if they were married to a Puerto Rican woman, partly because they validated a version of the Latina-woman-as-seductress trope that I have discussed elsewhere (Ramos-Zayas, forthcoming). The Portuguese in the Ironbound or the Italians in North Broadway figured prominently in discussions of racial intolerance partly because they were presumed to “never date Black people,” as a Puerto Rican student once explained. Some researchers have eloquently argued that inter-racial dating is not evidence of a lack of racism, but that it is actually possible because racism exists (cf. Warren and Twine 2002).
  13. The spatial dimensions of these intimate, emotive, subjective relations are often taken for granted, although the conversations and justification for dating choices are also referents to what is acceptable, objectionable, or tolerable in a particular space. See also Laumann, Ellington, Mahay, Paik, and Youm (2004) for an empirical study on how sexual partnering is structured by the local organization of social life, the local population composition, and shared norms behind relationships that are sanctioned or supported. For a more in-depth analysis of the particularities of the relationship between Brazilian and Portuguese or Dominicans and Puerto Ricans, see Feldman-Bianco (1992) and Duany (1998), respectively.
  14. While Marrow (2003) argues that Brazilians are becoming racialized into the black-white binary of U.S. society, and managing to “escape” the downward mobility of Hispanic/Latino categorization, it is imperative to take into account contextual and class-based variations among the Brazilian population in the United States. For instance, many Brazilians in Newark acknowledged that they were considered to be “uneducated,” “working class,” and “less cosmopolitan” than Brazilians in New York. According to Marrow, successful Americanization for Brazilians means not becoming part of a stigmatized Hispanic/Latino group. However, it is important to recall that most of the populations that have been subsumed under the “Hispanic” or “Latino” categories have attempted to reject it—for finding the label inadequate or outright offensive (Calderón 1992; Oboler 1995)—to no avail. Brazilians may not be an exception to this general ambivalence toward pan-Latino categories. In this work, as in others (De Genova and Ramos-Zayas 2003), I view Latino as a *racial* category that suggests power inequalities and subordinate status and, to the degree that Brazilians experience these inequalities in the United States, they are likely to be largely racialized as “Latinos.” Processes of categorization such as this illustrate

- the distinction between “race” and “ethnicity” as paradigms through which to read subordination (cf. Bashi and McDaniel 1997; Pierre 2004). See also Tosta (2004).
15. The concept of “ethnosexual frontiers” is also pertinent here to describe how the race and ethnicity of sexual and romantic partners are frequently transgressed, though oftentimes quite actively inspected and regulated, and how such renderings of sexuality also conspire with “heteronormative ethnosexual stereotypes” (Nagel 2000: 113). A question that deserves more attention, but is beyond the scope of this essay, is to what degrees these youth are subverting and/or reinscribing a “heterosexual imaginary” (Ingraham 1996).
  16. The Portuguese whiteness, while oftentimes challenged—particularly by the Brazilians who did not see them as “real Americans” (a coveted term for suburban whites and sometimes, in Newark, for Blacks)—were still viewed as “sort-of-white” by most U.S.-born Latinos around Newark. In the Ironbound, the Portuguese have engaged in a form of ethnic-based commercial development that depended on the deployment of “Portuguese”-ness as commercial strategy, thus increasing the residents’ ambivalence toward terms suggesting any form of assimilation into whiteness. Portuguese community and intellectual leaders in the 1970s explicitly requested that “Portuguese” would not be considered, for census and federal assistance purposes, under the “Hispanic” category.
  17. This resonates with the “ethnicity concept” in the United States that privileges “culture” and “cultural distinctiveness” in ways that deny the continued significance of race and the special position of “blackness” and repackage “culture of poverty” discourses that perpetuate stereotypes of U.S.-born Black experiences (Bashi and McDaniel 1997; De Genova and Ramos-Zayas 2003; Pierre 2004: 142–43).
  18. Relevant here is Cristoffanini’s discussion of how “the other” gets to be represented as ideology, so that the behaviors and inclinations highlighted by the stereotype take away any historical referent and “freeze” the representation impeding alternative perspectives (2003: 12). Drawing from the experience of African Americans and African blacks, Jemima Pierre calls for a reinsertion of “race” into proliferating cultural narratives that emphasize the “ethnicity” of Africans and undermine the power struggle in which African Americans are enthralled. These generally prevented discussions of “race” in light of power inequalities.
  19. I use the term “Black” in the same way that my interlocutors used it, almost exclusively in reference to African Americans. This term generally excluded “Afro-Latinos” or “Afro-Latin Americans,” who themselves used “Black”—or a Spanish or Portuguese equivalent—to designate African Americans. Very few of the Brazilians in Newark self-identified as “Afro-Brazilians.” For a comparison between African-American and Afro-Brazilian youth views of *embranquecimento* (racial “whitening” and “acting white”) in educational contexts, see Warren (1997). An enormous limitation of this project is that it only includes the experiences of African American youth to the degree that these young people were part of the friendship groups of the Brazilian or, more commonly, the Puerto Rican youth I interviewed. See Dzidzienyo and Oboler (2005). This is an edited volume.
  20. Although these dating choices were supplied as evidence of Latin Americans and Latinos as “racially mixed” people and were widespread among all the Puerto Ricans and most of the Brazilians with whom I spoke, the idea of “mixture” in the case of U.S.-born Latinos oftentimes referred not only to “phenotypical” variations within a given birth family but also to family compositions that included other kin and friendship networks as well, including intermarriage with African Americans. The insinuation that “all of us have some black in us” was implied in the Brazilian concept of *genipap*, which has an equivalent in Puerto Rico as *la raja*. For an

