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**Afroamerican Movements:**  
*Political Contests and Historical Challenges*



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Last week there were two conferences in U.S. universities concerned with people we call Afro-Latinos. The counterpoint between a conference at Howard University titled Times of Change and Opportunities for the Afro Colombian Population organized by the Colombian embassy, and a conference The African Diaspora in the Americas: Political and Cultural Resistance at the University of Minnesota, exemplify poles within the contested terrain of Black politics in the Americas. The fact that we are today closing a third conference in less than two weeks is not only a demonstration de que los negros estamos de moda como dice mi amiga Claudia Mosquera (that we Afro-Latinos are in fashion) but more so that Afro-Latin American politics is now a key arena, not only in local and national but also in hemispheric and global politics.

The contrast between the speakers and sponsors of the conferences at Howard and Minnesota represent two distinctive modes of racial politics that are associated with opposing social and political ideologies, cultural politics, and historic projects. For instance, the conference at Howard had speakers from the U.S. Agency for International Department (USAID), and U.S. Black conservatives politicians like Gregory Meek, while the conference at Minnesota featured Jesus “Chucho” Garcia, the main leader of the network of Afro-Venezuelan organizations as the keynote speaker.

In fact, last week Chucho Garcia published an article in the internet critiquing the conference at Howard as an example of the complicity of the Afro-Colombian right with global neoliberalism and with the U.S. imperial project. In the same vein, a U.S. coalition in solidarity with Afro-Colombian grassroots organizations denounced the conference as yet another example of a developing partnership between Black conservatives in Colombia and the U.S. with the twin governments of Bush and Uribe. Likewise, an email of the Proceso de Comunidades Negras (one of the largest organizations of the Black movement in Colombia) observed that what was named by the Colombian government as the Afro-Colombian week at Washington, D.C., namely the conference at Howard along with other meetings and a free

concert by Afro-Colombian singer Petrona Martinez, was “part of the enchantment that the government devised to try to get the votes for the Free Trade Agreement”. The title itself, *Times of Change and Opportunities for the Afro Colombian Population*, reveals an optimism about the current situation of Afro-Colombians, an angle of vision articulated from the standpoint of an increasingly visible political class whose point of view sharply contrasts with the sad condition of millions of Afro-Colombians displaced by the armed conflict, and by the evidence from social research that shows that Afro-Colombians have among the worst indicators of social and economic inequality in the Americas.

The contest over the character of Black politics in Colombia, that so far in our narrative presents an Afro-Colombian elite supportive of Uribe’s regime (with all the implications of his anti-terrorist/pro-war policy of “democratic security”, and his unconditional alliance with U.S. neoliberal and imperialist politics), and allied with conservative sectors in the U.S.; in contrast with Afro-Colombian grassroots organizations and their allies in the U.S. (like the TransAfrica Forum), should be framed in a larger landscape of hemispheric and global geopolitics, cultural politics, and political economy. In this sense, in mapping Black politics in the Americas one of the main contradictions today is between Colombia and Venezuela. On one end the Afro-Colombian elite is becoming a transnational showcase and imperial lab for a conservative neoliberal Pan-Africanism, while on the other end the network of Afro-Venezuelan organizations is championing initiatives for articulating an hemispheric Black left. For the last two years, in the month of November Afro-Venezuelans had been organizing north/south meetings of Afro-Latinos and Afro-North American close allies with that purpose. The 2006 meeting was called *Afrodescendants against Neoliberalism* and the 2007 *Afrodescendants for revolutionary transformations in Latin America*. Even though there are close connections with the government led by Hugo Chavez, to the extent that there was government financing for both meetings, there also is a meaningful level of autonomy of the network of Afro-Venezuelan organizations and their leaders from the Venezuelan state. In short, this contrast between the path of the Afro-Colombian Black elite and the Afro-Venezuelan web of social movements is an important point of entry for a cartography of a complex and contested terrain of contemporary Afro-Latino politics.



In this presentation, I will intend to draw, in broad strokes, some key historical, analytical, and political themes, for mapping the arena of Afro-Latino politics within a more general field of social, cultural, and racial politics. For this, I’ll try to present a world-historical perspective on Black social movements as antisystemic forces, in counterpoint to the global pattern of domination and exploitation that Anibal Quijano baptized as the coloniality of power, while engaging in dialogue with Mark Sawyer’s analysis of racial politics as a process of race

cycles. I will close by making some practical observations about our roles as intellectuals working on Afro-Latino diasporas from U.S. institutions.

