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# Their Story is Our Story: The American Dream and the Construction of Transnational Identities in the Literary Production of Puerto Rican and Dominican Writers in the USA

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Their Story is Our Story:  
The American Dream and the Construction of Transnational  
Identities in the Literary Production of Puerto Rican and  
Dominican Writers in the USA

By

Tamara E. Maravalli

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Honors in  
Latin American & Caribbean Studies

Union College

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*Dedicated to Pamela Parris,*

*dancer, teacher and friend.*

*Thank you for always believing in me. You had everything to do with this  
creation.*

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## Abstract

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### **Their Story is Our Story: The American Dream and the Construction of Transnational Identities in the Literary Production of Puerto Rican and Dominican Writers in the USA**

Major: Latin American and Caribbean Studies

Advisor: William Garcia

Puerto Rican and Dominican writers in the United States express the human cost of displacement of migrants and immigrants to a new socio-cultural environment where they face discrimination, racism, labor exploitation or governmental abandonment. Many of these writers explore cultural identity of their communities and are questioning the viability of the “American Dream.” The American Dream is connected to the prevailing, mainstream social expectation of assimilation, but these communities come to the United States when the dynamics of globalization facilitates maintaining close ties with the countries of origin, facilitating the construction of transnational identities. Chapter One concentrates on Puerto Rican writers such as Jesus Colón, Nicholasa Mohr, Pedro Pietri, Sandra Maria Esteves, and Miguel Piñero, all of whom question one’s own identity by revealing the impact of transnational migration on the cultural identities of Puerto Ricans in the U.S. mainland. Chapter Two focuses on Dominican writers including Franklin Gutiérrez, Julia Alvarez, Junot Diaz, and Loida Martiza Pérez. Alvarez and Diaz demonstrate their awareness of gender and racial dynamics; they create characters that face discrimination and have to overcome social discrimination while straddling and reconciling two cultural worlds. Contrastingly, Gutiérrez and Pérez’s narratives try to “mediate” between two worlds, but are marred by hesitation and lack of assertiveness when

dealing with issues of class, gender, and ethnicity. The literary production examined not only serves as a document that describes the experiences of migrants and immigrants, but also opens a window that illuminates our own American history. Puerto Ricans and Dominicans in this country are redefining their cultural and national identities and, in the process, detonate a review of both our dominant cultural identities and of our history as a nation. In closing, I offer a glimpse of *Bodega Dreams* (2000) by Ernesto Quiñonez as an illustration of how U.S. Latino writers in the new millennium seem to embrace without hesitation a transnational, hybrid cultural identity while critically contesting and revising the mainstream national narratives of the American Dream, community, education, and citizenship. Quiñonez represents life in the barrio, a place he and his community call home.

## Introduction: Their Story is Our Story

“We are all Americans of the New World, and our most dangerous enemies are not each other, but the great wall of ignorance between us.” —Juan González, *Harvest of Empire*

“We the People” is a phrase that continuously causes questioning in our America. As a nation, we know these lines as the first three words of the preamble identifying those responsible for upholding the foundations of the American Constitution. However, even today Americans want a concrete answer defining “we.” “Their Story is Our Story: The American Dream and the Construction of Transnational Identities in the Literary Production of Puerto Rican and Dominican Writers in the USA” may be seemingly biased and perhaps different compared to other predictable historical narratives we have learned in school, read in novels, seen on television or the big screen, but, my study is rather unique as it explains how numerous peoples from other regions of the world uproot themselves and journey across the globe to come to America.

As Ray Suarez states in *Latino Americans: The 500-Year Legacy That Shaped A Nation*, we cannot understand our history without understanding more than fifty millions of our fellow Americans—in fact, we cannot understand our history without recognizing that “Latino history is our history” (Suarez xi). Suarez argues that

too many Americans have been taught a siloed American history. The core narrative, the story at the heart of the story, is a grand procession of white guys on white horses, with the “others”—black Americans, women, and religious and ethnic minorities—confined to their own separate areas...Latinos in the United States is your history too, no matter where in the world you or your ancestors came from (Suarez xii).

The ethics of migration and immigration are rather complex; there are many perspectives on why people migrate, how people migrate, and whether countries should encourage, discourage, or limit migration or immigration. The United States has transformed and continues to change by migrants and immigrants, but these migrants and immigrants transform as well since they become less a part of the place they come from and more a part of America.

This thesis acts as a guide or exploration for a better perspective on how we understand and construct cultural identity and on our history and future as a nation. I raise questions and encourage in-depth discussion about what we can learn from emerging ourselves in the cultural production, specifically literature, of migrant and immigrant communities. Migration and immigration are an integral aspect of human race from its origins to the present. Latin American literature explores personal experiences and how communities move to survive and build a better life. However, such large displacements of people highly affect those who are leaving their homeland and those who are receiving them.

The Puerto Rican and Dominican literature that I approach not only act as documents that depict migrant and immigrant experiences, but it also enlightens us; it's a window into migrant and immigrant experiences. Our country is changing every day. Today Spanish-speaking newcomers are inheriting and revitalizing areas of the U.S., especially California or Florida's culture (Suarez xi). In the years to come, our America will continue to transform. It's going to be fascinating and exciting for some, but uncomfortable and formidable for others.

Juan Flores and Jorge Duany pose their own observations about transnational identities to bring new insights to questions of Latino/a identity, nationalism, migration, immigration, and transculturation. In *Divided Borders: Essays on Puerto Rican Identity*, Flores demonstrates how the search for identity unveils the Anglo-American fantasy of the melting pot. Flores discusses



how Puerto Ricans, Chicanos, Native American, and African Americans aren't assimilated into the dominant American culture and continue even today to fight for their self-legitimization as people whose experiences and history have prevented them from being their true selves. These communities struggle to transform America into an inclusive multicultural society in spite of the discrimination, abuse, inhuman labor conditions, unjust wages and living conditions faced by Latinos in the United States. Interestingly, Flores refers to Puerto Rico as the "country's jacket" (142). This metaphor depicts how important Puerto Rico is to American history: its occupation in 1898, the unilateral decreeing of American citizenship in 1917, the crisis during the Depression years, controlled industrialization, the relentless cultural saturation, and the transformation of the American people (142-143).

In "Nation and Migration: Rethinking Puerto Rican Identity in a Transnational Context," Duany explores the impact of transnational migration on the cultural identities of Puerto Ricans on the Island and in the U.S. mainland. Duany argues that Latino communities cross significant cultural, geographic, social and linguistic borders once they land in New York. Duany claims that "this displacement helps to reconfigure their national identities...the emergence of cultural nationalism as a dominant discourse in Puerto Rico is partly the result of a growing diaspora since the 1940s" (52). According to Duany, conflicting issues including territory, birthplace, citizenship, culture, language and identity are difficult to understand not "as a territorially organized nation state, but as a trans-local phenomenon of a new kind" (52). Nonetheless, the migration and immigration experiences go through drastic change and transformation after the initial arrival to their new home. Settling is ongoing and continues for generations.

In this thesis, I argue that Latino cultural production and history are essential to understanding our nation and peoples. In particular, I show how Puerto Rican and Dominican

Republic writers express the chronicles of the human cost of migrant and immigrant people's displacement in a new environment surrounded by mainstream cultural expectations of assimilation, racial discrimination, and economic exploitation. Puerto Ricans and Dominicans writers and intellectuals begin to question if the American Dream is real and if so, what is it? Throughout this essay I examine and demonstrate how many of these authors question the feasibility of the American Dream because it is impossible to erase one's background and own history to conform to mainstream ideals of cultural identity. I show how the American Dream is not even viable to all who belong or conform to the mainstream cultural identity since low socio-economics result in the lack of resources and opportunities that may ensure the American Dream. However, many in society blame the immigrant/migrant community's inability to conform as the rationale for their failure to reach the American Dream, and that is just a fallacy. The American Dream is connected to mainstream social expectation of assimilation, which is an unachievable for "outsiders." Instead, it sets up these communities for failure. There is only one American Dream, a dream created by an Anglo-Protestant society, and a dream that is plausible only if one dreams in English. As Alvarez suggests in her novel, the American Dream not only requires that immigrants lose their accent, but also that they belong to a social class that will provide the necessary resources and opportunities to succeed socially.

The Interdisciplinary Research Group on the Americas (GIRA) has focused on transculturation and cultural hybridity processes in order to obtain better understanding of the various cultures and identities in our America and how the American Dream is difficult to achieve. In particular, GIRA uses the concept of transculturation:

a set of ongoing transmutations; it is full of creativity and never ceases; it is irreversible. It is always a process in which we give something in exchange for

what we receive: the two parts of the equation end up being modified. From this process springs out a new reality, which is not a patchwork of features, but a new phenomenon, original and independent...According to [Fernando] Ortiz, transculturation describes the process at the center of which can be found a "native culture" and a "conquering culture", but given its permanent nature, it is the later stages of this same process that are still now permeating the American continental cultural landscape. (GIRA 1)

When discussing culture and cultural identity, topics often discussed in Latino/a literature, transculturation provides a continental scope of the issues and situations regarding migration and immigration movements. Identity is based on a culture's history, but identity is at stake for those who cross borders. Consequently, this often leads to cultural hybridity, which GIRA suggests "comes not only from the impossibility to reproduce exactly European cultures and their later borrowings from Native cultures in American soil, but also from the impossibility of keeping these Native cultures intact" (GIRA 1). Nonetheless, these dynamic intercultural processes in which people deconstruct their initial cultural identity to start forming new connections are further demonstrated in both Puerto Rican and Dominican literature. According to GIRA, transculturalism may occur to be encompassing or combining multiple elements of one culture and it is rooted in the pursuit to define common values and shared interests across national borders (1).

In the following chapters I demonstrate how Latino/a writers explore the lives of migrants and immigrants who moved to New York City. In particular, I map out the literary production of Puerto Rican migrants and Dominican immigrants and how they imagine their communities in literature. They convey their experiences, including their hopes, struggles, and their cultural pride, which becomes the anchor that allows them to float in a stormy sea. In the first chapter, centered on Puerto Rican literature, I show the development of the sense of

community in New York. The Puerto Ricans migrated shortly after World War II due to the dire economic situation on the island. Sugar production declined in Puerto Rico which meant less employment opportunities on the island and an intense struggle to feed and support families. Consequently, Puerto Ricans headed to New York by the thousands in search for the American Dream. They were pressured by the “push-pull factor,” meaning they were pushed to flee due to the difficulties on the island, and the ideal American Dream pulled them to New York. Many were excited about the idea of New York, a glamorous place with work opportunities

However, once living in the U.S., the Puerto Ricans experienced difficulties as well, including language barriers, poverty, nostalgia for their homeland, and the constant belief that they would not be welcomed fully in New York or elsewhere. Not everyone in Nueva York was sure they wanted Puerto Ricans in their home and found them an inconvenience. Moving to the city was difficult for many as they moved into buildings that were accepted by only roaches. Soon the City was in the full throes of urban renewal and many Latino neighborhoods were destroyed by constructing parks, expressways, and housing projects which displaced thousands of families (Suarez). The famous film version of *West Side Story* (Jerome Robbins and Robert Wise 1961) exemplifies these neighborhoods with the Sharks and Jets rumbling on empty blocks just before a bulldozer came in to diminish the area. The film nevertheless portrays Latinos as powerless people with many negative stereotypes, a misrepresentation that many believed back then and many still believe today.

*Memorias de Bernardo Vega* may be a logical starting point for a survey of Puerto Rican writers since it chronicles the first generation of Puerto Rican communities in New York. In this book written in the late 1940s, Bernardo Vega (1885-1965) describes the growth and consolidation of the Puerto Rican community and their intention to stay in the mainland. Since

Vega's work wasn't published until 1977, Jesús Colón's *A Puerto Rican in New York, and Other Sketches* (1961) became the first Puerto Rican narrative work in English. Born in 1901, Colón was part of the first group of Puerto Rican writers who show the many signs of immigrant life in their literature: "a community itself, still relatively modest in size, resembled that of earlier immigrant groups in social status, hopes for advancement and civic participation" (Flores 146). The writing was more autobiographical and journalistic as it illustrated personal sketches and jargon. Many were concerned about the island and felt vulnerable in New York. The early waves of migrants were from the countryside and had little to no education. They came from poor or working class families. Incidentally, it takes time to create an intellectual community of cultural producers in a new land, especially a new community that is changing its culture and language in a new society.

