

## BLACK THOUGHTS: A Political Ideological Perspective for Afro Latinos Part III: Reflections of Me

Contributed by Kevin Alberto Sabio - Blacktino.net  
Wednesday, 13 August 2008

I have to admit&hellip;I hated the &lsquo;Latin Explosion&rsquo; when it came about, around ten years ago. I had previously touched on this subject here on Blacktino.net before, but I now want to go a little further in-depth about it.

I found it insulting on several different levels. For one thing, Latinos have been around in the entertainment field in this country for a few generations now; to act as if we&rsquo;re just coming onto the scene is disrespectful and insulting. You had the Salsa bands and Latin Jazz bands touring the country during the early and mid parts of this past century. You had musicians such as Carlos Santana and Jerry Garcia making an impact in Rock music during the 60s and 70s. Also, you had Latin Freestyle music (which I&rsquo;m a huge fan of) in the 80s and 90s, along with other Pop Music artists, such as Gloria Estefan, Lisa Lisa & Cult Jam, and Sheila E. We had been doing our thing in the music and movie industry for a good while now; and we didn&rsquo;t just arrive on the scene out of the blue.

The other thing that I hated about the &lsquo;Latin Explosion&rsquo; and found insulting&hellip;! I never saw myself being represented by the people behind the hype machine, or anyone that looked anything like me. As far as Afro Latinos were concerned&hellip;we didn&rsquo;t exist. Latinos were shown as light, bright&hellip;and damn near white.

There were a few notable exceptions to this &lsquo;rule&rsquo; during the whole &lsquo;Latin Explosion.&rsquo; You saw a few Afro Latina beauty queens picked to represent their respective countries, specifically Miss Colombia and Miss Honduras. But for the most part, Afro Latinos were relegated to the status of persona non grata. You never saw us during the whole &lsquo;Explosion,&rsquo; not unless you dug around really deep in the underground circles. While we were being bombarded with images of Ricky Martin, Enrique Iglesias, Mark Anthony, and Jennifer Lopez&hellip;you hardly got the opportunity to see or hear groups or artists such as DLG (Dark Latin Groove), Proyecto Uno, Fulanito, or El General (a precursor to the current Reggeton movement) in the mainstream. I couldn&rsquo;t see a wonderful talent like Lisette Melendez, but got to see and hear plenty of a (now blonde) Shakira. I could hear Rock En Espanol, but would be hard pressed to find R&B music performed by artists like Son By 4, Veronica, or other artists associated with labels like H.O.L.A Recordings, or Sir George Entertainment. Gee, I wonder why?

I&rsquo;m reminded of a comedy routine performed by Puerto Rican comedian Herb Quinones. He reflects on his up bringing, and how he was taught by his family that, &ldquo;You&rsquo;re not Black&hellip;you&rsquo;re Puerto Rican!&rdquo; despite his obvious African features. For much

of his life, he believed what he was told (being taught that his nationality was his race), and would fight anyone that would tell him otherwise. In his routine, he states that the NYPD cleared up that racial distinction for him during a profiling incident in his youth. He was riding around with some friends in a car, when they ended up getting pulled over. The routine goes like this:

NYPD: All you n\*ggers get out of the car!

HQ: My friends got out&hellip;I didn&rsquo;t move.

NYPD: (angrily approaches car) I SAID&hellip;all you n\*ggers get out of the car!

HQ: (adamantly) I&rsquo;m NOT black&hellip;I&rsquo;m Puerto Rican!

NYPD: (roughly hauls him out of car) Man&hellip;you&rsquo;re just a SPANISH n\*gger!

That&rsquo;s a pretty telling experience, right? Yet, as funny as Herb is, you&rsquo;ll never see or hear Latino comedians like him, or Ruperto Vanderpool in mainstream Latino comedy specials. Being from New York, I was lucky to hear about comedians like them on the underground comedy scene out there, along with a very funny J.J. Ramirez.

Aside from the music industry, we hardly get represented on television, or in the movies. When was the last time you saw a T.V. show that revolved around an Afro Latino family? We&rsquo;ve made some inroads as far as overall representation, but Afro Latinos are still nonexistent. When my niece was younger she used to love to watch the television show &ldquo;Taina&rdquo; on Nickelodeon, starring the very talented Christina Vidal. At the same time, you had the series &ldquo;The Garcia Brothers,&rdquo; also on Nickelodeon at the time. You also had shows on cable like &ldquo;Resurrection Boulevard,&rdquo; and &ldquo;My American Family&rdquo; on PBS. Again&hellip;this was great as far as having a Latino presence on television was concerned, but where were WE in all of this? It&rsquo;s rare for an Afro Latino to be cast in a Latino role in film or television. We normally get relegated to playing only African American/Black roles. Look at the careers of actors such as Zoe Saldana, Merlin Santana (R.I.P), Tatyana Ali, Alfonso Ribeiro, Gina Torres, and Christina Milian. Very few Afro Latino actors are able to be cast consistently in a &lsquo;Latino&rsquo; role because of how they look. The few exceptions would probably be Dania Ramirez, Lauren Velez, Wanda De Jesus, and Rick Gonzalez. Also, when was the last time you saw a movie that&rsquo;s subject matter was about Afro Latinos? You might have to sift through many independently made movies on the underground scene.

I know that with the African Diaspora Film Festival, an independent Black film festival based out of New York City ([www.nyadff.org](http://www.nyadff.org)), they have a program dedicated to films made by, or whose subject matter is about Latinos of African descent. It&rsquo;s through there that I learned about Afro

Latino filmmakers such as Gloria Rolando, Sergio Giral, Tomas Gutierrez, and Sara Gomez, all from Cuba. Only through certain underground independent Latino macrocinema networks back in New York, did I see us as a people being reflected in all of our various shades and colors, like La Cinema Café, Chica Luna, and LatinBeat. Much of it is being lead by Dominican/Dominican American and Puerto Rican filmmakers based out of the Washington Heights and East Harlem sections of Manhattan. Many of these films can be seen in the various independent film festivals based in New York other than ADFP, such as Urbanworld Film Festival, the New York International Latino Film Festival, ImageNation Film and Music Festival, and Reel Sisters of the Diaspora Film Festival to name a few. Even though you have to search for it, our stories are being told, and are out there.

Much of this motivates me to work on (and continue with) my own cinematic projects. I have a few cinematic and animated television projects in the vault as I write this, and looking to get produced in the near future. There needs to be a truer representation of who we are. Our stories need to be, and will be, told.

© Copyright 2007 Blacktino e-News Network

#### POST YOUR COMMENTS TO DIALOGUE ON ARTICLES:

1. Register to Blacktino.net.
2. Login in with your username & password.
3. Scroll to the end of each article.
4. Post your comments.