The race cycles perspective articulates a comprehensive framework for an historical analysis of Black politics in the Americas in so far as it combines political-economy and cultural hermeneutics, the interplay of national and transnational forces, the societal significance of critical conjunctures, and Black historical agency. In this analytical schema racial formations are conceptualized as a complex field and a contested process marked by the “constantly unsettled meanings of race and their tension with other societal structures”. In the same vein, racial politics is understood as a structurally determined and historically contingent process, a contested terrain mediated by state formations, imperial statecraft, and the vast array of struggles that compose the everyday scenarios of power relations. The very concept of race cycles signifies a dynamic temporality in which a central scenario is the relationship between the racial state and Black movements as prime movers of the historical ebb and flow between moments of crisis and social unrest, and moments of equilibrium in dominance and hegemony. I will like to suggest that we can engage this theoretical framework with world-historical analysis in order to frame Afroamerican politics in general and Afroamerican movements in particular within larger landscapes of power, this adding a global spatiality to it. A full development of this thesis is beyond the scope of this presentation but I will like to advance some ideas that are necessary to make my argument here.

I will begin with a historical argument that we can identify four main cycles of Black politics in the Americas that correspond to four critical world-historical conjunctures: the first one is the 18th century wave of slave revolts that had its climax in the Haitian revolution (1796-1804), which in turn marked the birth of Black politics as an explicit terrain of identity, rights, and as a project of emancipation. That was the time that Eric Hobsbawm called the “Age of Revolution” when, arguably, the most profound social revolution of the era was in Haiti. Here, I want to quickly highlight the concern that Rebecca raised yesterday about the need to keep-up an active memory of Haiti as the foundation of Black liberation, as an imperative of any transformative transnational agenda of Afrodiasporic politics, a disposition that is enacted by the efforts of Afrovenezuelan representatives to the Andean Parliament to organize a world forum in solidarity with Haiti as approved in the 2007 World Social Forum in Nairobi. The second period I locate between the first and second world wars, an epoch that was also defined by the Russian and Mexican revolutions, and by the world-economic crisis of the 1930s. In the Black world this was the time of Garveyism and its huge transnational movement of Black self-affirmation, but it was also a time of a radical Pan-Africanism in which Black marxisms and socialisms were crucial (for instance CLR James in the Fourth International and Claude McKay in the 1921 meeting of the Third International in Russia). On the cultural front it was the period of the Black modernist cultural politics of the Harlem Renaissance, and of Black surrealism and the negritude movement in the Francophone zone of the African Diaspora (France, Africa, and the Caribbean) that articulated their own webs of Black cosmopolitanism and visions of Black freedom dreams (to use Robin Kelley’s expression). This Afro-Francophone world was the historical universe that produced world-historical figures such as Aime Césaire and Franz Fanon. The third moment, I date from the post World War II period to the global wave of antisystemic movements of the 1960s and 1970s. This is the period that Nikhil Pal Singh characterizes in his book *Black is a Country* as the long view of the civil rights movement. This moment was marked by a systemic cycle of struggles for decolonization in Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean, and by the rise of movements against Jim Crow in the United States. In the particular conjuncture of the sixties (which here is not a decade but a historical time that we can trace between 1955 and 1975), the main axis of Afroamerican movements was located in the U.S. that served as an inspiration to struggles

of Black liberation in South Africa, and later to the rise of Black politics in South America (as we heard yesterday from Daniel Garces reference to the 1975 Congress of Black Cultures of the Americas in Cali, Colombia). In its second moment (1968-1975) the U.S. Black Freedom Movement (to use Cornel West's concept to characterize the times) coined the expression Black power that was later translated into women power, indigenous power, Chicana/o power, etc, thus inspiring and providing language for the new social movements that emerged. The wave of antisystemic movement of the sixties converged with a world-economic recession that was deeply felt in the oil crisis of 1973. The combination of a wave of antisystemic movement and a global crisis of capital accumulation, informed the rise of neoliberalism in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The fourth period I am proposing to conceptualize Black racial politics in the Americas, begins in late 1980s and early 1990s. This is the time of the rise of the new American imperialism (for instance, of the invasions of Grenada and Panama, and of the first Iraq war), of the end of the enchantment with neoliberal state policies because people already felt their negative economic and political effects. This was also the era of the peaceful revolution that dismantled the soviet bloc, exacerbating the crisis of actually existing socialism. This was also the moment of the emergence of an array of social movements against the effects of neoliberal globalization and particularly of the rise of Black and Indigenous movements in Latin America.