Nicholasa Mohr, born in 1938, published her first novel *Nilda* in 1973. Mohr's literary work is narrative, departing from what Colón had done in the sense of narrating a "portrayal" of the community. She is a precursor, but also an older contemporary of the Nuyorican Poets, who worked with poetry (usually recited publicly) and theater. In her early books, Mohr is recreating the Bronx of the 1940s & 1950s, while the Nuyorican Poets are interested in the immediate now (then the 1970s and early 1980s); but they were writing at the same time. Because of the genre (narrative) and the focus on the early days of the Puerto Rican community, Mohr has never been included as part of the Nuyorican Poets Cafe group, but she is part of the Puerto Rican intellectual renaissance of the 1970s.

Originally, poetry was the beginning of the spoken word, a way to interconnect and reach their own community, but once their work was published then their audience was America. Nuyorican writers such as Pedro Pietri and Miguel Piñero produced much of their work during

the 1970s as well. Piñero premiered his famous play *Short Eyes* in 1975, and Pietri published the poetry collection *Puerto Rican Obituary* in 1973, followed by his second book published in 1979. Sandra María Esteves published *Yerba Buena* in 1980. These writers provide a view from within as they write in English and have a better sense of community that is not solely Puerto Rican, but also Nuyorican. Many writers express their emotions and beliefs as if they feel that they are true American citizens, but continuously criticize the American Dream. They portray how they are victims of capitalist society and consumerism and struggle with ongoing challenges such as identity construction, community, and belonging. Their literary work projects an angry discourse about the ills of their community and blame the government, mainstream America, and the media, criticizing the social economic system and the lack of equality because the New York barrio is their home now, not a temporary site of residence.

Chapter Two discusses the literary production by immigrants from the Dominican Republic who fled the island to escape the dictatorship of Rafael Leónidas Trujillo Molina, an unelected strongman who typified the worst excesses of Latin American misrule to the point of destroying the country's economy to ensure a fabulous wealth for himself and his family. Additionally, he raped women, kidnapped women and children, and tortured and killed all those who would oppose his regime and his excesses: everyone feared him. Julia Alvarez, a Dominican woman writer recalls a summer day in 1960 when a black car started showing up in her driveway: "That car could mean one thing...we were under surveillance. In our country that was deep, deep trouble" (Suarez 156). In short, the entire Alvarez family was in route to the United States, just like thousands of other Dominican families. They moved to the South Bronx and the far north neighborhoods of Manhattan as many Puerto Ricans left for the suburban communities

in Connecticut and New Jersey. Following in the footsteps of Puerto Ricans, Dominicans faced nostalgia and were unsure of their identity during the late 1960s and 1970s.

Interestingly, Dominican immigrant literature is distinctly different from the already established Nuyorican writers due to the fact that the Dominican presence in the United States is more recent. In fact, Dominican literary and cultural critics prefer to describe Dominicans living in the United States as economic exiles. Many writers depict the two worlds which they belong to and their narratives address the issue of divided loyalties between two cultures and two identities, creating a sense of biculturalism. The circulation between New York and Santo Domingo is common. Junot Diaz and Julia Alvarez in particular, attempt to find their identity in their new home. They reveal the reality of both the American and Latino world, but nonetheless are willing to search for a new life and “make it” in the USA. Alvarez, Diaz, and Loida M. Pérez write in English to establish a dialogue with the predominantly English-speaking society where they see themselves as citizens. These writers grew up in the United States, unlike Franklin Gutiérrez who came to the States as an adult. He writes in Spanish to demonstrate his connection and nostalgia for the old country. Each writer reflects their psychological, economic, social reality, and the cultural shock of adapting to a new world. Emotional deprivation, displacement, and ambivalence are realities for the Dominican-Americans and Dominican writers attempting to mediate identity conflicts and to create a literature that connects the relationship between the island and its diasporic artists.

Although Puerto Rican and Dominican writers portray different experiences, they both display similar intentions. First, they exercise their speech as they become concerned American citizens; they want to improve their community and neighborhood for the nation’s benefit. Throughout time, the migrants and immigrants write less about their homeland and more about

their urban neighborhood. Writing becomes a way to communicate and reflect on their community status (they become the voices of their communities). They were determined to discover the root of their difficulties and question how to improve their conditions

Interestingly, the Latinos were expected to have the same cultural death as the Irish, Italians, Germans, and previous arrivals to America. However, the Puerto Ricans and Dominicans weren't as far away from their homeland as those who landed on Ellis Island. Instead, they arrived in America when communication and transportation were easily accessible. Therefore, telephones, plane tickets, and media established and maintained easy contact to their home culture, making it difficult to erase their cultural identity and assimilate into mainstream America as previous generations of immigrants had done.



## Chapter One

### The Literary Production of Puerto Rican Migrants in the USA

The literary production of Puerto Ricans in New York began when Jorge Brandon, known as the father of Nuyorican poetry, began reciting his work on the streets of New York in the 1940s. Brandon later became a mentor to many young poets and was instrumental to the Nuyorican Movement during the 1960's. Poetic improvisation became the driving force behind Nuyorican poetry and prose and has evolved to reflect an ever-shifting city, nation, and world (Martinez 1). After Puerto Rico became a United States "protectorate," Puerto Rican migration to New York City increased exponentially; Puerto Rican communities sprung up in Manhattan neighborhoods such as the Lower East Side, East Harlem and the Bronx. During this period, the Latinos experienced many hardships such as poverty, violence and most importantly, the struggle to adjust to a new culture while trying to maintain their own. In the process of dealing with these issues, Nuyorican writers and artists expressed their fluid identity by employing innovative and authentic narrative forms through poetry, short stories, prose-fiction, theater, and music. They created an artistic outlet to pioneer and guide their New York City neighborhoods by revealing the trials and tribulations that the Puerto Rican population dealt with each day in the United States. The label "Nuyorican literature" was derived from the fact that "the majority of Puerto Ricans, to date, have resided in New York, and was popularized by a group of performance poets who gathered around the Nuyorican Poets Café, founded in 1973" (Acosta-Belén). Nuyorican literature was originally coined to distance the Puerto Ricans from mainstream America, but was later known as a marker of a "distinctive hybrid or 'borderland' cultural identity" (Acosta-Belén). Writers including Jesus Colón, Nicholasa Mohr, Pedro Pietri, Sandra Maria Esteves and Miguel Piñero question one's own identity by revealing the impact of transnational migration on

the cultural identities of the U.S. mainland and of Puerto Ricans on the island. These writers explore issues of transnationality, alienation, cultural shock, nostalgia, and racial issues to express the struggle that these Puerto Ricans fought with while yearning for the American dream and a better future. Puerto Ricans were conflicted with turning their backs on their roots, returning to the island, and creating a balance between two cultures. Nonetheless, how does one remain true to their heritage and become an accepted member of American society at the same time? In this chapter, I refer to the Nuyorican Movement as the first major visible movement for Puerto Rican communities in New York. The literary production of stateside Puerto Rican migrants was written predominantly in Spanish and the works of first generation migrants were published in small presses or not at all. I show how The Puerto Rican literary production act as multiple documents that depict migrant experiences and eventually demonstrate the sense of community developed in New York.

Gilbert H. Muller's critical study *Strangers in Paradise: The Immigrant Experience and Contemporary American Fiction* focuses on the quest for identity which is exemplified in Nuyorican literature. In particular, Muller reveals how the Latino culture seeks the American dream and tries to discover what it means to be an American. His study explores the psychology of different cultures and issues of economics, race and ethnicity since World War II. Muller states that the island of Puerto Rico is an especially unique example of a hybrid transnational process. For example, Muller claims that Puerto Rico is:

not quite the fifty-first state, not quite independent and free...The constant movement back and forth from Puerto Rico to the mainland is a result largely of island unemployment but also perhaps an emblem of the fragmentation of Puerto Rican identity as it collides with American realities. (Muller 126)

Puerto Ricans are faced with multiple cultures and identities once arriving to New York. For example, Muller believes that Nuyorican writers capture the Puerto Rican individuals and families who are forming their own identity and neighborhoods in New York. Muller argues that they are “strangers in their own country...with a different language, culture, and racial mixtures. Like so many before them, they hoped for a better life, a new future for their children, and a piece of that good life known as the ‘American dream’” (Muller 127). The unfulfilled American Dream is a continuous concern for the Puerto Rican communities and they often question whether or not to become fully Americanized. However, Muller reveals that it was essential for the Puerto Rican communities to create a new identity in order to achieve a better life and better future. To illustrate this viewpoint, individuals like Colón, Mohr, Pietri, Esteves and Piñero, stood as spokesmen for the barrios and were an outlet for expressing discrimination and the injustices they faced daily. Despite daily struggles and nostalgia for the island, these writers advocated for staying in New York.

Among the first wave of Nuyorican literature, Jesus Colón is a precursor of the Movement as he questions and constructs notions of culture, class, history and identity. In particular, in his collection of sketches, *A Puerto Rican in New York* (1961), Colón writes about the Puerto Ricans who came to stay and make a life for themselves and their families in New York. Interestingly, this is the first book published in English by a Puerto Rican writer and marks a shift in who is the intended audience of readers. Although Colón was born in Puerto Rico in 1901 and Spanish was his first language, he wrote regular columns in English while living in New York during the 1950s:

Because Jesus Colón wrote in English and Spanish, he was able to chronicle for English-speaking audiences how Puerto Ricans shaped and were shaped by the history of New York City... [his chronicles] give us a sense of historic continuity,

connecting our present to our past and our differences to a common humanity.  
(Mercado 1)

For Colón, New York became his home. Once Puerto Ricans were named US citizens in 1917, many, including Colón, boarded the S.S. Carolina for a five-day journey to New York—the first Puerto Rican community landed near Brooklyn. Colón enjoyed sharing his stories of New York life to those back on the island, especially his sweetheart who was still living in Puerto Rico. Colón was so fascinated by his new life that he provided a glimpse into City life at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He focused his sketches on his daily adjustments and the unfamiliar language. Some of his sketches portray many common Puerto Rican stereotypes and are sometimes read as didactic or humorous.

In one of his chronicles, “A Puerto Rican in New York,” Colón recalls his first day of school in 1915 when he was given his first book: *A History of the United States*. He remembers only being in 8<sup>th</sup> grade and not knowing or understanding his new home. However, he was curious about American history and wanted to “get acquainted with the moon-looking face of George Washington and the solemn figure of Abraham Lincoln” (Colón 197). Most interestingly, the phrase “We, the people of the United States” stood out most to him. The phrase meant belonging for all, but to the rest of America, it did not. To illustrate the discrimination he faced as a child, he reminisces about a time he was unable to play checkers on the porch of the YMCA because “I did not belong to the white race. Mr. Whole said not a word and the game, not yet started, ended” (Colón 198). Immediately, inequality was evident to Puerto Ricans of all ages. However, Colón did not allow discrimination to hold him back from his dreams. In fact, he believed that

When the phrase is realized in its totality, Puerto Ricans will have the right to choose the form of government they really want. And when that opportunity comes I will choose Independence. I have studied and weighed all the choices. Independence is the way that will provide for everything—material and spiritual—for the people of Puerto Rico. Independence and socialism. Socialism and independence. (Colón 202)

It is evident that Colón came to America with a vision and despite the challenges of this new world; he was ready, willing and able to strive for independence and his American Dream.

In his foreword to the second edition of the book (1982), Juan Flores comments on intentions and the desire to stay in New York despite difficulties and adjustments. Flores states that Colón

Was writing of Puerto Ricans who were in New York to stay, and whose life drama came to hinge less on their sense of contrast with the Island than on their individual and collective interaction with North American society and the workers of diverse cultures with whom they were coming into increasing contact. (Colón xv)

The development of transnational identity becomes more evident as Colón claims that he is searching for Independence and “independence for Puerto Rico will come sooner than you think” (Colón 202). However, it is important to recognize that Colón is well aware of the stereotypes and bigotry that has long masked the image of Puerto Ricans in the American public eye.

Nonetheless, as a precursor of the Nuyorican Movement, Colón demonstrates the issues that frame the vision of freedom and equality. In fact, he also presents more diverse interactions with other non-Puerto Rican citizens such as African-Americans. He represents the generations born or raised in New York who grew up straddling two languages and cultures—creating a voice of his people.

