

Du Bois' Double Consciousness versus Latin America Exceptionalism: Joe
Arroyo, Salsa and Negritude

By Mark Q. Sawyer

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Scholar in Health Policy, UC Berkeley

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Assistant Professor UCLA Department of Political Science and Ralph J. Bunche Center for
African American Studies

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author. For more information contact Mark Sawyer msawyer@polisci.ucla.edu

It has been tempting for observers to use DuBois' ideas of double consciousness to contrast U.S. race relations from those in Brazil and Cuba. In those cases, DuBois' theory becomes a paradigmatic representation of the inability of the United States to accept US black's basic humanity, while the obvious patriotism of blacks in places like Cuba and Brazil becomes a clear sign that racial politics there differ in important ways that contradict DuBois' proposition (Glasco 1992). However, I will contend in this essay that both the positions of blacks in Latin America and the United States are more nuanced both on the ground and as they relate to DuBois' theory of consciousness than most readings would allow for. By not applying DuBois to racial politics in Latin America we obscure the struggles of Afro-Latinos for political, cultural, social, and economic equality and misread the legacy of black US politics. I propose that the elegance of the construction of double consciousness is capable of capturing the differing dimensions of inclusion and exclusion in Latin America and the U.S.. By invoking DuBois' Double Consciousness in relation to Latin American racial politics we are able to reconnect Latin America to the African Diaspora and build a bridge for critical engagement of black politics in Latin America. Consequently, I also argue that denying the existence of double consciousness in Latin America obscures the struggles of African descended peoples in Latin America and leaves little possibility for understanding assertions of black identity and challenges to racial oppression and inequality.

Blacks in Latin America are patriotic and a critical part of national symbols (Sawyer et al. 2004a, Sidanius et al. 2001). At the same time, they have historically had unequal access to social, political and economic power. It is this duality that has been developed in a growing literature on race and Latin America and that can be described as “inclusionary discrimination” (Telles 1994, Hanchard 1994 and 1995, Twine 1997, Nobles 2000, Wade 1995, Fernandez 1996, Helg 1995, Sawyer 2004b). Hanchard describes this when he explains, “African elements of Brazilian culture were selectively integrated into the discourses of national identity. With the ascendance of the ideologies of racial democracy and whitening. Afro-Brazilians came to be considered part of the cultural economy, in which their women and men embodied sexual desire and lascivious pleasure. At the same time, Afro-Brazilians were denied access to virtually all institutions of civil society that would have given them equal footing with the middle classes of modernizing Brazil (Hanchard 1995).” While Hanchard is writing specifically about Brazil, similar processes occurred throughout Latin America. Despite miscegenation and a lack of formal segregation a growing literature has pointed to manifestations of racial inequality in a variety of social structures in Latin America. However, it remains to be seen whether it is possible for comparisons to be drawn with the United States by using DuBois’ construction of double consciousness as a pivot point.

The most famous expression of Du Bois’ double consciousness is the statement,

After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world,-a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels this twoness,-an American, a

Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, who dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder (DuBois 2003).

Du Bois through double consciousness grounds the struggle over the politics of representation and the unequal incorporation of black in the national project and in world systems. Yet at the same time, Du Bois was not a separatist but saw room for a politics of recognizing the specificity of the black experience while challenging, from the black perspective, injustice in national and world systems. The struggle over culture in Du Bois' theory is paramount and can be seen in his concern for black culture and organizations. As Marable notes, "he also fully identified with the cultures, heritage, and political resistance of people of color throughout the Third World, particularly in the Caribbean and sub-Saharan Africa. His academic research focused largely on the cultural and political role of Africa in world civilization (Marable 1998)."

Thus, Du Bois' concept of double consciousness was in its inception an international construct that challenged the politics of representation. Representation was not confined to brute political representation but was invoked in order to question the unequal inclusion of blacks first as slaves or colonial subjects, and later as subjects without basic human rights and the ability for social mobility or development. These ideas were applied to Latin America. Du Bois wrote specifically about Latin America and challenged the myth of racial democracy and miscegenation as the road to racial paradise in his work,

We cannot allow the West Indies and Central America to be made deliberate slums for the profit and vacation activities of the Whites, In South America we have long pretended to see a possible solution in the gradual amalgamation of whites, Indians and blacks. But this amalgamation does not envisage any decrease of power and prestige among whites as compared with Indians, Negroes, and mixed bloods; but

rather an inclusion within the so called white group of a considerable infiltration of dark blood, while at the same time maintaining the social bar, economic exploitation and political disfranchisement of dark blood as such. We have thus the spectacle of Santo Domingo, Cuba, Puerto Rico and even Jamaica trying desperately and doggedly to be “white” in spite of the fact that the majority of the white group is of Negro or Indian descent. And despite facts, no Brazilian nor Venezuelan dare boast of his black fathers. Thus, racial amalgamation in Latin-America does not always or even usually carry with it social uplift and planned effort to raise the mulatto and mestizoes to freedom in a democratic polity (Hellwig 1992).