This current period is the one that I have been researching for several years and I will talk more about this, but before I'll like to flesh out the argument a bit more by quickly addressing three key theoretical issues that are germane to the main theme of this conference. The first refers to how to analytically represent the global and how to methodologically articulate the relation between the global and the local. There are volumes written and lots to discuss about this sort of questions, but there are a few things I'll like to say here.

First, that I see globalization as a long-term process, articulated by a world-historical matrix that following Anibal Quijano I conceptualize with the notion of the colonality of power. In a blurb, the colonality of power can be represented as the interweaving of four regimes of domination (racism, capitalism, patriarchy, and imperialism) and the inter-sectionality of the forms of identity (race, class, gender, sexuality), culture and knowledge, as well as the modes of political-economy (capitalist exploitation and accumulation), and the institutions of geopolitics and political community (modern nation-states and empires) associated with them. There are two dimensions of this argument I want to highlight here. The first is that this sort of world-historical perspective oppose a pervasive methodological nationalism wherein the nation-state is the primary unit of analysis (a methodology and a politics that is clearly challenged by African diaspora perspectives), but it also against top-down world-systems analyses in which the national and the local are simply subordinated to the global. In contrast, I contend that what we call globalization or world-space is a contradictory and relatively open process, in which specific "parts" (such as nations, regions like the Pacific coast in Central America, the Antilles, and the Afroamerican diaspora) have their relative autonomy and therefore their own temporalities and configurations of space. The other point I want to make is that in this understanding of global constellations of power, race and racism and their articulations with labor, gender, sexuality, and knowledge, are central elements in this long-term process of globalization. An important conclusion of this sort of argument is that "racial formations" and racisms (deliberately in plural), are complex and historically specific processes that, on the one hand articulate and unfold in particular ways in time and space (e.g., locally, regionally, and nationally), and on the other hand compose world-historical orders (hence the possibility and significance of concepts such as "world racial order" as proposed by scholars such as Bonilla Silva, Goldberg, Ferreira da Silva, and Mills, among others).



This leads me to address the second analytical question which is: what is the world-historical significance of Blacks movements. As proposed by Bill Martin and Howard Winant, arguably, the first movements for global justice and democracy were the composed struggles against slavery and the abolitionist movement. If by antisystemic movements we mean the constellation of struggles, collective actions, and organizational forms that are able to challenge and transform the global order of things in different key moments in world history, when we analyze the different waves of antisystemic movements, we will see that they correspond to the transnational race cycles that we described before. This is not an historical accident because of the centrality of racist regimes in modern/colonial scenarios of economic, cultural, and political power. I will say that one of the best examples that we have of this kind of world-historical analysis in which individual and collective agency and racial politics are framed within complex and contradictory processes in different spaces and scales (world capitalism, empire-building and imperial competition, state formation, regions, class and race, but unfortunately with no gender analysis) is *The Black Jacobins*, CLR James' 1938 book on the Haitian revolution.

My third analytical question is: how to conceptualize the African Diaspora and Afro-Latinidades within the diaspora. I've written about this and here I will just say that I build from Tiffany Patterson's and Robin Kelley's analysis of the African diaspora as a condition linked to world-historical processes of capitalist exploitation, western domination (geopolitical and geo-cultural), and modern/colonial state-formation; and as a process constituted by the cultural practices, everyday resistances, social struggles, and political organization of "black people as transnational/translocal subjects". I add a third dimension, the African diaspora as a project of affinity and liberation founded on a translocal ideology of community-making and a global politics of decolonization. In this latter sense, the African Diaspora can be conceived as a project of decolonization and liberation embedded in the cultural practices, intellectual currents, social movements, and political actions of Afro-diasporic subjects. The project of diaspora as a search for liberation and transnational community-making is grounded on the conditions of subalternization of Afro-diasporic peoples and in their/our historical agency of resistance and self-affirmation. As a project the African diaspora can be described as a north, a historically grounded utopian horizon to Black freedom dreams.