interpretation of the extensive use of the diminutive phrase as a form of evasion of Blackness and mitigating hierarchical distance in relation to race, class or phenotype (see Yvonne Maggie 1988 in Hanchard 1994: 59–60).

21. In her ethnographic study of a Rio de Janeiro shantytown, Goldstein (1999) argues that, even if it is not clear whether Brazilians continue to believe the myth of racial democracy, there was a strongly held belief in a “color-blind *erotic* democracy” deployed to highlight the considerable line crossing in evaluations of beauty and choice of “ideal partner.” Among Brazilian and Puerto Rican youth in Newark, a form of “erotic racial democracy” also served to claim a higher moral ground, by carving a view of race that rendered it invalid as a category of social difference yet deployed it as a term to describe desirability and attractiveness.
22. In many instances, I heard students commenting on how Puerto Ricans and Dominicans didn’t get along and rarely dated. Nevertheless, these instances were not read as “racist” by either group, while not wanting to date African Americans was. The perception was that, while there were some real indicators that a Dominican and a Puerto Ricans might mutually object to dating each other, Blacks would date someone who was Latino (or more commonly Latina). Hence, the avoidance was not mutual, and could not turn into friendly bantering, as was sometimes the case between Dominicans and Puerto Ricans, and even between Brazilian and Portuguese youth.
23. There were critical historical referents that longtime, older Puerto Rican residents deployed to explain their mistrust of African Americans. For instance, Puerto Ricans felt they had been instrumental in a political campaign to get Kenneth Gibson, the first Black major of Newark, elected in 1970s and in the subsequent consolidation of the African American political elite in the city. Yet, they felt that their involvement had not been rewarded, because they felt excluded from the political machine that emerged. This historical moment was supplied as a leading reason why Puerto Ricans, for the most part, avoided alliances with African Americans and regarded Black politicians with suspicion.
24. Blackness becomes valuable only in specific situations when forms of “urban competency” (in contradistinction to the “backwardness” attributed to some Central American migrants) were valorized (Ramos-Zayas 2007). In a more explicitly gendered context, Black female bodies were at times equated with ugliness and lack of femininity, even when they were also representations of black sensuality in the U.S. urban youth media (cf. Goldstein 1999: 567).
25. The image of “Black women” as “churchgoer” was very generation-specific, so that younger Black women were considered aggressive “in the streets” and older Black women were viewed as “conservative” churchgoers. Nevertheless, both images suggested “aggressiveness” to most Latinas, who emphasized how adult African American women who worked as counselors, teachers, or security guards at the schools and in other Newark institutions made moral judgment of them. They pointed to instances when older African American females making comments like “you should get married and then have a child” or “at least all my children have the same daddy.” For a discussion on the politics of “respectability” in the African American community, see White (2001).
26. Although many African American lesbians seemed to be very active in Newark’s churches, they escaped the racial affective descriptions of most Latino and Latin American youth. See McCarthy-Brown (1998) and Bates (2001).
27. This image was rearticulated when the media covered the case of a young African American lesbian from Newark who physically hurt a street vendor after the vendor made a pass at the woman’s girlfriend in New York’s West Village. A fistfight

