

FUBU
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Raymond Santana was arrested early in the morning on April 20th, 1989. Along with four other black Harlem teens (Antron McCray, Kevin Richardson, Yusef Salaam, and Korey Wise), Raymond was charged with the brutal rape of Trisha Meili, a 28-year-old, white investment banker. Raymond was 14 at the time. Along with the other four teens, he was tried, convicted and sent to jail for the next seven years. The teens became known as the Central Park Five.

In late December, 1995, Raymond was released from prison:

Raymond Santana: ...I had to register as a sex offender. I had a seven o'clock curfew. People looked at you different. You know, I couldn't get a job.

Reggie Ossé: It was in the papers when y'all came home!

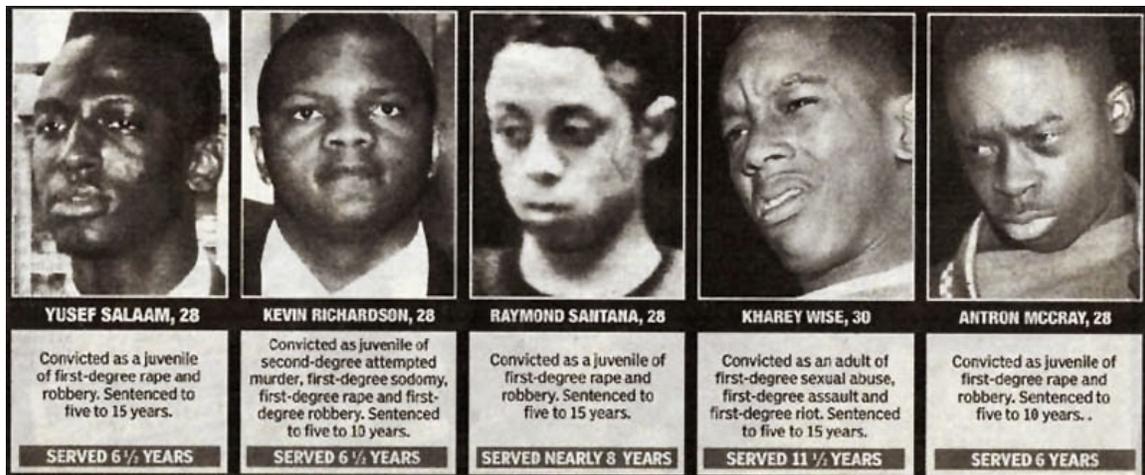
Raymond Santana: Yeah, yeah, yeah it was in the papers. I remember Steven Lopez came home before me, they put it out there. And so, you know, now came all these obstacles that I didn't even know was gonna occur. I start filling out these applications and they're like "have you ever been convicted of a crime?" And you go shit—

Reggie Ossé: Do I lie, or do I—

Raymond Santana: Do I lie or... And then you say "aight yeah." And they say, "what was it," and you say, "rape"... you ain't getting no job. You ain't getting no job. And then...

Reggie Ossé: How many?

Raymond Santana: A lot. A lot of applications. And even if that one person said, "aight, you know what, I'ma overlook that, what happened?" And you go, "Central Park jogger"? It's over. See you later. There is no job.¹



¹ Ossé, Reggie. "The Raymond Santana The Central Park 5 Episode." *SoundCloud*, Loud Speakers Network, soundcloud.com/thecombatjackshow/the-raymond-santana-the-central-park-5-episode.

Raymond was incarcerated, once again, on October 29th, 1999, for criminal possession of crack cocaine. The length of his sentence was predicated on his prior rape conviction. He was sentenced to between one-and-a-half and four-and-a-half years in prison.