In mapping African diaspora spaces we need to historicize them specifying their diversity and complexity while analyzing their linkages. Earl Lewis concept of African-American communities as “overlapping diasporas” is a useful tool to understand diversity and articulation within the African diaspora. I propose the concept of intertwined diasporas to signify not only the plurality of histories and projects articulated within the African diaspora, but also the world-historical entangleness of multiple genealogies of diasporic formation (e.g., African, South Asian, and East Asian diasporas composing a Caribbean diaspora space), and the transdiasporic character of world cities’ populations (e.g., working classes and new immigrants as subaltern modernities). Afro-Latinidades tend to be marginalized and even erased from most mappings of the African diaspora, at the same time that African diaspora perspectives need to play a more important role in Latino/American studies. This shows the marginalization of Afro-Latinidades from Latino studies while it reveals our invisibilization as Afro-Latinos/as in most cartographies of the African diaspora. The same Eurocentric ideology that place blackness at the bottom of the great chain of being and imagine Africa as a dark continent outside of history, locate Blacks at the bottom or outside of Latino/Americanist world-regional and national definitions. On the other end, the geo-politics of knowledge that corresponds to the sequence of British and U.S. hegemony in the modern/colonial capitalist world-system, informs cognitive mappings and historical accounts of the African diaspora and the Black Atlantic focused on the Anglo world. Nonetheless, in spite of this double subalternization of Afro-Latinidades from both Anglocentric accounts of the African diaspora and Latino/Americanist discourses, there is a long history of Afro-Latina/o diasporic consciousness and participation in African diaspora networks.



I will now return to the current period of racial politics in the Americas to focus on Afroamerican movements. Let me introject a testimonial element to locate myself and to ground the analysis in my own research. As an Afrodescendant and as an intellectual-activist, what appealed me the most as a topic of research, was the rise of Black movements in Latin America. But after digging more deeply into the subject, I decided to redefine the object of investigation in terms of three interweaved processes that compose the developing field of Black politics in Latin America. The three processes are: social movements of Afrodescendants, ethno-racial state policies, and the increasing importance of transnational actors of diverse character from the United Nations and the World Bank, to the US Agency for International Development and the U.S. Black Congressional Caucus.

Thus, the present dynamics of Black politics in the Americas should be framed within the contested terrain of neoliberal globalization and the forms of state and economy associated with it, the geo-political contest between U.S. imperial designs and its allies against dissident states that oppose it (especially Bolivia, Cuba, Ecuador, and Venezuela), as well as in relation to the struggles over the redefinition of nationhood and over recognition, rights, and resources that come along with the politicization of ethnic and racial identities of Black and Indigenous peoples in the region. There are local, regional, national, and transnational moments in this arena, and these are the concrete spaces of power that compose the field of forces (to use the expression of Bourdieu and Foucault) that we are researching and in which we hope to be intervening. This is the general historical scenario within which I frame the current cycle of racial politics in the Americas.