The ultimate decision of staying in the U.S. is further discussed in Nicholasa Mohr's short story "A Very Special Pet" (*El Bronx Remembered*, 1975). Not only was Mohr the first woman writer, but she was similar to Colón in the sense that she too was a precursor of the Nuyorican Movement. Born in 1938 to parents who migrated to New York City during World War II, Mohr grew up in the Bronx along with many migrants who fled from the island. In her literature, Mohr questions, explores, and critiques living in the bicultural world which she experienced while living in the Bronx. Mohr's views are rather interesting because she is the early second generation of the first wave of Puerto Ricans who came to New York. Her experiences occurred long before the Nuyorican Movement and before life in Spanish Harlem became the precarious socio-economic wasteland of the 1970s. Her realistic narration helps describe the atmosphere for Puerto Ricans living in the Bronx and those adjusting to a new home and new culture. Her characters lead no easy life, but she does not "look back" to Puerto Rico because her resolutions are all rooted in New York City.

Instead of returning to the island, Mohr focuses on the development of a new identity for individuals and families. In "A Very Special Pet" Mohr illustrates the disorientation of a poor family of ten after moving to the United States. The family struggles with the move and they keep dreaming of going back to Puerto Rico. Mohr exemplifies how the family specifically struggles in New York City when she states,

City life was foreign to them and they had to learn everything, even how to get on a subway and travel. Graciela Fernández had been terribly frightened at first of the underground trains, traffic, and large crowds of people. Although she finally adjusted, she still confined herself to the apartment and seldom went out. (Mohr 1)

The difficulty for Puerto Ricans from the island becomes evident through Mohr's description of their adjustment to the Bronx. Mohr shows her readers the deep changes and problems that the Puerto Ricans face after migration and settlement in America. Clearly, leaving the island and moving to the city is overwhelming and frightening.

Mohr illustrates the living and economic conditions of the Fernández family. For example, Eugenio works as a porter and sells newspapers and coffee on the side, but still "the money he brought home was barely enough to support ten people" (Mohr 2). The children ask for a television and telephone because all of their American friends make fun of them for not having the same technology that they own. The family speaks of Puerto Rico with nostalgia: "a hundred acres," "fruit trees – mangoes, sweet oranges, everything!" (Mohr 2). Living in the Bronx is a constant battle; the family doesn't have enough money to celebrate Christmas, "insurance payments were long overdue," and the house is surrounded with "cockroaches...spiders, ants, even houseflies" (Mohr 3). Mohr expresses the reflection about the impact and efforts of migrating to the mainland. The family romanticizes about a version of Puerto Rico and they lament the core language and value that seems lost, but internally they know that returning to the island is not the right path for the family.

As the family continues to dream about returning to Puerto Rico, Graciela realizes that the family situation is getting worse so she decides to sacrifice the hen in order to feed her children:

For some time now, Mrs. Fernández had given up any hope of Joncrofo producing eggs and had also accepted her as a house pet...After thinking about it for several days, this morning Graciela Fernández reached her decision. Tonight, her husband would have good fresh chicken broth for his cold, and her children a full plate of rice with chicken. This silly hen was really no use alive to anyone, she concluded. (Mohr 3)

Mrs. Fernández is willing to do anything possible to help her family survive in New York, even if she needs to kill the hen. She wants to play a motherly role and encourage her children to accept this new culture and feel more American. After chasing the chicken around the house in attempt to kill it, she becomes sad and realizes that the chicken is a symbol of Puerto Rico. The children see the hen as a family pet, but Mrs. Fernández sees the hen as a source of food, just like a Puerto Rican peasant typically sees a hen. After, she begins to clean the kitchen and sings a song about “a beautiful island where the tall green palm trees swayed under a golden sky and the flowers were always in bloom” (Mohr 6). She herself dreams of returning to a farm in the mountains where life was seemingly easier. Interestingly, the children, or perhaps the “Nuyoricans” do not know that island—they can hear their mother singing a song, but they do not know her homeland. Instead they know of “a” island and not “the” island. The word “the” would be chosen if they knew she was singing about Puerto Rican. It may be familiar to Mrs. Fernández, but it is unknown to the children.

The precursor writers have common themes with the Nuyorican Poets group, such as straddling two cultures. Many accepted their dual cultural and embraced their identity even though they were considered “different.” Nuyorican artists de-colonized themselves and created a new identity that depicts their culture conscious, struggles, and pride. In particular, Pedro Pietri sketched the lives of five Puerto Ricans who came to New York with dreams deferred. Pietri himself was born in Ponce, Puerto Rico and moved to New York City in 1947 at the age of three (Gonzalez). He and his family settled in the west side of Manhattan where he and his siblings attended school. After graduating from high school, Pietri was drafted into the Army and was sent to fight in the Vietnam War. Nonetheless, the experiences that he faced in the Army along with the discrimination he witnessed while growing up in New York became



influential in his personality and style of poetry which was embraced by young Puerto Ricans, who were imbued with a sense of nationalism and pride.

Pietri was perhaps best known for “Puerto Rican Obituary,” an epic poem published in his 1973 book, *Puerto Rican Obituary*. However, in 1969, the poem was first presented at a rally in support of the Young Lords Party which was an anti-imperialist Latino group in New York City. The rally supported the demands for affordable homes, health care, fair wages, and to end the oppression of the poor and people of color. Although the Young Lords were taken over by the United States government in the 70s, Pietri still continued his critique of social promises. As a poet and radical activist, Pietri’s poem became one of the most powerful and meaningful pieces of literature to the Puerto Rican community. His epic poem encapsulates the lives of Puerto Ricans in New York and provides a counterbalance to an idealized and unfulfilled American Dream which ultimately exposes the absurdities of migrant life.

The poem captures the lives of *boricuas*, the Taino name for Puerto Ricans, living in Spanish Harlem in order to take whatever steps needed to achieve the American Dream. Interestingly, there is no discussion of Puerto Rico or why Puerto Ricans migrated to the United States. Instead, the poem begins with a clear description that Puerto Ricans are in the U.S. to work. Pietri demonstrates the lives Puerto Ricans who have dreams that are unfulfilled and struggle from hardship and low wage jobs. Pietri illustrates this when he writes,

They worked ten days a week  
and were only paid for five  
they worked  
they worked. (Pietri 1)

This demonstrates the poor working conditions and low wages, but more importantly, the repetition of the phrase “they worked” shows that the Puerto Rican community is willing to work

as much as possible to achieve their dreams, regardless of their treatment or pay. The poem commentates the several forms of prejudice when Pietri states,

They worked  
 and they died  
 They died broke  
 They died owing  
 They died never knowing  
 what the front entrance  
 of the first national city bank looks like. (1)

These lines show the discrimination and segregation towards the Latino population and how they have never even been to a bank like most Americans. Even though Puerto Ricans are U.S. citizens, the amount of bigotry is evident against the Latino community with their treatment, low wages, and lack of opportunities. The repetition of the verb “died” is important in the poem because the word explains the lives of the characters; under most circumstances working leads to prosperity, but for the Puerto Ricans, working and living in the United States leads to cultural death of the island they originated from.

Many of the characters in the poem are unable to accomplish their dreams, and hate their own lives and the communities around them because they are losing a part of their identity from the island. Pietri decides to give his five Latino characters names: Juan, Miguel, Milagros, Olga, and Manuel. However, these names do not represent specific individuals, but instead they symbolize all Puerto Ricans living in New York City who “All died/ waiting dreaming and hating” (Pietri 2). This line illustrates how their dreams are unreachable and they become resentful, bitter and angry because they not only want a better life for themselves, but also for their families and children.

Some Latinos dream for better resources, a safer community, and more opportunity while others dream of being considered a true U.S. citizen who is not held back because of their Hispanic descent. Pietri's tone indicates his disdain for the Puerto Ricans who want to turn their backs on their Spanish language, background and community because the Americans don't want them. The poem exemplifies each of these desires: some dream "for a welfare check" (Pietri 3) or for "a five dollar raise" (Pietri 3), and others dream,

about Queens

Clean-cut lily-white neighborhood

Puerto Ricanless scene...

Proud to be a long distance away

from the sacred phrase: Que Pasa. (Pietri 4)

Those who dream of being accepted into American mainstream society also dream of being less Puerto Rican. These individuals are willing to give up everything to "make it" in American, even if that means they become "Puerto Ricanless." However, Pietri sees the desire to turn away from one's own culture as impossible because it is difficult to fully leave heritage behind.

In addition to describing the dreams and desires of the Latino community, Pietri also illustrates the harsh realities regarding the "empty dreams" that the Puerto Ricans face living in New York:

These dreams

These empty dreams

from the make-believe bedrooms

their parents left them

are the after-effects

of television programs

about the ideal

white american family

with black maids  
and latino janitors. (Pietri 4-5)

These lines refer to unreachable dreams that are a product of mainstream society and television that show white Americans as the ideal individual who can achieve success, money, and happiness. Pietri exemplifies how black and Latino minorities are the communities that adjust to life in America and are considered less than “white Americans.” Words such as “empty,” “make-believe,” and “left” each aide in his portrayal of Puerto Ricans as victims of an unjust society. Perhaps Pietri is critiquing the experience that many face when migrating to America because throughout the entire poem, he demonstrates a downhearted, yet truthful tone.

Scholar, Chistina Beltran claims that poetry such as “Puerto Rican Obituary” highlights more important aspects such as cultural shame and ethnic pride. In her book *The Trouble with Unity: Latino Politics and the Creation of Identity*, she states:

Earlier critiques of prejudice and discrimination, movement rhetoric and writings often focused on the emotional and psychic damage of racism, exploring the need to overcome internalized shame and self-hate...Latino activists articulated increasingly pointed critiques of assimilation, simultaneously developing forms of pride and racial consciousness. (Beltran 31)

This statement demonstrates exactly what Pietri shows in his poem: he exemplifies prejudice, discrimination, and the many forms of inequality, but he also illustrates the emotional and psychic damage and racial consciousness. Ultimately, these are the reasons for which Pietri argues that cultural pride is essential to success and happiness. The examples of discrimination are demonstrated through the Puerto Rican desire for the “land of opportunity.” The community is consumed by these “empty dreams” to the extreme of forgetting their own history. Beltran shows how forgetting their past in order to be more accepted in America demonstrates the

emotional power that racism and segregation can have on an individual or community.

Consequently, it is essential to have ethnic pride and not fall under internalized shame and self-hate.

Towards the end of the poem, Pietri argues that ignoring cultural identity is to risk a loss of culture when he declares in capital letters: “PUERTO RICO IS A BEAUTIFUL PLACE / PUERTORRIQUEÑOS ARE A BEAUTIFUL RACE” (10). This phrase and the decision to capitalize all the letters reinforce the urgency for Puerto Ricans to reaffirm national and cultural pride within the United States. Similarly, the last two lines of the poem, “Aquí to be called negrito / means to be called LOVE” (11) embraces the Puerto Rican love for their heritage and rejects the discrimination that they face in America. Pietri’s use of Spanglish throughout the last few statements of the poem reinforces the need for Puerto Rican culture. However, his repetition of the word “aquí” demonstrates that it is “here” in America where Puerto Ricans can create and inhabit their own cultural space. Therefore, there is no reason for the Puerto Rican community to return home to the island.

Nuyorican poets encourage Puerto Ricans to construct their own identities. Woman poet Sandra Maria Esteves offers the perspective of a woman who constructs her identity by looking at her own life. Esteves was born and raised of Puerto Rican and Dominican parents in the South Bronx of New York. She self-describes herself as “Puerto Rican-Dominican-Borinqueña-Quisqueyana-Taíno-Africana” (Esmeralda 1). As one of the founders of the Nuyorican poetry movement, Esteves published some of her best poems in her first two collections, *Yerba Buena* (1981) and *Tropical Rain: A Bilingual Downpour* (1984). In her poem “Here” from *Yerba Buena*, Esteves states that she is an individual with two identities when she claims: “I am two parts/a person / boricua/spic” (Esteves 1). She calls herself a “boricua” and “spic” which

describes a person who is both Puerto Rican and Hispanic. She refers to the “past and present” meaning that she identifies herself today in the same view as she did in the past which means that she carries her roots and heritage with her despite being surrounded by the American culture. Cultural identity is further revealed in the poem when she states, “alive and oppressed / given a cultural beauty / ... and robbed of a cultural identity” (Esteves 1). These lines are powerful because Esteves compares being alive to being oppressed, meaning that she is living her life to the fullest and embracing transnational identities.

The cultural beauty that she refers to is related to her exterior features like skin or hair color. Her cultural beauty is something that she is proud of and feels she can hold on to and does not need to change. However, her cultural identity has slowly been taken away from her; she speaks in “alien tongue” and feels that she “must be changed” or “we must change.” Although Esteves believes that many Puerto Ricans feel the need to change since they are unsure of their identity, Esteves still realizes and encourages the Puerto Ricans to embrace their own identity. She states that it “teaches me to see, and will / bring me back to me” (Esteves 1). Esteves is trying to show her readers that no matter what color we are or what language we speak, there will be a moment in our lives when we will find our true identity, no matter how long it takes to find it. Once the identity is found, heritage and culture are never forgotten, even if you eventually integrate into a new culture.