- ensued and the young woman ended up being arrested and tried. These images are part of a long tradition of representing Black women as unfeminine, castrating, and sexually and economically demanding. Imus' remarks on the women on the Rutgers University basketball team provides a widely publicized example of this tendency.
28. Images of the Ironbound as a quaint ethnic enclave have been recently challenged by an increase incidence of crime in the area. However, the Portuguese residents still remained safeguarded from criminalization as local Portuguese authorities have generally attributed the increase crime rates to "people from the outside," particularly Black and Latino youth presumed to be "from other areas" of Newark or even to the increase migration of Brazilians. The housing projects at the outskirts of the Ironbound, where most African Americans lived, were usually erased in narratives of commercial viability and "cultural richness" (cf. McCracken 1988). See "IBID Hires Off-Duty Police Officers to Address Student Rowdiness on Ferry Street" [April 6, 2006] In [www.goironbound.com](http://www.goironbound.com). See also "City's Portuguese and Brazilians find life is a lesson in tolerance," Mary Jo Patterson *Star-Ledger*, May 14, 2000; *The Star-Ledger* Newark, NJ; FINAL This is an example of regulating rowdy working-class youth of color for the sake of commerce (Rivera-Colón 2004).
  29. In the case of the Dominican migrant men with whom Decena spoke, "coming out" was viewed as stating the obvious, so that "relying on the speech act of coming out alone . . . neglect[ed] a consideration of the social relations established and negotiated as bodies navigate social fields" (2008: 3). The particularity of Mike's case, however, is situated in one of those "social fields"—particularly, one saturated with racial and sexual normativity and state intervention—so that his "tacit subjectivity" was inflicted upon
  30. Brazilian entering the United States through the Mexico-U.S. border was a relatively "new" phenomenon in the 1990s. Before then, Brazilians were never really considered part of the "illegal" migrant stream. But by 2004, they constituted one of the largest "Other Than Mexican" or OTM, as the Department of Homeland Security, now classifies them. The "illegal" migration of Brazilians across the Mexico-U.S. border decreased significantly in 2005 as a result of "immediate deportation" laws instituted and a visa requirement for Brazilians traveling into Mexico. The Brazilian case was used by George W. Bush as an example of the "effectiveness" of his immigration policy. See Comissão Parlamentar Mista de Inquérito (Brasilia 2006) and Margolis (2006).
  31. Images of the United States as a sexually liberal country prevailed among most "straight-identified" Latin American students. The connections between violence against sexual minorities and immigration to the United States has been considered by Peña (2008) and Puar (2007), among others.
  32. The first homosexual to obtain political asylum in the United States because of sexual orientation was Marcelo Tenorio, a Brazilian man who sought and was granted U.S. asylum on the basis of fearing anti-gay persecution in Brazil (Ribeiro 1997: 12). The immigration judge, Philip Leadbetter, said that "the evidence convinced him homosexuals faced persecution in Brazil" and the ruling represented the first time an immigration judge had recognized homosexuals as part of a persecuted group (Ben-Itzak n.d.: 257–273, 319).
  33. Another side of this visibility had to do with the exoticization of Brazilians in New York gay communities, as was mentioned by a Puerto Rican and Brazilian college student I once met while giving a talk at a small college in New England: "My mom is Puerto Rican and my dad is Brazilian. I was born and raised in the Bronx and I considered myself Puerto Rican. After I came out, I started playing up my Brazilian identity more. It's a good thing if you're Brazilian, in the gay community." Brazilian gay men

- were also ubiquitous in Newark's "gay scene," as Emanuel Anzules noted in an undergraduate senior monograph on homosexual life in Newark (Anzules 2006). In his monograph, Anzules interviewed the owner of Brasilia Grill, a family restaurant in the Ironbound during the day that becomes "B Lounge," a Latino gay club at night. Also in his interviews, Anzules found that Mexican and Central American day laborers in Newark were oftentimes propositioned for sex work.
34. A number of deportation cases involving Brazilians in Newark and the nearby New Jersey town of Riverside were documented in the U.S. and Brazilian presses. See, for instance, Queiroz Galvão, Vinicius. "Ameaçados, brasileiros fogem nos EUA." *Folha de São Paulo*, 21 August 2006.
  35. Sheriff argues that women tend to be more reluctant to interpret other's behaviors as racist than are men because they tend to encounter racism in intimate contexts that are charged with ambivalent emotions (in Goldstein 1999: 579). Not only are these intimate contexts inherently saturated with emotional ambivalence they are also situated in a political economy that allows and promotes certain interpretations—particularly nation-building mythologies of "meritocracy" and the "American dream"—over others.

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