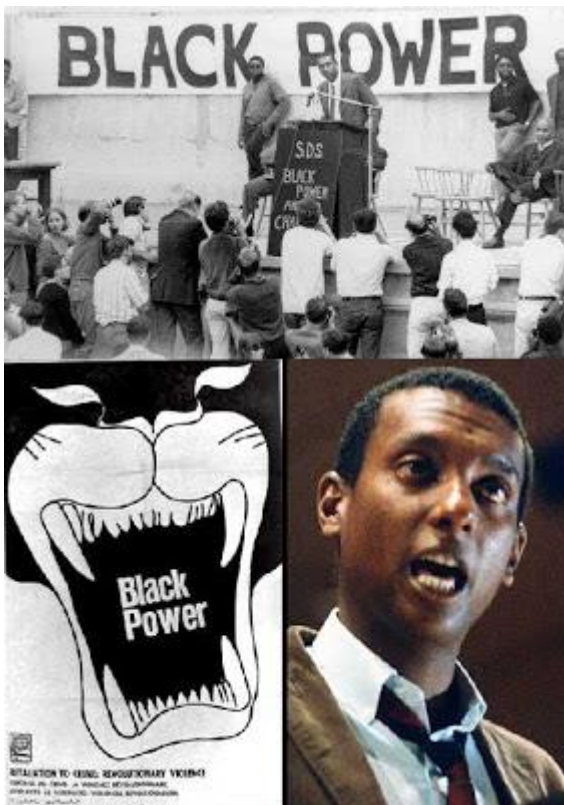


The history of Black social movements had always been diverse and full of conflicts and debates between various political perspectives and ideologies of power, different ways of understanding the meanings of “race” and racism and how to fight against them, and among contending historical projects and their implications in regard to distinct alliances and horizons. For instance, in the 1930s, there were substantive differences among those regarded as the Pan-African leaders of the time. For example, we can see three different views on Africa and its meanings: first in Marcus Garvey’s transnational Black nationalism wherein Africa was the ultimate source of Black identity that needed to be recasted and modernized in favor of a sort of “Black empire” (as analyzed by Michelle Stephens); in contrast to WEB DuBois’ concept of Africa as a necessary referent in Black struggles for democracy and social justice conceived as centered in the Americas; both different from CLR James’ understanding of African struggles for decolonization as a key moment in the larger project of socialist internationalism and particularly within the politics of the Fourth International. Both DuBois and James developed a tradition that Cedric Robinson calls Black Marxism, which constitutes a challenge to both western Marxism with its tendency toward Eurocentrism and class reductionism, and to the dominant strands of Black nationalism that tend not to clearly see the links between racism and capitalism (and I will add patriarchy and imperialism, following women of color feminisms).

Likewise, during the wave of antisystemic movements of the 1960s/1970s, the Black Freedom Movement in the United States, that was one of the keystones of the tsunami of struggles that shook and to some extent transformed the world, was also heterogeneous and full with all sort of internal differences. Most accounts tend to highlight differences between what is known as the southern-centered civil rights movement which climax is usually dated to the 1963 civil rights march to Washington, D.C., with the resulting approval of laws in 1964 and 1965, against racial discrimination and granting voting rights to Black citizens; in contrast with the Black power movement that is usually described as mostly placed in northern cities, is traced historically to the rise of Malcolm X as premier leader of African-American radicalism, to Stokely Carmichael Black power slogan in SNCC campaigns, and to the emergence of the Black Panthers in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The story is much more diverse and complex and we do not have time and space here for details and nuances, but it is important to

say that the differences between the reformist integrationism of the dominant tendency within the civil rights movement, and the revolutionary projects of transformation advocated by organizations such as the Black Panthers and the League of Revolutionary Black Workers, reveal meaningful differences in the U.S. Black Freedom Movement of the 1960s/1970s. Once again, these are just examples to provide a historical grounding to the outline of the present that I am trying to offer.

When we talk about waves or cycles of social movements, we should recognize a relationship between the rise and fall of antisystemic movements in critical periods of crisis and restructuring in the world-economy, moments of emergence or decline of imperial hegemony (like today), times of proliferation of war or of relative peace, and times of rebellion or of relative conformity. One of the biggest historical dilemmas of strong cycles of protest is that their successes tend to create the conditions for subsequent periods of cooptation and repression by the dominant powers with the consequence that the movements get ripped of their antisystemic character. This dynamics of the ebb and flow of antysitemic movements and race cycles, serves to partly explain the changes in U.S. Black politics after the Black Freedom Movement of the 1960s and 70s. The approval of laws that extended the franchise catalyzed a considerable increase in elected position occupied by Blacks, while explicit state opposition to racism by means of laws and public policies against discrimination, and the increase in social mobility partly due to Affirmative Action policies promoted some improvements in education and employment.