“Puerto Rican Discovery #3, Not Neither” from her collection *Tropical Rain: A Bilingual Downpour* (1984) is similar to “Here” as it focuses on the Puerto Rican sense of identity and being torn between two cultures. “Puerto Rican Discovery #3, Not Neither” explains her background of being “born in the Bronx, not really jibara / Not really hablando bien / But yet, not Gringa either” (Esteves 4). The use of Spanglish further demonstrates the split identity, in

addition to the geographical and cultural references such as “Puertorriqueña-Dominicana,” “jibara,” and “gringa.” Interestingly in Puerto Rican history the word “jibara” refers to a mountain-dwelling peasant, but in modern times the word has gained a nobler and more positive connotation in Puerto Rican culture as it is proudly associated with a cultural ideology as pioneers of Puerto Rico (Mooney 1). The word “gringa” is a term used mainly in Latin America to speak of a female foreigner usually of U.S. descent. These words that Esteves chooses introduce an interesting topic of discussion: how does the speaker in this poem view her identity, background, and culture? Esteves asks herself “Y qué soy, pero con what voice do my lips move” (4) which means that she is trying to find out who she is and who she wants to become as an individual and U.S. citizen. However, she states that no matter what happens or what people say she will always be Puerto Rican, which is evident when she states, “Giving blood to the independent star” (4). This statement demonstrates that although she is now rooted to New York, she will always carry Puerto Rico with her.

Another instrumental Nuyorican poet, Miguel Piñero was born in Gurabo, Puerto Rico and moved to the Lower East Side of Manhattan when he was four. After his father abandoned his family in New York, Piñero was left to steal food for his family and consequently became affiliated with robberies and gangs (Bennetts 1). According to Bennetts,

His themes revolved around life on the mean streets he knew best, populated by drug addicts and con men, pimps and prostitutes. Drugs and crime were a persistent theme as well in Mr. Pinero's own life; he was arrested several times on drug and robbery charges. (Bennett 1)

Piñero examines the subject of identity and making it in the U.S. in his poem “A Lower Eastside Poem” from his collection *La Bodega Sold Dreams* (1985). Nuyorican poets, especially Piñero

do not just dwell on self-pity and daily struggles. Instead, he argues that returning to Puerto Rico is a cultural protection and a way to shield their true identity. Feeling out of place in the U.S. mainland and feeling disappointed with their experiences as a U.S. citizen is not a reason to return to the island.

In his poem, Piñero is not necessarily commiserating about his situation. Instead he calls his readers attention to the situation in which his community is marginalized and has limited opportunities to grow. The Nuyorican writers reveal their relentless cry for social justice by calling out the system to improve and foster the progress of their communities.

Although the poem demonstrates the struggle for independence and being seen as a true U.S. citizen, Piñero's priority is to help improve his community when he states,

Just once before I die  
I want to climb up on a  
tenement sky  
to dream my lungs out till  
I cry. (Piñero 7)

The quote shows how many Puerto Ricans continue to dream for a better life in America even though they have been disappointed with what America has offered them so far. For example, Puerto Ricans find themselves not enjoying the same privileges as American citizens do. In fact many Puerto Ricans are surrounded by “stabbing shooting / gambling fighting & unnatural dying” (Piñero 7). The lack of resources, violent neighborhoods, low wage jobs, struggle to be American, and insecurities with identity differ the Puerto Ricans from Americans.

Even though the Puerto Ricans do not feel completely American, they are still proud to be in the Lower Eastside. This is evident when Piñero claims, “So here I am, look at me / I stand proud as you can see / pleased to be from the Lower East” (Piñero 7). The poem shows



that although the Puerto Ricans are away from the island, many are proud of being American and living in New York. The Lower Eastside is considered home for them: “this concrete tomb is my home / to belong to survive you gotta be strong / you can’t be shy less without request” (Piñero 7). Piñero illustrates that even though it is not easy for Puerto Ricans to be fully integrated in American culture, it is still possible to call it home. In fact, throughout the poem, Piñero wishes that when he dies, he is buried in the Lower Eastside and not Puerto Rico. This establishes that he already is American and will make it in New York despite his obstacles and struggles. Readers learn that he has lived in the Lower Eastside and this is where he wants to stay forever—he embraces his city and his neighborhood. The images of the neighborhood, community, struggles and overall tone exemplify the hardships of the neighborhood, but the readers better understand his love for the Lower Eastside when he states,

I don’t wanna be buried in Puerto Rico  
 I don’t wanna rest in long island cemetery  
 I wanna be near the stabbing shooting  
 gambling fighting & unnatural dying  
 & new birth crying  
 so please when I die  
 don’t take me far away  
 keep me near by  
 take my ashes and scatter them thru out  
 the Lower East Side. (Piñero 7)

It is evident that the author wants to be in his neighborhood even if it is surrounded by “stabbing,” “shooting,” “gambling,” “fighting,” “unnatural dying,” and “crying.” These words that Piñero chooses denounce the precariousness and social exclusion of his community and desire to hope and dream for a better situation for all Puerto Ricans.

For Piñero, he does not define his identity as a Puerto Rican from the island, instead he is American and he believes that, “There’s no other place for me to be.” He states that despite the negative stereotypes such as the, “pimps’ bars & juke saloons / & greasy spoons make my spirits fly / with my ashes scattered thru / the Lower East Side (Piñero 7). He still embraces his identity and he appreciates his neighborhood, community, and “new” home. He chooses to illustrate the harsh reality of life many minorities face when they are suffering in poverty, but Piñero embraces the ills of his community and ultimately admits that this is what defines him. His transnational identity has helped him pursue a better future and he shows that Latino culture is not centered on drugs or violence, but it is rather focused on pursuing a better future.

Similarly, Piñero’s “The Book of Genesis According to San Miguelito” which is also in his collection *La Bodega Sold Dreams* (1985) is a humorous yet dark poem that expresses frustration and anger towards racial prejudice, injustice, and the ghettos of New York. Similarly to other Nuyorican writers, Piñero also defines himself as a U.S. citizen rather than as someone from the island of Puerto Rico. Interestingly, Piñero expresses how God was responsible for the creation of man and the world, but the government, in particular, President Nixon, allowed prejudice to occur among mankind. The poem is a new “gospel” (truth) for Puerto Ricans as it exemplifies several flaws in the creation of poor urban communities, such as racism and poverty; the poem reads: “In the beginning/ God created the ghettos & slums” (Piñero 96). The world is filled with “ghettos,” “slums,” “leadbase paint,” “rivers of garbage,” and “filth.” Piñero gives God, or President Nixon the full responsibility for the problems in America such as the “slums,” “heroin & cocaine,” “hepatitis,” and “capitalism.” He demonstrates the issues that Puerto Ricans face on a daily basis in addition to the issues being built from creating mankind; the creation of humans “begat racism / who begat exploitation” (Piñero 96). The poem reminds

readers of the hardships that have developed from discrimination, and Piñero blames these difficulties on prevalent views in American society towards race, ethnicity and otherness.

The correlation that Piñero develops between God and President Nixon is exemplified when God speaks to the people. For example, the people question God's intention and decisions so they ask "WHY? WHY? qué pasa babyyyyy?????" and God replies "No . . . . . COMMENT" (Piñero 96) which is typically a response given when one does not want to take responsibly or give an explanation. This is further illustrated when God speaks over national television, just as the President typically does. In the poem, God tells the people over television "to be / COOL" (Piñero 96). Interestingly, broadcasting over the television encourages U.S. citizens to listen to "God" or the government. After God sent out this message, the people were cool, kept cool, and stayed cool, which shows that they as a community do what their leaders asks. God tells his people "vaya," meaning "cool" or "chill out." This is ironic because God tells the Puerto Ricans to relax because some are clamoring for his explanation of their suffering and exclusion. For Piñero, his poetry provides messages to the Puerto Ricans in New York and he realizes that he can be instrumental to change. He mocks and criticizes the government for allowing such segregation and prejudice. His description of the ghetto calls the attention of the Latino neighborhoods and he wants to bring awareness to the struggles of their diaspora.

The problems that affect the Puerto Rican communities are not about pulling up and making an effort; it is about the need of major structural social changes being implemented by those who have authority. This is why Piñero and many Nuyorican writers mock the social order—they wrote for the consumption of all Americans so they hear their words and messages. Nuyorican literature deplores that America needs to better understand the conditions of this

sector of population. They do not only refer to Puerto Ricans, but they denote to any poor person trapped in a community.

## Chapter Two

### The Literary Production of Dominican Immigrants in the USA

Throughout migrating and immigrating to the United States, many writers revealed trauma regarding identity, whereas the second and third generation of migrants and immigrants projected a rooted sense of identity and connected it with mainstream culture. They, the Dominicans, embraced transnational identity and were able to call New York their home. The question of identity looms for the Dominican communities as they carve their niche in New York City and develop a consciousness that allows them to retain their native culture. According to Janira Bonilla, the word *home* for the Dominicans

often conjures up the idea of a safe and stable haven embodied by kinship ties, a native language, and culturally specific practices. The idea of a familiar fixed home is a pivotal component in identity formation. Thus, a geographical point of origin such as one's hometown or country becomes a key marker of identity. For many Dominicans, home is synonymous with political and/or economic repression and it is all too often a point of departure on a journey of survival...Despite the harsh welcome and the assumption by many that they are a transitory immigrant group, Dominicans have established firm roots in the U.S., particularly in New York City, they are now the fastest growing immigrant group. With a foot in two or more cultures, Dominicans identity takes on a new dimension. (Bonilla 200)

The Dominicans in the United States have adjusted their values, cultures and identities to include the U.S. cultural practices and values. It has been a means of surviving, but also adapting.

Through their literature, they demonstrate that they have learned to harmonize, integrate and inhabit multiple spaces at once.

Many Dominican poets in the United States have written poetry, short stories, and novels in their mother tongue. Some have published their work in the Dominican Republic while others have published their work in the United States or both countries. Interestingly, writers such as Franklin Gutiérrez, Julia Alvarez, Juno Diaz and Loida Martiza Pérez each allude to the transition to American culture. In particular, these writers have a number of recurrent themes such as solitude, sadness, innocence, and the identity of their people. In particular, Dominican writers began to show the influence of North American culture in their works of literature quite similarly to Puerto Rican writers. The struggle for these writers was not only personal survival, but instead it was the struggle to find a place in a new society without losing their heritage. Dr. Daisy Cocco De Filippis, who studies Dominican writers in the U.S. and translates many Spanish poems to English, claims that

choosing a new life does not mean a total rejection of old ways and old values, but the chance to deliberately and thoughtfully choose what is of value from both cultures and synthesize this in a new culture, a new vision of life. (De Filippis 8)

The theme of a new culture and a new life is a main topic of concern for Dominican writers. According to Dr. Jane Robinett, poems by Franklin Gutiérrez are a gift to those who remained in the homeland. Robinett claims that “it is this vision that gives readers in the Dominican Republic a chance to re-value what is truly important in life” (De Filippis 18). Their poetry gives new perspectives on their own culture and paints a clear vision of what they left behind in order to live in the United States—for some, this included their identity.

Daisy Cocco De Filippis, a respected scholar on Dominican Studies, discusses Gutiérrez and his efforts of signifying the loss of identity and un-nurturing experiences in her study, *Poems of Exile and Other Concerns: A Bilingual Selection of the Poetry Written by Dominicans in the United States* (1982). On the contrast, writers like Alvarez and Diaz exemplify the search for

identity. De Filippis claims that Gutiérrez struggles for economic survival and education. She states that his “literature is ‘el testimonio’ of their experiences; the witness of their attempt to grasp what is left of the dream behind their exile” (De Filippis 10). Gutiérrez provides his readers with a testimony as he witnesses the New York environment and the city’s impact on the Dominican population. Gutiérrez provides his readers with a worldview of his assumptions about the immigration experience in his writing, which are mainly negative and therefore portray a negative perspective on the American Dream and overall life in New York.

Franklin Gutiérrez’s involvement with Dominican literature began when he arrived to New York City as an adult in the late 1970’s. Born in Santiago, Dominican Republic, his writings have been recognized at home and in the United States. Gutiérrez completed his B.A. in Santo Domingo in 1975 and had published several books in the Dominican Republic before coming to the United States. Today he is a professor of Spanish Language and Literature in the Department of Foreign Languages at York College in New York City (Gutiérrez). Gutiérrez is most famous for his poem “Helen” published in 1984 because it demonstrates identity issues for Dominicans arriving to America. His poem reveals the loss of identity in a young Dominican woman whose transformation is clear when her name changes from the Spanish Helena to the English Helen. In particular, Gutiérrez’s perspective as an immigrant becomes evident throughout the poem and he exemplifies the challenges and un-nurturing experiences that he faced as an adult; consequently, he hasn’t come to terms with a new life in the United States.