On December 23rd, 2002, Raymond was released, once again, from prison, this time ahead of schedule. Due to new DNA findings, the Central Park Five were acquitted of all charges in the initial rape. Circumstantial evidence had shown for a long time that the rape had been committed by one person, not five; this person, Matias Reyes, long since incarcerated on other serial rape charges, had come forward, giving matching DNA and a new account of the night (this new account matched the evidence in ways the initial, coerced confessions from the CP5 had not). Due to his time already served on the now-vacated rape charge, Raymond was released from prison in time for Christmas:

It was a celebration. All the guys jumped around, they're "rahhhh," they all cheering. "You goin' home, it's over, you goin' home!" The corrections officer said "well you know, it's a lot of people out there. You wanna go through the back? I'll get a car for you, you know you can go out the back way." And I said, "boy, I'm a free man, I'm going out the front! Open that door and let's go." It took me back to that perp walk that they do, and now this time it was a free man walk. And it was definitely great to walk through that, to hold my head up high. I said, "I told you. We were innocent".²

Raymond is a self-identified black man. But he is also Puerto Rican, on both sides of his family, and as such his ethnicity is often misread in our society. The space of Afrolatinx people in the U.S., even in the current day, can cause the average American confusion³:

Charlemagne: Mero, you Afrolatino?

The Kid Mero: Yes! We gonna start this conversation again? We just had this conversation off-camera, but we can start this conversation again.

Charlemagne: Yeah I just found out about this term a week ago.

The Kid Mero: Charlemagne just found out about Afrolatinos...

DJ Envy: He calls everybody Afrolatino now.

The Kid Mero: Oh word? I mean, in New York City I feel like most people are Afrolatino, or Mexican.

Desus Nice: I mean, everyone's from Africa, right? So you cant really offend anyone with that.

² Burns, Ken and Sarah Burns, directors. *The Central Park Five*. 2012.

³ Breakfast Club Power 105.1 FM. "Uncommon Sense Cast Interview at The Breakfast Club Power 105.1 (04/01/2016)." *YouTube*, 1 Apr. 2016, www.youtube.com/watch?v=q4K30voPZ4s&t=189s.

The experience Raymond Santana (and the rest of the CP5) had is, unfortunately, a common and constructed *black* American experience. While this is rooted in the African-American experience, to the eyes of the overseer⁴, Jamaicans, Nigerians, Puerto Ricans (like Raymond) and African-Americans are all *black*, and subject to the same criminal justice system incongruities as the rest of the groups we (as Americans) treat as *black people*:

The drug war has been brutal—complete with SWAT teams, tanks, bazookas, grenade launchers and sweeps of entire neighborhoods—but those who live in white communities have little clue to the devastation wrought. This war has been waged almost exclusively in poor communities of color, even though studies consistently show that people of all colors use and sell illegal drugs at remarkably similar rates. In fact, some studies indicate that white youth are significantly more likely to engage in illegal drug dealing than black youth. Any notion that drug use among African-Americans is more severe or dangerous is belied by the data. White youth, for example, have about three times the number of drug-related visits to the emergency room as their African-American counterparts.

That is not what you would guess, though, when entering our nation's prisons and jails, overflowing as they are with black and brown drug offenders. In some states, African-Americans comprise 80 percent-90 percent of all drug offenders sent to prison⁵.

While Raymond's criminal justice experiences, as a Puerto Rican man, mirror those of African-Americans around the country, internally between related minority groups, cultural conflicts exist⁶:

DJ Vlad: So, I noticed that in your music, and in your conversation, you use the N-word a lot.

Cardi B: Yeah?

DJ Vlad: Um, and this is one of the most loaded words... I mean, I would say this is *the* most loaded word in the English language. I remember at one point, there was a whole thing where Jennifer Lopez used it in one of her verses. I think Ja Rule wrote the verse, but she used it, and there was this whole backlash over Latinos using the N-word and so forth... what's your approach to that?

⁴ [Overseer, overseer, overseer, overseer
Officer, officer, officer, officer
Yeah, officer from overseer
KRS-One, "Sound of da Police," 1993](#)

⁵ Alexander, Michelle. "The New Jim Crow." *The Nation*, 21 Oct. 2015, www.thenation.com/article/new-jim-crow/.