All of these developments demonstrate some of the achievements of the U.S. Black movements of the 1960s/70s. However, today class polarizations among Afro-North Americans are more sharp than in the 1960s, while there is weakening of Black left currents (as we can see from the relative failure of efforts such as the Black Radical Congress) and grassroots organizations (even though they are re-emerging especially in the South), at the same time that we are witnessing a rise in Black conservatism, as we can visibly see in figures like Colin Powell and Condoleza Rice. To some extent, the very same successes of the movement facilitated the integration of much of its political energies and social activism

within the structures of state and corporate power that champion the racial ideology that Eduardo Bonilla Silva calls “color-blind racism”, a racist regime whose ugly face was revealed in the racial and class underpinnings of federal policies toward New Orleans in the crisis of Katrina, and that is embellish with an imperial multiculturalism wherein a Black secretary of state defends another invasion of Haiti and a Latino Attorney General justifies torture in Iraq.

In contrast to the relative weakening of Black social movement and grassroots politics in the U.S., in Latin America there was in the 1980s an effervescence of explicitly Black (or Afro) social movements, a change that we describe as a shift of the main locus of Afroamerican movements from north to south. We know that there is a long tradition of racial politics in Latin America, and nowadays very often the the Partido Independiente de Color in Cuba (from 1908 to the 1912 racial massacre) and the Frente Negra Brasileira in the early 1930s, are used as examples that Black political parties were first organized in Latin America. However, until the 1970s and 1980s most of Afro-Latin American political participation was within the main political parties (mostly liberal and left) and most grassroots efforts within multi-ethnic/racial labor unions and peasant organizations.

A constellation of social movements explicitly self-defined as Black (or Afro) began to emerge unevenly in Latin America and the Creole Caribbean in the late 1970s-early 1980s, and began to bear fruits locally and regionally in the late 1980s-early 1990s. In my research I found that many of the main leaders of Black movements across the region used to be members of the Latin American left who were disappointed with the racism and class reductionism of the mestizo left and consequently shifted gears in the context of the crisis of the Soviet bloc and of socialist discourse in general. The mutual influence of Black and Indigenous movements that emerged together in that period, also place them together with the emergence of new social movement politics (ecological, gender, sexual, cultural, ethnic) not only in Latin America but throughout the world, changing political identities and cultures and the ways and means of doing politics. At the same time there was a maturation of the negative effects of the neoliberal project that included corporate colonization of regions and populations that were relatively apart from the logic of capital and state regulation (like the Pacific Coast of Colombia and Ecuador and the Caribbean coast of Central America). In this process of development of Black cultural and political identities in Latin America, U.S. Black movements and their most visible figures (like ML King and Malcolm X) were (and are) a fundamental referent.

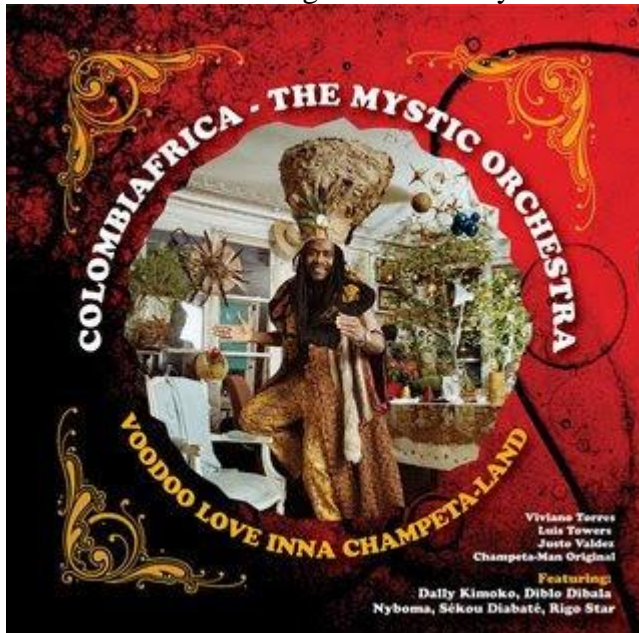
In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Black and Indigenous movements in Latin American, had been able to organize local grassroots organizations, articulate national webs of social movements and began to weave transnational networks. Along with the so-called Washington Consensus, there was a rise of explicitly Black movements and organizations that led struggles for cultural identity and recognition, ethnic education, land rights, economic justice, ecological integrity, ancestral knowledges, and political representation. By the 1990s, Black and Indigenous movements championed campaigns to declare Latin American states as pluriethnic, multicultural, and even plurinational (especially indigenous) by means of constitutional reforms, thus challenging white elite creole discourses of mestizaje, that were founding ideologies of nationhood since the 19th century. This resulted in constitutional changes of that sort in Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico, Venezuela, Bolivia, and Peru. These changes were also associated with the organization of a transnational networks of Black and Indigenous movements in the Americas. Here, two important moments are the north/south organization in 1992 against the celebration of 1492 as a “discovery”, and the Zapatista uprising in 1994 along with the signing of the North American Free Trade