The poem was composed in Spanish, like all his published literary work, and included in a poetry collection of the same title that was published in the Dominican Republic. Interestingly, the poetic speaker in the poem is located in Santo Domingo, not in New York City; he does not even acknowledge the worth of a view from within the immigration experience and positions

himself anchored back in the island in order to indict Helen. His poem begins with Gutiérrez describing the dramatic change since coming to this new land such as the scenery, communities, resources, food, parties—all new aspects of life. In the first line of the poem, when he states “How things have changed, Helena / the anguish cry for a homeland / left behind” (Gutiérrez 1-3), he exemplifies the nostalgia of the land that he has left behind. He continues to describe the city as an observer the first time he came to America:

the first encounter with  
 the tall, uniform faded towers of the empire,  
 the wide avenues  
 buried under immense layers of snow,  
 the traffic signs,  
 one way, no parking anytime, quarters only.  
 (Gutiérrez 4-9<sup>1</sup>)

These lines depict a strange environment that the poet finds difficult to accept since he points out the flaws of the city, such as the intense snowfall or restrictions and regulations regarding “uniforms,” “one way,” “no parking,” and “quarters only.” He recognizes the fast-paced lifestyle in New York which differs from his homeland. The imagery of challenges and difficulties in the following lines exemplify the cultural differences that he is experiencing. For example, “the daily toils,” “the scar,” and “an escalator’s collapse.” These are negative connotations that suggest that life is a struggle in New York and his experience is not nurturing, nor does he want to accept these new ways of life.

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<sup>1</sup> Las inicales sorpresas ante las altas / uniformes y despintadas torres del imperio / ante las anchas avenidas / ahogadas en grandes capas de viene / ante los letreros / one way, no parking any time, quarters only. The original version of “Helen” was published in *Poems of Exile* in 1951 and was later translated by Daisy Cocco De Filippis in 1988.



The poet introduces political tension when he refers to New York and the United States as an “empire” because that word choice is a political label that highlights the uneasy relationship between the poetic speaker and the host country. Juan González’s *Harvest of Empire* stresses the political tensions between many early Dominican immigrants and the United States due to the nation’s role in Dominican politics and invasion of their country in 1965. González states,

The Dominican exodus, unlike that of Puerto Ricans and Mexicans, began largely as a refugee flight in the mid-1960s. Much of it followed a popular uprising in April 1965 that sought to restore to power the country’s first democratically elected President, Juan Bosch. President Lyndon Johnson, fearing the revolt would lead to a Castro-style revolution, dispatched 26,000 troops to invade the country, and those soldiers sided with the Dominican in its efforts to crush the revolt. (González 118)

Nonetheless, many conflicts followed after April 1965. Dominican political life was controlled by the repression against Bosch’s followers, which lasted over a decade. Between 1966 and 1974 more than three thousand were killed while others suffered from torture or imprisonment (González 118).

Interestingly, the poem climaxes when Helena’s name loses the final “a” which shows how immersing into a new culture is critical to living a somewhat normal life. Before this description, the reader experiences the change in environment and disappointment once the Dominicans arrived to New York, but once the reader sees that the woman’s name changes in order to become more Americanized, then it is evident that the Dominicans gradually lose their identity. In addition to struggling for an identity, treatment and personification are also evident in the poem when it states, “what will his [the American boyfriend] friends say of a dark-skinned

Mama like you / And his mother, picture her shame, / unable to understand your English”

(Gutiérrez 42-44). These are crucial lines to identifying how the Dominicans are initially seen as un-American and outsiders; acceptance is hard for their communities due to their skin color, accents, and cultural differences.

The poem also suggests that Latino women are weak and easy to seduce: “So what? You answer / you find him nice...so he continues to bed you / while he dates a Northamerican blonde” (Gutiérrez 46-49). This implies that the American boyfriend is taking advantage of Helen. Perhaps he would rather date a blonde American and that is why “he never goes out with you” (Gutiérrez 40). Instead, “he stays in your room” (Gutiérrez 39), because he does not want to be seen in public with someone who looks and acts differently. It also shows how the Latino woman is willing to give up her identity and even her self-respect to fit in and be associated with an American boyfriend.

Nonetheless, the poem condemns and reflects views regarding the Dominican immigrant experience in New York City. Although the poem stresses the social and psychological devastation of the immigrant experience, it also portrays a patriarchal attitude that conveys their experiences. In particular, the text constitutes a “shaming” Helen. The poem allows its readers to question: who is he to criticize her? Why do we judge by appearance and private affairs? The poem never offers Helen a voice; it’s only the voice of man discrediting a woman for not living her life according to the patriarchal values and notions of Dominican society. Instead, the speaker in the poem calls her a “whore” and mocks her desire to adjust adequately to her new society, advance economically, to learn English, and her wanting to leave behind a rural life filled with precariousness and poverty. In this case, it does not matter if Helena is based on a real person or not because Gutiérrez is constructing a text that is anti-immigration, almost as if he

were warning Dominicans back in the island not to come to the mainland unless they want to lose all their traditional values and their identity in order to reach a materialistic American Dream. His critique of the American Dream is not out of concern for the exploited worker or marginalized poor who cannot make it in America. Instead, his critique is of those who put down a woman's "foolish" dreams in order to present a negative allegory of what is the immigration experience.

Gutiérrez reveals the dynamics of immigrant life, such as the scenery, resources, parties, food and even dreams. He demonstrates this when he states,

How things have changed, Helena,  
the radio cassette, remote control  
la washing machine, la dishwasher  
treasures beyond your finest dreams.

*Comida, fiesta, letrina.* (Gutiérrez 62-66)

The three actions "comida, fiesta letrina" exemplify crass shaming and reduce Helena to three actions: to eat, to party, and to shit. Nonetheless, this description provides readers with the idea of "shaming" a female. Gutiérrez describes this new world which he cannot accept because it is in contrast to the Dominican Republic.

De Filippis suggests that Gutiérrez and other Latino writers share a similar language, background, struggle and common vision; however, Gutiérrez's poem is centered on the idea of loss. The sense of loss is a key theme in immigration literature by any group. De Filippis states that "the keen sense of loss is one of the primary forces that shakes the world in a harsh urban environment in which they now live, with which they must contend" (De Filippis 17).

Nonetheless, Gutiérrez speaks to immigrants everywhere and gives them a voice of common longing and understanding because "the transition from island to metropolis, from the Tropic of

Cancer to the cool weather north of the 40<sup>th</sup> parallel, from a Latin culture to an American culture is one which not every emigrant survives” (De Filippis 17). It is not just the language, food, music, and culture that it lost for the Dominicans; it is the sense of home and the struggle of finding a place in society.

Julia Alvarez also examines the hardships and conflicts that her family faced as immigrants; however, unlike Gutiérrez, Alvarez not only discusses her optimistic perspective of living as both Dominican and American in New York, but also frames her narratives about immigration from an enlightened gendered perspective. Interestingly, her perspective of living in the United States is quite different from Gutiérrez since she was born in New York City on March 27, 1950. However, at only three months of age, she returned to the Dominican Republic with her upper-middle class family and then returned to America at the age of ten. Alvarez’s family was highly influenced by American attitudes and goods from the time she was very young—they had much respect and admiration for Americans, and to the children, New York seemed like a fantasy land. Although, Alvarez and her family had much appreciation for America, her homecoming was not what she expected it to be once she returned to New York from the Dominican Republic. Many of Alvarez’s work, in particular, her poem “Homecoming” (1986) and most prominent novel *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* (1991) express her personal experiences and heavily focus on issues of immigration, assimilation, and identity. Her cultural upbringing in two cultures is evident in the combination of personal and political views in her writing. Additionally, she is known for examining cultural expectations, stereotypes, issues of gender, and generational clashes in an introspective manner.

Alvarez’s experiences as a Dominican are expressed in her poem “Homecoming” (1986) as Alvarez attempts to bridge her past and present worlds to discover herself. Alvarez uses

language to play with the divide of families, cultural power, and to define the lifestyle of immigrants, but ultimately Alvarez chooses to have a more optimistic viewpoint than authors like Gutiérrez by recognizing her cultural transformation and evaluating her changed identity. For example, the opening lines of the poem are laden with alliteration, mixing dialogue, Spanish diction, and a blend of two cultures:

When my cousin Carmen married, the guards  
 at her father's finca took the guests' bracelets  
 and wedding rings and put them in an armored truck  
 for safekeeping while wealthy, dark-skinned men,  
 their plump, white women and spoiled children  
 bathed in a river whose bottom had been cleaned  
 for the occasion. (Alvarez 1)

Not only do these lines exemplify the stereotypes of Americans and Latin Americans, but these lines describe how much effort and money was put into making the wedding in order to please the groom's family, and to present the image of social status and respect that proves they are "worthy" as their new in-laws from the North. Their background is mixed with a "wealthy, dark-skinned men, their plump, white women and spoiled children." Additionally, the white family was so privileged that the river they use had to be cleaned for their benefit. The Dominican wedding is a whirl of disturbing facts, such as the money spent and the effort of impressing the "sunburnt Minnesotans." All in all, the wedding is to impress the audience—in this case, the white Americans.

It is evident that the Dominican culture is lost in the wedding when the narrator describes "showing off my English," "Chinese lanterns strung between posts," and "my merengue has lost its Caribbean." The lack of culture and self is further demonstrated when Alvarez describes the

servants. At first, the servants were invisible to everyone, but by the end of the poem, Alvarez realizes that she did not recognize their hard work and she feels ashamed. She states “it was too late, or early, to be wise, meaning that she was initially blind to the exploitation of the dark-skinned servants just like everyone else at the wedding. She illustrates this point when she states,

It would be years  
 before I took the courses that would change my mind  
 in schools paid for by sugar from the fields around us,  
 years before I could begin to comprehend  
 how one does not see the maids when they pass by  
 with trays of deviled eggs arranged on daisy wheels. (Alvarez 2)

Blindness to their own white privilege stopped her and Carmen from acknowledging the socio-economic and racial dynamics in their country. Consequently, they ignored the workers' predicament. Not only did the servants help with the celebration, but they helped build their home and pay for their education due to “the sugar from the fields around us.” The servants have been loyal to the Dominican family for quite some time now and this is the moment when Alvarez reflects on the workers who perform the hard work:

Except the maids and the workmen,  
 sitting on stoops behind the sugar house,  
 ate with their fingers from their open palms  
 windows, shutters, walls, pillars, doors,  
 made from the cane they had cut from the fields. (Alvarez 2)

Notably, the servants aren't allowed to join the festivities even though they serve and are the core to the wedding—without them, the weddings wouldn't take place. Fascinatingly, the

wedding was set in the Dominican Republic, which demonstrates that the poem is truly about herself, her family, and the Dominican society.

The title “Homecoming” has various potential interpretations that mirror the major themes in the poem. Her “return” implies that she is physically going home for the wedding, but also going back “home” in time. The poem acts as a flashback and reflection of how she has changed and how she views her identity. Distance has allowed her to develop a critical eye about her Dominican culture and society. Due to her experiences living abroad and education, she is able to process memories from a critical perspective. She finds that she is able to notice dynamics of social exclusion, racism, patriarchal values, and workers exploitation that are prevalent in Dominican society. The poem reflects a personal and self-critical introspection of finding herself, her family, and her class growing up.

In her 1991 book *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents*, Alvarez tells the story of a family from the Dominican Republic that migrates to the United States, which fits nicely with the first wave of Dominican immigrants who left the island in the 1960’s due to political turmoil. The family was forced to flee due to the father’s opposition to Rafael Leónidas Trujillo’s dictatorship. Although the Garcia family represented in the novel didn’t share the typical immigrant experiences due to their wealth and socio-economic status, they still struggled as Dominican immigrants. In particular, the novel shows the clash of two cultures and the struggle to assimilate into American culture without losing their Dominican heritage. Alvarez’s protagonists share commonalities with the typical Dominican immigrant experience, such as the painful dislocation of family ties, the difficult cultural readjustments, and psychological difficulties of children who are forced to suddenly move from one cultural context to another.