⁶ DJ Vlad. "Cardi B Loves Lil Kim's Sluttiness, Dating Black Guys, Latinos Using the N-Word." *YouTube*, YouTube, 20 Mar. 2017, www.youtube.com/watch?v=E-Z-5KEWW0.

Cardi B: Um... it's just, it something that, it's just like, a lingo. Even if I want to stop saying it, I can't stop saying it, I'm sorry. It seems like it's something that's so normal, which is bad, but it is what it is. And if it comes to the fact that she's Latina, you know like, my parents, my father's side, were Spanish, were Hispanic and everything, but its like... where do them Spanish people came from? Where do them Latina people came from? They mixed people, you know? We mixed with African, European, uh what is it, Mulattic and everything. It's just like, what am I considered? And at the end of the day, Latinos and Hispanics, they are considered a minority. You think white folks see Hispanic and black people like "they're Hispanic, they're black"... no! We're all the same to them, so it's like [*Cardi shrugs*]... know what I'm saying?

Cardi B and the Kid Mero represent a new type of Dominican-American celebrity. Dominicans are notorious in the United States for refusing to acknowledge their blackness, due to the relationship in Hispaniola of the Dominican Republic to Haiti. It feels fresh to see first-generation Dominican-Americans who don't just *admit* they're black, but are proud of it. They can say 'nigga', they *are* niggas, and they treat it not as a question, but a fact.

To some extent, I think Afrolatinx people in America occupy a space similar to the Mulatto, both of which are things that I am. The vast majority of Latinos come from a mixed-ethnicity background, usually involving European, African and Indigenous American ancestry. I think there is a vague underlying awareness of this in the United States, yet, in many ways, we also often colloquially treat Latino as a race. Personally, I'm often "confused for" Latino "instead of" Mulatto, as if racial and cultural backgrounds are identical concepts (i.e., that it isn't possible to be *both* Latinx *and* Mulatto):

Drake: You know, if I ever feel anything, or if I ever feel like an outsider, it's usually because I'm not American, to be honest with you. That's when I feel like people are, like, you know, against me, or they feel like I'm not part of, like, the... and I guess maybe it has something to do with the fact that I do have quite an eclectic makeup, you know: I am mixed, I am Jewish, you know. But, yeah I feel like, um... you know, at the end of the day, I'll tell you, when it comes to, uh, when it comes to everything else, I'm *black*. I am referred to as a *black* artist. Like last night, at that awards show, I am, I'm a *black* artist.

DJ Semtex: You're talking about the Grammys?

Drake: Yeah. Like, I am, you know, I'm apparently a rapper, you know. Even though Hotline Bling is not a *rap* song, the only category they can manage to fit me in is in a *rap* category, because... maybe

because I've rapped in the past, or because I'm black, I can't figure out why.⁷

Cardi B and the Kid Mero aren't the only lightskinned celebrities prominently vocalizing their blackness in 2017; arguably the biggest commercial musician of our time is as well. I don't think it's unimportant that there is a widely circulated set of memes prefaced around the theory that Drake is secretly Dominican⁸; the increasing visibility surrounding the blackness of Mulattos, Dominicans and other related groups is being explored by many different corners of the cultural zeitgeist right now.

In November 2016, 1/3 of Latinos voted for Donald Trump. In comparison, only 8% of the "Black" vote went to Trump. How many of these Latino voters were Afrolatinx? How many cross-identified as "Black" and "Hispanic" on exit polls? How many were Caucasians who identify as Hispanic? How many fell into neither "Black" nor "White" categories? What were the numbers, by group, of Cubans, Mexicans, Dominicans and Puerto Ricans voting for him?