Agreement. For the web of Afro-Latino organizations that still known as the Alianza Estrategica de Afrodescendientes en las Americas (Strategic Alliance of Afrodescendants in the Americas), a strong glue was the process of organizing toward the 2001 world conference against racism in Durban, South Africa. That process served as an organizational and education space for the formation and consolidation of Afro-Latino webs of social movements such as the Alianza Estrategica and the Red de Mujeres Afro-Latinoamericanas, Afrocaribenas y de la Diaspora (Strategic Alliance of Afro-Latin American, Afro-Caribbean Women and Women from the Diaspora) that Ivette Modestin, who is here in this conference, represents. It was within this process of hemispheric organizing where the movement developed a collective leadership and a political identity. As put by Romero Rodriguez from Mundo Afro in Uruguay, in one of the most important meetings of the web in 1999 at Santiago de Chile “entramos Negros y salimos Afrodescendientes” (we enter as Blacks and came out as Afrodescendants), meaning that the movement coined the term Afrodescendent as a new political identity with the purpose of including people of African descent of all colors. The term was later was adopted by the U.N, and by NGOs and international organizations. As a political category the signifier Afrodescendant embodies the will of developing diasporic ties with members of the global African diaspora in the Americas and beyond.

After the western boycott to the Durban meeting and its accord, led by the U.S. (which was worsen by its convergence with the events of September 11, 2001), arguably, the region of the world in which the Durban agenda against racism became more salient was in Latin America. The Black movements of the region had obtained important achievements such as the 1993 Law 70 in Colombia (the “law of negritudes rights” that grant collective rights over land primarily to community councils to rural Black communities in the Pacific region), that as Daniel said yesterday can be considered the most important piece of Afro-reparations in the Americas, as well as the land rights of the Quilombolas in Brazil. The organized efforts and collective actions of the movements had captured attention of the governments of the region (signatoires of the Durban accord) and of key transnational institutions (such as the World Bank and IDB). Consequently, now there is a general trend toward state recognition of the specificity of Black identities and cultures in the region, in several countries there are special legislations, and there are government institutional branches developing policies for Black populations. There also is an increase in elected and appointed officials of African descent in the as well as formal efforts to reunite them in a Black Parliament of the region.. There are programs of Affrmative Action developing in Brazil and Colombia, as well as efforts to document and combat institutional and everyday racism. As Linda Kolko mentioned yesterday, this December, in Ecuador there was a meeting to discuss and coordinate initiatives for racial equity in several countries, in this front Brazil is where the movement had the greatest achievement, given that it is the first country of the region with a ministry for racial equity organized at the level of the executive.

However, returning to the counterpoint of the two conferences with which I began this presentation, and bringing the analysis of race cycles in a world-historical perspective, it seems that the very partial successes of the Afro-Latin American movements had facilitated the conditions for the emergence of conservative Black elites, and also for the integration to the state and the NGOization of some of its key leaders and organizations. I don’t have time to develop this here but should say that part of my research could be defined as an ethnography of state and empire, and as an ethnography of transnational funders and NGOs. In my investigation I found that, as in Sonia Alvarez analysis of the women movement, we need a more nuanced analysis than simply speaking about cooptation and integration, and need to differentiate between the transnational actors (for example between USAD and the Interamerican Foundation, and between Gregory Meek and Charlie Rangel as two distinct

position in the Black Congressional Caucus) as some Black movements in Latin America and Afro-Latinos in the U.S. do. On the other hand, we need to analyze and evaluate the overall effects of the alliances and the funding with state institutions and transnational actors (some of them powerful reps of transnational capital and the U.S. imperial state) in what for some sectors of the movement can be described as a shift from a politics of mobilization and grassroots alternatives to a politics of accommodation and integration into transnational networks of neoliberal governmentality.