Interestingly, Alvarez’s novel is told in reverse chronological order and previews the

events of how four sisters: Carla, Sandra, Yolanda and Sofia, enjoyed a fairly sheltered and comfortable childhood in the Dominican Republic and are suddenly thrown for a loop once they realize they're not accepted as Americans or Dominicans in America—instead, they are trapped between two cultures and are viewed as “other.” The novel questions identity at many different levels (personal, cultural, national); nonetheless, the Garcia girls do whatever it takes to fit into American society and even the Dominican Republic. They try to lose their accents when they're speaking English and they try to lose their accents when they're speaking Spanish, but even after losing their accent, they still feel different. Alvarez shows her readers that no matter what, the Garcia girls are different—they are caught in two worlds and need to learn to exist in both of them.

As the four girls mature, they grow increasingly distant from one another and their parents to the extreme that the integration into American culture tears them from their family roots. Moving to America at such a young age caused the girls to be more susceptible to influences from American culture, whereas their parents, especially Papi, were more committed to Dominican values. The girls gradually found themselves in more and more trouble: Fifi was caught with marijuana, Carla used hair-removal cream, Yolanda was found with a book about the female body, and Sandi stayed out past curfew. Although these are seemingly normal mistakes American teenagers make, these were clear infractions of the Garcia family's values and roots. Sandra's experimentation with Tampax was so appalling to her parents that she was sent away to an all-girls boarding school. Additionally, their parents insisted that the girls be sent summers to the Island so we wouldn't lose touch with *la familia*. The hidden agenda was marriage to homeland boys, since everyone knew that once a girl married an American, those grandbabies came out jabbering in English and thinking of the Island as a place to go get a suntan. (Alvarez 109)



The girl's assimilation into American culture was much harder than their parents because of their age and social exposure. All four sisters are caught between sexual and gender norms, framed within a traditional Catholic and patriarchal ideology from the Island, and a more liberal American viewpoint of behavior. However, it is important to note that the girls were not the only one in the family who had trouble adapting. In fact, their mother also had difficulties adjusting to a new lifestyle because she was unsatisfied with her financial situation. She considered herself to be of a high social class, and failed to recognize that it is unrealistic to gain social respect and material privilege as an immigrant.

In order to discover where the Garcia family stands in terms of identity, they must negotiate between their Dominican and North-American halves in order to appreciate their place in society. Additionally, they are compelled to come together as a family in order to anchor their values and goals. Their difficult experiences reveal how many immigrants have expectations that become shattered. For the Garcia girls, their split vision demonstrates the struggle to fit into mainstream America, especially when they chose to lose their accents. Richard Rodriguez comments on this notion in "Aria: Memoir of a Bilingual Childhood," which describes his own childhood and challenges growing up as an immigrant in the United States while speaking two languages: English in public and Spanish at home. As Rodriguez grows older he uses less and less Spanish to the point where he no longer understands it fully, and eventually abandons his native language completely in order to be accepted in American society.

Alvarez's main character, Yolanda represents the individual search for identity. For example, in the opening chapter Yolanda finds herself back in the Dominican Republic at the age of thirty still questioning her identity. Interestingly, her name plays an important role in the novel. Her Spanish nickname is "Yo," which refers to the English subject pronoun "I." While in

New York, most Americans pronounce her name incorrectly and call her Joe, which represents her American version of Yolanda. Her nickname “Yoyo” is reminiscent of the toy that goes up and down, back and forth, similar to Yolanda’s bouncing from culture to culture from one extreme to the other. Nonetheless, her many nicknames express her diverse facets of her hybrid identity. This is further illustrated when she travels back and forth from America to the island. Later in the novel, readers see Yolanda stranded with a broken car in the middle of a guava field in the Dominican Republic. As she sees *campesinos* walking towards her, she becomes frightened and mutters in English rather than Spanish. It is clear that the two men spoke Spanish and although she understood them completely, she chose to speak English instead. At this moment, Yolanda is faced with the two different worlds she belongs to: the United States and the Dominican Republic.

In his essay entitled “Imaginary Homelands,” Salman Rushdie states that the “linguistic struggle immigrants undergo reflects other struggles in real life: the struggle between two cultures within themselves” (Rushdie 16). This exemplifies the struggle of identity and struggle between two cultures that Alvarez explores through the characters in her novel. Rushdie believes that the Garcia girls are an example of “hyphenated Americans” meaning that no matter what, they are not truly American. In fact, their experiences in New York make them American-Dominican. Rushdie argues that,

A translated individual is the one born across two worlds. Immigrants, too, go through a translation, a movement that makes them lose some things that remained in their native country, but also makes them acquire some new things from their new location. (Rushdie 17)

The idea of the “hyphenated American” portrays the fragmented identities that each member of the Garcia family is faced with as two worlds which they live in collide and blend together. At times, the two worlds intersect, rub against each other, and flow into one another; the interactions between the two worlds can very often be positive, and sometimes negative. Nevertheless, Alvarez explores how many immigrants bridge two cultures together in order to discover their true identity—an issue that many Dominicans and Alvarez herself experienced.

Janira Bonilla and Sintia Molina directly deal with issues of identity in Alvarez and Diaz’s literature. In Bonilla’s essay “Transnational Consciousness: Negotiating Identity in the Works of Julia Alvarez and Junot Díaz.” Bonilla explores assimilation and identity formation as experienced by Dominicans in New York. He argues:

Both Alvarez and Diaz put forth alternative identity models that articulate a transnational consciousness developed vis-à-vis in the United States as both the receiving country and imperial Other that is in large part responsible for creating the conditions that force Dominicans to leave the island in the first place. (Bonilla 201)

Dominican-American authors have embraced their experiences of Dominican immigrants even though many were challenging. In particular, coming of age narratives have formulated a transnational consciousness. Interestingly, writers like Alvarez and Diaz provide unique interpretations to distinct experiences from gender, class and racial discrimination—they provide perspectives of an outsider and insider. In addition, Molina discusses how Dominican literature in the USA tends to “mediate” between the two worlds. In her essay entitled “Duality and Displacement in Dominican Literature.” According to Molina, large populations of Dominicans mediate between two cultures and often feel 50-50. She argues that “Alvarez and Diaz use

language to express the duality and displacement in their narratives reveals their constant struggle to be a part of two cultures that is inextricably bound in their stories” (Bonilla 205).

Alvarez’s perspective is anchored on socio-economic backgrounds and Diaz’s writes about poor, working class communities because he belongs to that class. Both are aware of gender and racial dynamics, but they create characters that face discrimination differently—characters that reflect on their identities.

The themes of language and cultural awareness between the Dominican and American cultures are also illustrated by Junot Diaz. Diaz was born in a poor section of Santo Domingo and moved to New Jersey at the age of seven. After graduating from Rutgers University and pursuing a graduate program, he published the collection of stories *Drown* in 1996, which chronicles the human cost of an immigrant people’s displacement in a new environment surrounded by cultural and racial discrimination as well as economic exploitation. The San Francisco Chronicle regards *Drown* as “A stunning collection of stories” that is “another front-line report on the ambivalent promise of the American Dream.” Throughout Diaz’s stories, he describes memories of his island in the Dominican Republic—his narrative space is dominated by nostalgic recreations and his childhood experiences of immigration.

Diaz’s interest lies in narrating the great human loss of marginalization; he is concerned with depicting everyday deprivations and humiliations of inner-city life in the United States. He explores the struggle of obtaining the American Dream. Each of his stories is related to a moment in time; most of the stories in the collection are narrated by Yunior, who recounts his family’s immigration experience to the United States. Throughout Yunior’s childhood, readers see that he loses a father and that he is forced to help his mother with her economic needs in order to provide for the family. Interestingly, the truth about Yunior’s father, Ramon, isn’t

revealed until the last story, “Negocios.” Ramon was having trouble succeeding in the United States and was unable to provide for himself and his family, forcing him to move to New York and marry a U.S. citizen in order to gain citizenship. Ramon leaves his family for Nueva York: “New York was the city of jobs, the city that had first called the Cubanos and their cigar industry, then the Bootstrap Puerto Ricans and now him” (Diaz 167). Ramon’s lack of English plays an important role in this story as he was noticeably an outsider. Ramon was driven towards achieving his dreams: “He was twenty-four. He didn’t dream about his familia and wouldn’t for many years. He dreamed instead of gold coins” (Diaz 169). Nevertheless, he worked nineteen to twenty hour days, seven days a week during his first year of work. He was barely surviving to pay for rent and his personal needs like food and clothing. Eventually he was robbed and then lost his cleaning job, lost his apartment, and was unable to send money home to his family for six months.

Diaz certainly draws attention to his gritty view of life due to the poverty, struggle and scamming in urban New Jersey and the inner-city of New York, which is evident through the subjectivity and objectivity in “How to Date a Browngirl, Blackgirl, Whitegirl, or Halfie.” Issues of race, ethnicity, class, and gender acquire central importance in this story. Diaz shows how these categories influence social constructions and question one’s identity. In the story, the narrator-protagonist’s hypothetical encounters with a “browngirl,” a “blackgirl,” a “whitegirl,” and a “halfie,” offer an exploration of the construction of Dominican identity. As Yuniors offers detailed advice to his readers on how to act while dating a woman of different racial and ethnic backgrounds, his imaginary interactions replicate the social structures of minorities. Interestingly, Yuniors tries to define and represent himself in ways that maximize his chances of “scoring” with each girl—which nevertheless underscores the theme of masking one’s

Dominican identity. When Yunió suggests that “the white ones are the ones you want the most,” it is clear that the possession of a “whitegirl” is as close as Yunió can get to possessing whiteness itself (Diaz 145). Additionally, the desire to obtain whiteness is exemplified when Diaz includes small gestures that reveal cultural identities and attitudes when the narrator attempts to hide his origin and true identity. This is further illustrated when Yunió recommends running a hand through your hair “like the white boys do.” Yunió attempts to undermine certain aspects of his culture, such as his class, race, and rural background when he states, “Take down any embarrassing photos of your family in the campo, especially the one with the half-naked kids dragging a goat on a rope leash” (Diaz 143). Instead of being proud of his heritage, Yunió demonstrates the insecurity of being “other” and the desire to be perceived as more American.

Diaz reflects the socio-cultural transformations by the Dominican communities in the United States similarly to Alvarez. Milagros Ricourt, a scholar who studies the Dominican culture in *Dominicans in New York City: Power From the Margins*, states that “second-generation Dominicans who have grown roots in the United States and identify themselves as Dominican-American or Dominican New Yorkers—hold an ethnic identity grounded in the host society” (Ricourt 20). This is true for New York-born Julia Alvarez and island-born Junot Diaz because they both have spent most of their formative years living in the United States while experiencing bicultural environments and trans-nationality. Even though they portray different styles and concerns regarding female and male perspectives, they both make cultural and personal identity their central topics of concern.

Interestingly, both Alvarez and Diaz use English as their primary vehicle of expression, whereas Gutiérrez expresses himself originally in Spanish. In doing so, they are branching away from the nostalgic and Spanish oriented tradition of the Dominican diaspora, which according to

Torres-Saillant has been an issue “for the virtually exclusive consumption of small literary circles in Dominican neighborhoods” (Torres-Saillant 253). The two authors, Alvarez and Diaz represent a distinct type of Dominican exile. Diaz’s narratives represent a breakthrough for Dominicans due to their focus on the urban working community such as his example of Yuniór’s father. Duany describes how issues of language, race, class, and gender acquire particular significance against the backdrop of extreme poverty, drugs, and criminality that is associated with inner-city neighborhoods such as Washington Heights, the largest Dominican enclave in the diaspora.

The focus on the English language along with a few Spanish words in Alvarez and Diaz’s work reinforces the differences between the two cultures, but also exemplifies the connection between creating a new identity. The use of the Spanish words in literary texts typically does not follow with a translation because the authors are forcing the readers to recognize the Spanish words and decipher their meaning based on the context. Ultimately, this technique draws the reader into the world of the narrator and demonstrates the difficulty for Dominicans who are unable to speak English. Interestingly, Diaz includes an epigraph by Gustavo Pérez-Firmat, a Cuban-American, in his national bestseller *Drown*. The epigraph provides his readers with an important cue to Diaz’s opinion about the topics Pérez-Firmat writes in his book about the transnational identity of people like him, second-generation Cuban-Americans. The epigraph states:

The fact that I  
am writing to you in  
English already falsifies what I  
wanted to tell you.  
My subject:

how to explain to you that I  
don't belong to English  
though I belong nowhere else

Before readers begin to explore Diaz's stories, it is implied that cultural differences and transnational identities are a main topic. As a result, the Spanish language validates the untranslatable experience of those who like him, speak English and do not know much Spanish, except for what was spoken at home. Language for Yunió symbolizes the two worlds which he straddles: the Dominican and American cultures. In America, Yunió suppresses his Dominican culture in favor of the dominant American culture. Nevertheless, with the use of language and culture awareness, Diaz portrays what it's like to feel "in between."