If we, as Latinx people, understand the term "Latino" as a flawed category, why do we stay loyal to it? If it is used primarily against *us*, as a way to ideologically split populations of minorities, then maybe we need to move away from self-identifying with the term, or should at least continue to *loosen* the term until it means nothing. Since its inception as a sovereign nation, American oppression has occurred on the axis of *black* and *white*. These terms, like *latinx*, are constructions, not facts. What would the political consequences be of an America where Dominicans, Mexicans and Puerto Ricans and other self-identified *latinx* groups all considered themselves black, rather than "other"? Throughout *The New Jim Crow*, Michelle Alexander posits that race has consistently been used by the rich, white elites of America as a tool to create a wedge between Black Americans and working-class White Americans, with the ultimate goal of splitting these groups up to limit their organized political power. Along Alexander's line of thought, it would likely make it harder for conservative Republicans to advance their agendas.

Of course, we should all be able to create our identities, as individuals, as we see fit, and the goal of flexible terms (i.e. the change from *latino/a* to *latinx*) is to make that possible for more people in the future than it has been in the past. In this context, I think that the work contemporary pop culture figures like Cardi B and the Kid Mero are doing, in small but consistent doses, is important. In the same way that Jennifer Lopez expanded the American image of Latinas in the 1990s, these people are subtly reframing the term *black* to apply to groups that culturally we have usually relegated exclusively to the category of *Latino* in the past. In doing so, they are *loosening* the terms *Hispanic* and *Latino/a/x*, and making it harder for the average American to picture specific complexions or sets of physical features when they hear those terms. In the near future, hopefully, we can live in a country where a police description of a "Hispanic male" suspect will be utterly useless.

⁷ DJ Semtex. "Drake Talks 'More Life,' Kanye's Rant, Quentin Miller, Meek Mill & More with DJ Semtex." *YouTube*, 18 Feb. 2017, youtu.be/vGTBc84iV7M?t=23m51s.

⁸ FlamaTV. "Flama Conspiracies: Drake is Dominican." *YouTube*, YouTube, 8 Apr. 2016, www.youtube.com/watch?v=6uakBrVPD0Q.

The filmmaker Arthur Jafa describes his first time seeing Kubrick's *2001*, as a young black boy in the Mississippi Delta⁹:

...the thing is, at this point in my life I didn't have unchaperoned interactions with white people, young or old. He was sitting in the ticket booth with the door open so I walked over to him and said, "Excuse me, sir, I've just come out of the movie, could you tell me what it was about?" He looked down at me over his paper, paused a moment, and said, "Son, I've been looking at it all week and haven't got a clue." And that's the last thing I remember. I don't remember how I got home, what other conversations I might have had, nothing. But that brief interaction I've never forgotten. The film had completely leveled our differences, race, class, age. So that for that moment, in the presence of this monumental work, we were equal.

a black hagakure.

to the central conundrum of black being (the double bind of our ontological existence) lie in the fact that common misery both defines and limits who we are. such that our efforts to eliminate those forces which constrain also functions to dissipate much of which gives us our specificity, our uniqueness, our flavor and that by destroying the binds that define we will cease to be, but this is the good death (cachoeira) and to be embraced.

Our black death, our Latin death, is the birth of the individual. Maybe we'll get there someday.

Raymond Santana: The best thing was that, you know, they said um, you know, they, they, they charged us, tried us, convicted us, sent us to prison, you know, within two years, right? So this case has been on for 25 years, and we got some victory. Now you gotta deal with us for the rest of *our* lives.

Reggie Ossé: Yeah, you ain't goin' nowhere.

Raymond Santana: We ain't goin' nowhere.¹⁰

⁹ Jafa, Arthur. *My black death*. Moors Head Press, 2016.

¹⁰ Ossé, Reggie. "The Raymond Santana The Central Park 5 Episode." *SoundCloud*, Loud Speakers Network, soundcloud.com/thecombatjackshow/the-raymond-santana-the-central-park-5-episode.



Esteban Jefferson, *Raymond Santana, December 22nd, 2002*, oil on linen, 6" x 10", 2017