Colombia is perhaps the clearest example that we cannot simply understand racial politics in terms of Black movements, but as a more complex and differentiated field of Black politics in each country, in Latin America, and in the Americas. Here the task of the political cartographer is difficult and requires both theoretical sophistication and historical analysis. For instance, a call last week's by Daniel Mera (from Colombia's Proyecto Color) for a form of Black solidarity looking up to the U.S. as the only example of Blacks been in power since dynastic Egypt, is a very different strand of transnational Black politics from the one declared by Daniel Garces yesterday when he advocated for an Afrodiasporic agenda for human rights and grassroots development based on ancestral knowledge, territorial integrity, and community self-government. One way of representing this differences is as contending Pan-Africanisms, where we need to sharply distinguish, for instance, a neoliberal Pan-Africanism that advocates for the Free Trade Agreement as a means for "progress and possibility" while defending President Uribe's policies of "democratic security" (which very much resembles President Bush's "war on terror"), in contrast with a grounded grassroots Pan-Africanism that defends community self-government, ecological development, regional integration and globalization from below.

This whole scenario refer us to one of the main historical challenges that Afroamerican subjects in general and Afroamerican movements in particular are facing today, which is the question of what is going to be our role in a moment in which we are placed at the limelight of processes of national and hemispheric change. For instance, Afro-Colombians are central actors in the fights for or against Plan Colombia and the Free Trade Agreement. On the other hand, Afro-Venezuelans have been pressuring the government to support their demands to be recognized as a political category with rights, resources, and special policies, to the extent that President Chavez self-declared as Afrodescendant after they organized an hemispheric conference of Afrodescendants against neoliberalism (whether we can call this a gesture of effective change or of "ethno-populism" is an open question). In the context of the highly

polarized situation in the Andean region, yesterday in Colombia around 5 million people participated in a march against the paramilitaries, that was largely organized by Afro-Colombian grassroots organizations and that defended Black legislator Piedad Cordova against conservative attacks that also have a racist component. In Ecuador, Afro-Ecuadorians have representation in the constituent assembly (a situation without historical precedents in the Americas), and the Black movement for the first time developed a unified political platform. On the other hand, in the U.S. there is the possibility that a Black person may be elected President. All of this poses big questions to Black politics and to Afroamerican movements in particular. What is the historical project for the African diaspora and what this concretely means in terms of the kind of policies of economic development, political democracy, and cultural politics that we are to articulate and enact? How racial politics is to articulate with class, gender, and sexual politics, and in search of which kind of project of freedom and equality?



I want to close with two very concrete set of observations and concerns that can be turned into proposals. I want to predicate them by saying that as an Afrodescendent intellectual-activist, I am here not only as an academic, but also to participate in one of many attempts to build intellectual-political community. For the last few years I engaged in what I call collaborative action research with Black organizations throughout Latin America, and as many of you know in the South there is ample need and interest in working with academic intellectuals from the U.S. I suggest that we look into the possibility of formalizing this kind of efforts and in addition of having an annual conference, also get involved in projects of translation and exchange to develop a rich and productive dialogue with Afro-Latina/o intellectuals and movements across the Americas. For example, we are witnessing the beginning of ethnic studies and Africana studies in Latin America and there is the possibility of developing a rich north/south dialogue for which Afro-Latinas/os could be a bridge in the positive sense of Gloria Anzaldúa.

The last point is that socio-economic indicators from all sources reveal that Afro-Latin Americans suffer from the worst conditions of inequality, and in spite of the relative political and cultural achievements, the conditions of structural racism, cultural devalorization, and everyday racial violence and social marginalization characterizes the life of many of our people. In light of this, Afroamerican social movements are retaking the Durban agenda against racism. This July there will be a conference in Brazil to revive the agenda in the Americas with a projection of another conference in Durban. I suggest we pay special attention to these efforts and try to be part of them. We at the Center for Latin American, Caribbean, and Latina/o Studies and the Department of Afroamerican Studies at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, are committed to steer this process by means of our project on Black Cultures and Racial Politics in the Americas. For many of us it is a firm and

concrete step for Afroamerican movements to keep-up the long-term tradition of Black movements as bearers of a radicalization of democracy to build the African diaspora as a transformative force for alternative futures, as an effective source of hope in favor of life and happiness.

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