Issues such as displacement, cultural and personal identity and transnationality are further exemplified by Loida Maritza Pérez's novel *Geographies of Home*, published in 2000. Interestingly, Pérez centralizes her novel on a family focus similarly to Alvarez and Diaz; he attempts to map a cultural nest for immigrants and define the meaning of "home" as suggested in the title. Her immigrant perspective is highly influenced by poverty, discrimination, and the difficulties of relocation more similarly to Gutiérrez. Pérez was born in the Dominican Republic in 1963, an era of political and economic chaos caused by the effects of the 31 year dictatorship of Rafael Trujillo. Due to the economic strain, Pérez's family moved to the United States when she was three years old. *Geographies of Home* mirrors some of her own experiences trying to establish a home in the United States while still holding on to their cultural identity. Incidentally, Pérez charts the journey of a Dominican family struggling to achieve the mythical American Dream and constantly facing poverty, racism, and the possibility of abuse or threat of danger lurking in the darkest corners of New York City.



For Pérez, home is a question of perspective. Throughout the novel, each member of the family struggles with self-identity and adjusting to New York City life. Pérez's central protagonist, Iliana returns home from college after hearing that her family is close to destruction: one sister, Marina, is a rape victim who is plunging into schizophrenia; the eldest sister Rebecca is continuously brutalized by her husband and is neglecting her small children; Beatriz has disappeared; Iliana's father is abusive; and her mother is superstitious. While at college, Iliana's mother beckons her to come home. When she does, Iliana is little prepared for the dire conditions she encounters; she is torn between escaping back to school to avoid her family intense dynamics or face reality and attempt to re-build her family. Although Iliana deals with a variety of family problems such as sibling rivalry, acceptance and favoritism, she struggles with finding her true identity.

Iliana and her family are caught between two cultures and face the trials of immigrant life once settling in New York City—they are losing their strength and identity, and often rely on flashbacks of their homeland. This is illustrated in the memories of the beautiful and plentiful Dominican island. For example, Papito takes the reader back to a time when he felt determined to marry Anabelle. During a thunderstorm he described his emotions:

[His] Heart pounding with alarm, he turned to follow with his eyes the apparition posing as Annabelle. Unaware of his presence, she stumbled toward the sea. Her tangled hair whipped her face. Her mud-smeared dress gaped with a rip from her shoulders to just above her waist. The strip of fabric fluttered behind her, lending her the appearance of one who had lost a wing and was attempting to make do with the remaining appendage too water-logged to propel her off the ground. (Pérez 156)

Not only does Papito's flashback give the readers a sense of his old personality—a personality of someone who was capable of loving and showing compassion, rather than beating his children,

but this passage also illustrates a sense of his homeland—a fantasy land. Pérez's vision of the island is similar to Gutiérrez—it tends to be nostalgic and idealizing. Perhaps Papito is obsessively protective of his daughters because of his past. These memories of the Dominican Republic haunt the family and force them to question their new home. While in New York, the family is forced to move from apartment to apartment until they are evicted. Papito, feeling responsible for his family, finds a broken-down house in Brooklyn to protect the family from homelessness and the perceived danger on the streets and corners of the city. Interestingly, Pérez depicts Brooklyn and New York City as dangerous areas that are desolate and gloomy, which nevertheless mirrors the family's dark and negative perspective on America as a whole.

The extreme physical abuse enacted by Papito and Marina's self-abuse and mental instability can be seen to stem from being subjects under the Trujillo dictatorship; therefore, Marina is a critique of the Dominicans self-hatred towards their African heritage. While Trujillo was in power from 1931 until 1961, the people of the Dominican Republic were subjected to persistent poverty and repressive control over their daily lives. Most of the Dominican people were forced to silently watch as Trujillo took over plantations and businesses; the locals lived in fear of being a victim of one of his government appointed assassinations if they spoke out against him (J. González 342).

Even though Pérez claims that her novel is not completely autobiographical, many critics draw many comparisons between herself and her characters. Melita Marie Garza demonstrates that Pérez's family and the family from her story both emigrated from the Dominican Republic to New York, both have expressed difficulty forming a cultural and self-identity, and both have expressed their struggles establishing a home in New York. Additionally, Pérez and Iliana face similar difficulties such as confronting their ancestry and they are both educated women who

reminisce about self-identity. Iliana has been unsure of herself and who she wants to be as a woman:

Iliana remembered as well how, during her years in that apartment on Pennsylvania Avenue and in that neighborhood where few other Dominicans had resided, she had yearned to look like the Puerto Rican or black American girls so that she could be easily identified as belonging to either group. She would have traded her soul to have the long, straight hair and olive skin of her Spanish-speaking friends or to wear her hair in cornrows and have no trace of a Spanish accent like the Johnson girls down the street. She used to hate the question 'Where you from?' because few of her classmates knew of the Dominican Republic and several of her black friends assumed that she claimed to be Hispanic in order to put on airs. (Pérez 190)

Unable to fit in socially and having no sense of self is a major issue for young Dominican women and men. Readers have seen the conflicts of wanting to be seen as belonging to the dominant group in many Latin American works of literature, which is especially evident through Iliana. Interestingly, many of these writers mirror themselves in their novels in order to connect to their audiences. In an interview about her personal experiences about the importance of “home,” Pérez poses central questions about the Dominican immigrant experience when she asks:

What is home when the country you've left behind is no longer home; you've changed and so has the country. Is home a familial space? An emotional space? A physical space? It's different things to different characters. I don't even know what home is yet. (Garza 3)

Despite the several themes that Pérez and many other Dominican writers explore, the one central goal is to relate the challenges of the immigration experience in the United States. Garza also

compares this idea to Alvarez regarding the “darkness at the center of the American Dream” (Garza 2). The “darkness” rooted in the idea of the American Dream is revealed through the troubles and hardship that minority communities face in America. Even though race and class are a major concern for the Dominicans, maintaining heritage, family and identity are the utmost distress. Pérez’s critique about “home” is not only extensively addressed in her novel, but also in an interview where she describes the importance of belonging. Pérez discusses the issues with discrimination and argues that,

Ultimately, these issues pertain to the human condition: our need to belong and be accepted; the contradictions inherent in all of us; our attempts to do the best we can even in the worst of circumstances; our desire to guide our children and the risk of making mistakes along the way; our wondrous ability to sometimes understand and forgive. (Penguin Random House 4)

Pérez’s concern for belonging is a human condition. The Dominicans came to America to escape a brutal dictatorship and political turmoil, and to provide their families with more opportunities of a better life. They are willing to take risks, which is evident in the way Dominican literature portrays hardships and conflicts, such as the search for identity.

Sintia E. Molina comments on these main topics of concern for the Dominican Diaspora in her essay “Duality and Displacement in the Dominican Literature in the United States.” In particular, Molina discusses how Dominican literature has been influenced by the early Puerto Rican stories and follows the same tradition and focus of hybridism and ambivalence. Molina states that,

Dominican literature written in the United States tends to mediate between American and Dominican culture. For Dominican writers trying to find or adopt the code of “Americanness,”...Dominican writers have found the ground to

mediate between two languages, two cultures—to feel 50-50, not totally one or the other. This is the reality for the first and second generations of Dominican writers in the United States. These generations of writers face the dilemma of not being Dominican or Dominican American writers, but ethnic writers, and ethnic means “other.” (Molina 66)

The feeling of not belonging, neither in New York nor in the Dominican Republic causes displacement for these writers and allows them to find a way to express their feelings and connect to the Dominican communities in the United States and those back home on the island. Those like Diaz and Alvarez, search to place themselves individually and find their new home. They reveal the reality of both the American and Dominican world, but nonetheless are willing to search for a new life and “make it” in New York. However, Molina also suggests that for others, Dominican literature responds to the struggles of Dominicans to escape from their reality on the island (such as the Trujillo dictatorship) and search for their immigrant dream in New York.

Writers such as Gutiérrez, who chose to use Spanish as his primary language, “further isolate himself from the mainstream literary establishment, thereby increasing his sense of separation” (Molina 73). On the other hand, Alvarez and Diaz use English as their primary language to feel a sense of belonging in their new culture and to address a potential readership in their new home, mediating the two worlds that they inhabit and translating them for all readers in the United States. Gutiérrez defines himself as a Dominican writer; Alvarez and Diaz consider themselves Dominican-Americans. Even though Alvarez and Dias wrote in English, they still feel obliged to relate to their homeland and express their nostalgia for the island; they often return to the island searching for their lost home and identity. Nonetheless Dominican literature starting in the mid to late 1980s reflects the psychological, economic, social reality, and the

cultural shock of adapting to a new world. Emotional deprivation, displacement and ambivalence are realities for the Dominican-Americans and Dominican writers attempt to mediate identity conflicts and free their people to explore the culture and history of both the Dominican Republic and the United States.

## Conclusion

Both Puerto Rican and Dominican writers in the United States reflect about the displacement of migrant and immigrant peoples who explore their identity and the viability of the “American Dream.” Early writers were expected to assimilate since they produced at a time when mainstream social discourses conceived identity as organic stressing that cultural identity is more set depending on where you are born rather than on social conditioning. Throughout recent decades, transnational, hybrid, and multicultural identities became more accepted, which is exemplified by more recent writers. Assimilation and acculturation pushed the ideal melting pot as it referred to one homogenous national cultural identity that everyone must accept in order to being considered part of the nation. This pressure acted as a cultural suicide, but the intellectuals that I discuss throughout my thesis recognize that there is no set national identity. In particular, Ernesto Quiñonez discusses topics that engage American society and addresses issues concerning America and its politics, instead of issues on the island. Quiñonez embraces a transnational and hybrid cultural identity while critically challenging the American Dream and mainstream society. He demonstrates a new attitude towards identity, one that is more fluid in our new millennium.

Ernesto Quiñonez was born in 1969 and was raised in Spanish Harlem. A lifetime of hearing and experiencing personal stories encouraged him to document, in fiction, the triumphs and struggles of Latinos by placing a spotlight on the Young Lords, a second generation for Latino rights during the late 60s and 70s (Thompson). Quiñonez’s novel *Bodega Dreams* (2000) communicates the complexities of life in a poor urban community, such as East Harlem and illustrates in detail the neighborhoods, relationships, education, crime, values, ethnic dynamics, and the American Dream for Puerto Ricans and other Latinos in America. Quiñonez depicts life

in the Barrio as an essential theme throughout his story. From the first stages of Puerto Rican migration to the United States, urban barrios, in this case, East Harlem in New York City, have represented the predominant space for the Puerto Rican diaspora. The conditions of “El Barrio” ultimately fostered stereotypes and negative connotations on this “ethnic ghetto” in the mainstream American collective imaginary.

During the sixties, Nuyorican activists, poets, and artists started to express life and forged assertive discourses in these communities, attempting to conceive, create, and foster positive new experiences for Latinos. In particular, Ernesto Quiñonez exemplifies the importance of community through his representation of East Harlem and especially through his narrator, Julio, also known as Chino. As narrator, the protagonist functions as a “tour guide” of the Barrio as he links the reader to a more comprehensive reading and understanding of the lifestyle and possibility for community improvement and success. Chino’s search for self-identity embodies a more collective depiction of Puerto Rican life in East Harlem, where his ethnic roots clash with mainstream America in his strive toward the American Dream.

The novel begins with Chino’s childhood where readers are immediately introduced to his dearest friend, Enrique, also referred to as Sapo. Chino “loved Sapo because he loved himself. And I wanted to do that, to rely on myself for my own happiness. He’d been this way since we met in the fourth grade” (Quiñonez 3). Instantly, Quiñonez shows Chino and Sapo’s brother-like relationship. Chino looks up to Sapo as his protector and idol as he “wanted a name like Sapo” (Quiñonez 4). This first image of the novel also depicts how their childhood is filled with “fires, junkies dying, shootouts, holdups, babies falling out of windows as the things you took as part of life” (Quiñonez 5). The streets and schools are surrounded with violence and rebellious actions each day. Sapo in particular, was considered “one of those guys who went



around beating up other kids. He was the meanest and ugliest kid on the block. He loved himself and not only that, he was my pana, my friend” (Quiñonez 4). Sapo’s character predicts his future in East Harlem early on, as he “earned a reputation as a violent trouble maker, laying the groundwork for the amoral drug enforcer he becomes” (Marwell 462). Even Chino’s mother hated Sapo as she told Chino: “I don’t want to see you hanging around with that demonio” (Quiñonez 10). Chino never listened because Sapo meant adventure and family to him: “it is important to have someone watch your back. It is important to have a pana, a broqui. Sapo was important to me” (Quiñonez 10). However, Chino also grew close to Nancy, a Pentecostal girl who was “intelligent, polite, friendly and since she never cursed everyone called her Blanca” (Quiñonez 9). Sapo and Blanca have different views on life in the Barrio and Chino is torn between them. Chino’s childhood and adolescent life have been comprised of times with Sapo, as he wanted his adult life to be made up of times with Blanca. It was difficult for him to balance the two.

Chino marries Blanca and they ultimately decide they want to reinvent themselves; they enroll at Hunter College because “we needed school if we were going to change ourselves” (Quiñonez 13). They discussed being successful, saving money, raising children and achieving the American Dream outside the Barrio, whereas Sapo doesn’t understand why Chino would want to leave East Harlem. In this case, Chino and Blanca represent many Puerto Ricans who have a white mainstream image of the American Dream. They want to leave the Barrio to live in an ideal community far away from a place they consider dangerous with “pissed-up elevators, junkies on the stairs and posters of the rapist of the month” (Quiñonez 5). However, for Chino, the Barrio is an obstacle to his education and creating a new future away from his roots. He is

wavering between Sapo and Blanca; he is also ambivalent in his desires to reconcile the mainstream American Dream and his roots.

Blanca has a strict opinion of Sapo, just as Chino's mother does, and ultimately believes that Sapo keeps Chino from classes and being successful. She thinks he is "a drug dealer who brings bad news. Always has been. I don't want you around Enrique!" (Quiñonez 14). Blanca is very determined to make a life for herself and Chino outside of the Barrio. She marries Chino because she envisioned a successful future together, but Chino has a tendency to protect Sapo and unfortunately it causes fights with Blanca. She is frustrated by his actions: "What is your problem? You know, Julio, I married you because I thought you had brains. I thought you had more brains than most of the f-f-fucks in this neighborhood" (Quiñonez 14). Many Latinos in the community did not achieve success nor desire it. Chino manage to avoid the "all-too-familiar downward spiral traveled by many young Latino men with roots like his" (Marwell 462). Chino aspired to success and believed in life beyond the Barrio. However, it is clear to the reader that "the childhood bond between Chino and Sapo gave Chino a treasured sense of adventure and safety, cementing a loyalty that proved impossible to renounce even as the two traveled to adulthood on very different paths" (Marwell 462). Sapo influences Chino drastically; he pressures him into completing tasks, seeing people, driving to areas of the neighborhood, and fulfilling certain roles. Sapo continuously asks Chino for favors like storing money and drugs in his apartment and even carrying bags of drugs to people at his school: "Yo Chino, man whass up? You know you my pana right? And like you know yo'r the only guy I can trust right, I mean we go way back...yo mira I have this package.. can I leave it her wi'choo, Chino" (Quiñonez 18). This is an example of Sapo's character because it shows his influence over Chino as opposed to the positive influence of Blanca. Sapo and Blanca are the main functions of Chino's decisions.

Chino can choose to go home to Blanca and study for school or he can choose to smoke a blunt with Sapo. Although Chino does not like the situations Sapo puts him in or upsetting Blanca, he ultimately can't say no to Sapo: "Blanca openly dislikes Sapo, believing that he will only lead him to astray. She begs Chino to give up his boyhood loyalty that is getting in the way of the couple's upwardly-mobile American dream: finishing college, getting professional jobs and buying a house" (Marwell 463). Chino is fully aware of Blanca's disapproval of Sapo, yet he ignores her wishes.

Chino is clearly trapped in between the ideal American Dream and his roots in Spanish Harlem. His community and neighborhood holds him back as he feels he owes Sapo. Chino tries to balance two ways of living, thinking, and even speaking -- he is trying to find his identity and who he wants to be as an individual in the community and for his family. However, he is more influenced by the people around him. Quiñonez shows how challenging it is for Chino as he is "pulled by competing loyalties to the other people in his life to always make the right choices" (Marwell 462). There are times in the novel where Chino expresses his love for education and desire to be happy and successful, yet something is holding him back in East Harlem. The Barrio represents a figurative borderland between the past and future; it is an in-between space of complex transformations and developments. Perhaps this is why so many people do not leave their neighborhood or roots? Or conceivably, is there another path to success?

Sapo lures Chino into meeting Willie Bodega and Nazario, whose interesting perspectives on East Harlem cause Chino to question his own beliefs and desire for the American Dream. Chino becomes fascinated with Bodega's vision of the community. Bodega seems to fit the model posed by F. Scott Fitzgerald's famous character Jay Gatsby, but his dream differs from Gatsby in that it implies a response to the community's social and economic needs in East

Harlem. Bodega represents the possibility of success and achieving a Puerto Rican dream in “El Barrio,” just as Gatsby was the hero of the American Dream during the twenties. Bodega’s Gatsby-like character dreams of a great society; he pursues a dream of economic success and power by selling drugs and using the money to repair buildings, sending Latinos to school, and providing the community with money and prospects to improve East Harlem; he wants to make the Barrio a better place for Puerto Ricans. He believes that education is essential for the community and that Chino has the potential to help East Harlem, make a difference, and step toward success in the place he grew up.

Bodega also has a realistic view on mainstream America and the Puerto Ricans’ place in society. He explains to Chino that:

...this country is ours as much as it is theirs. Puerto Rican limbs were lost in the sands of Iwo Jima, in Korea, in Nam. You go to D.C. and you read that wall and you’ll also see our names: Rivera, Ortega, Martinez, Castillo. Those are our names there along with Jones and Johnson and Smith. But when you go fill out a job application you get no respect. (Quiñonez 26)

Bodega’s story leaves a mark upon Chino as he questions his future and the right path for success. This statement also exemplifies Quiñonez’s perspective on the struggle to assert cultural identity, especially for the Puerto Ricans in America. In fact, the Barrio acts as a border space where different cultures and identities exist. Quiñonez does not shy away from depicting the harsh realities that white America associate stereotypically with the socio-economic dynamics and lifestyles of East Harlem, but he creates hope and aspiration through the character of Willie

Bodega. The Barrio has a strong set of qualities that make it a perfect place for the creation of a new home and identity for Puerto Ricans in the United States. Bodega represents success and ambition in this community alone. He wants to take care of the community in hopes for it to grow and change. He does favors for the people in his neighborhood:

if Doña Ramonita can't pay her rent, I take care of it. The community center needs a new pool table, I take care of it. The word is out, it is all over El Barrio. Baby needs a new pair of shoes go talk to Willie Bodega. (Quiñonez 31)

Chino couldn't believe how much Bodega was trying to make a transformation within the community. He has learned from the past and knows change cannot come from brotherhood and goals: "extreme measures had to be taken and all you could hope for was that the good would outweigh the bad" (Quiñonez 31). Bodega wanted to make a stand, he "wanted real jobs, education for our little brothers and sisters, b'cause it was too late for us. We wanted led paint out of our buildings, window guards so our babies wouldn't go flying, we wanted to be heard" (Quiñonez 32). Bodega recognizes the poor living conditions, issues of violence on the streets, inequality due to race and ethnicity, and overall stereotypes of the Latino population. Bodega sells dreams and transmits ideals from the past in order to organize a better future for the community.

Although Bodega and Nazario's ideas made sense to Chino, so did Blanca's. Bodega and Nazario were talking about "starting out as a piece of trash from the gutter and transforming yourself into gold. They saw it as all or nothing. You couldn't have change without evolution and some people would get hurt along the way" (Quiñonez 160). Chino was unsure of who made sense of where his loyalties should be. However, he ultimately decided to tend to his roots.

Bodega's dream impacts Chino so much that he feels the need to continue the dream of providing optimism and a home for the community of East Harlem. Chino ultimately decides that both Sapo and Blanca had ideal perspectives for their future, but one does not need to leave the Barrio to be successful. Chino and Blanca can in fact, become successful right in the Barrio. "El Barrio" will always be a part of him as Sapo reminds Chino: "Just remember one thing from an old pana who has been here longer than you, just remember, bro, that no matter how much you learn, no matter how many books you read, how many degrees you get, in the end, you are from East Harlem" (Quiñonez 36). This quote shows the importance of roots and the Puerto Ricans' place in American society. Bodega has the vision of a new home in America—a piece of American land is owned, transformed and turned into a little Puerto Rican community that takes control of its future and success in the United States. Chino realizes that Bodega's dream has brought back hope to the community. Bodega represents a time when all things seemed possible; his ideals of social change and improvement provoke Chino's fascination with and admiration of Bodega.

Bodega realizes that searching for the American Dream and leaving behind culture and origins from the Barrio is not necessarily the only path to success. Why leave and abandon those in the Barrio in order to gain the American Dream? Bodega's statement causes Chino to reflect upon the community he grew up in as a whole. He began to think about not only his identity as an individual, but his place in the community and how he could work to improve the lifestyle and living conditions—he can be a success in his own home. The Barrio was a good place to begin the search for this dream by creating a prosperous Puerto Rican community in East Harlem rather than searching for the material American Dream, as "this place [East Harlem] was always a beautiful place, why couldn't we see it before" (Quiñonez 161). There are connotations and

stereotypes of East Harlem, but all areas are able to change for the better: “Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, we should think of identity as a ‘production’ which is never complete, always in process” (Hall 234). The identity of the Spanish Harlem community is continuously changing and has the opportunity to develop success and a bright future because of Bodega’s dream.

Identity is never static, it is a process. Ultimately, the process of identity construction creates transnational identities. In this case, El Barrio is in the process of development toward its own notion of the American Dream in East Harlem. Bodega claims Spanglish is the future, and Chino believes in this vision. Puerto Ricans have the opportunity to reinvent themselves and find their identity in America and East Harlem. Chino and Blanca wanted to change and reinvent themselves by achieving the mainstream view of the American Dream; however, there is a possibility for a new dream in their current home. In general, the Puerto Ricans are reinventing themselves and a new language comes to characterize this new identity which they are forming. Spanglish serves as a symbol for opportunity and future in a community that holds onto its culture and roots. It is a new language, a new view on life, and ultimately cultural identity. Bodega claims:

Spanglish is the future. It’s a new language being born out of the ashes of two cultures clashing with each other. You will use a new language. Words that they might not teach you in that college. Words that aren’t English or Spanish but at the same time are both. Now that’s where it’s at. Our people are evolving into something completely new. (Quiñonez 212)

Chino believes that Bodega's dream seems promising to him and those in his community. Spanglish serves as a symbol for identity and home in a community that is created out of heritage. Puerto Rican roots stay alive in this new language as Spanish words and structures are still used and impregnate the English language that Latinos are compelled to use.

Chino ultimately realizes his place in his community, his aspirations, and his own identity. For him and the Barrio, Bodega "represented the limitless possibility in us all by living his life, striving for those dreams that seemed to elude the neighborhood year after year" (Quiñonez 213). Quiñonez creates such a powerful and meaningful moment at the end of his novel as he shows the future and possible success for Spanish Harlem. The people in the community have hope of achieving this "new" American Dream, better known as Bodega's Dream. The ultimate dream shows that Spanish Harlem is a good place to start: "Tomorrow Spanish Harlem would run faster, fly higher, stretch its arms farther, and one day those dreams would carry its people to new beginnings" (Quiñonez 213).

The past conditions of "El Barrio" ultimately fostered stereotypes and negative connotations on this "ethnic ghetto" in the mainstream American collective imaginary. Those living in the community believe there are no possibilities for success, but Bodega proved this personification wrong by creating a future for the community. Quiñonez exemplifies the importance of community through his representation of East Harlem and especially through Chino, who allows readers to step inside the Barrio. Quiñonez creates a comprehensive narrative and understanding of the lifestyle and possibility for community improvement and success. Chino's search for self-identity illustrates a more collective depiction of Puerto Rican life in East Harlem. He is torn between his roots and the ideal American life. Bodega Dreams turns the Barrio into a new space with potential. It is important to note that Spanish Harlem as a



community doesn't mean one particular thing, but can change based on the people who inhabit it and embrace its future. Bodega proves that Latinos can strive toward success without moving out of the Barrio. Chino can be educated and still live in East Harlem. He can "be someone" and "make it" in El Barrio by helping the community as a whole. By the end of the novel, the community becomes more like a home for the Puerto Ricans; they become aesthetic homes where Puerto Ricans live and experience their place in America even though many hold transnational identities.

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