However, the challenge to DuBois’ ideas derive from a growing literature, that while acknowledging racial inequality in Latin America, seeks to challenge race as a frame for understanding social inequality in Latin America and race as a potential frame for social movements. By localizing DuBois to the US, the ability to compare and draw parallels with the US and to construct a diasporic politics are attacked. As philosopher Anthony Bogues explains, the struggle of blacks has consistently been to construct a tradition that is recognized for its broadness and depth. However, he notes more often than not, “At best this tradition continues to be viewed as particularistic, mired in fossilized, irrational conceptions and myths not worthy of serious study (Bogues 2003).” Leaders in this literature include Laurence Glasco, Peter Fry, Alejandro de la Fuente, Pierre Bordieu and Loic Wacquant. At issue has been the work of Michael Hanchard (Hanchard 1994). His study of the Movimento Negro Unificado in Brazil has been the center of a growing controversy about the study of race in Latin America. Fry, Bordieu and Wacquant have attacked Hanchard’s work as imposing an African American racial perspective on the politics of Brazil. “Instead of dissecting the constitution of the Brazilian ethnoracial order according to its own logic, such inquiries are most often content to replace wholesale the national myth of ‘racial democracy’ (as expressed for instance in the works of Gilberto

Freire, e.g. 1978) by the myth according to which all societies are 'racist', including those within which 'race' relations seem at first sight to be less distant and hostile (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1999)."

Bourdieu and Wacquant (1999) go on to attack the work of philanthropic organizations and other NGO's that they argue have imposed an African American perspective on racial politics in Brazil. Specifically they say that US foundations have wrongly forced affirmative action upon Brazil. Further, they argue that the modes and paradigms of US racial politics and resistance in the form of the Civil Rights movement are being imposed on Brazilians and other blacks in Latin America by US researchers and foundations. In his article, "Race, National Discourse, and Politics in Cuba: An Overview," Alejandro de la Fuente (1998) also expresses concern over the work of Aline Helg (1995) and Vera Kutzinski (1993) that follows a similar path to the work of Michael Hanchard. De la Fuente writes, "Recent scholarship has stressed, however, that this foundational discourse, frequently referred to as "the myth of racial equality," was an ideological construction of the elite that masked the objective structural subordination of Afro-Cubans in society. These researchers recognize that, once established and accepted, these myths become, as Viotti da Costa (1985: 235) puts it, an integral part of social reality, but they tend to see their effects in only one direction: That of the subordination and demobilization of blacks. This is an interpretation that minimizes the capacity of subordinate groups to appropriate these Inclusionary ideologies and use them to their advantage (De la Fuente 1998)." While Hanchard, Helg and Kutzinski (1993) use a Gramscian model to discuss the struggle of the movement to overcome the myth of racial democracy that denies the existence of racism, De la Fuente (1998) sees that myth not as

a constraint for black activism but as a discourse that prevented further discrimination and allowed blacks to be incorporated into the national project. De la Fuente questions the emphasis on constraint and suggests that black movements for racial equality in Latin America have not been necessary because of the ability of existing discourses and institutions to accommodate black concerns. While recognizing some racial oppression these authors emphasize difference from the US and in so doing attack the idea of race as a principle category for analysis or political struggle in Latin America (Loveman 1999).

However, while De la Fuente has emphasized the inclusiveness of Latin American nations, historian Laurence Glasco (1992) has in his writings specifically taken up the issue of DuBois. In his essay entitled, “National Versus Racial Identity: Juan Gualberto Gomez of Cuba and W.E.B. Du Bois of the United States,” attempts to draw a contrast between the Cuban independence figure Juan Gualberto Gomez and Du Bois. Laurence Glasco (1992) notes that despite challenging racial exclusion and the sad realities of the day, he still draws a contrast between DuBois and Gomez and in so doing also the racial situations in Cuba and the US. However, Gomez’s sense of black organizations was similar to that of Du Bois, “Gomez also founded two race-oriented newspapers in Cuba. *La Fraternidad (Fraternity)* and *La Igualdad (Equality)*. Through their pages he helped to convince black Cubans that the struggle for independence was intimately linked with that for abolition and black advancement. He also worked to unite the island’s colored societies, establishing the first Central Directory of the Societies of the Colored Race in order to protest discrimination and support the independence struggle (Glasco 1992).” Thus, Glasco selectively reads the record or ignores these parallels in order to construct difference between the US and Cuba.

Glasco's exploration of DuBois becomes a pivot point to argue that race relations in Cuba have been far more gentele and did not require racial identification or organization among blacks. Like Bordieu and Waquant, any suggestion of comparison or similarity with the United States, both invokes Black Nationalism and imposes an improper frame on Latin American racial politics. Both also in their work suggest that slavery in Cuba and Brazil were kinder and gentler than U.S. slavery. A topic De La Fuente (2003) takes up directly in his paper entitled, "Slave Law and Claims-Making in Cuba: The Tannenbaum Debate Revisited." De la Fuente concludes, "One need not romanticize the experience of slavery in the Spanish colonies to realize that under Spanish law slaves, depending on their location in the productive structure and the specific phase of development of the slave system, were able to claim some rights and to create some avenues for advancement (De la Fuente 2003). Thus, Glasco comes to the conclusion, "Cuba was a country that discriminated but whites were more accepting of blacks (Glasco 1992)." In drawing this conclusion Glasco obscures points in his own narrative where Gomez himself employs what DuBois describes as "the second sight" to establish a critical position on the development of the Cuban national project. Glasco fails to understand that double consciousness does not imply separatism as he suggests but an uneven pattern of inclusion and exclusion that lend African Americans the second sight and complicate their relationship with the national project. Glasco ignores Du Bois' radical integrationism in *Souls of Black Folk* where he wrote,

He would not Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wished to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of opportunity closed roughly in his face. This, then, is

the end of his striving: to be a co-worker in the kingdom of culture, to escape both death and isolation, to husband and use his best powers and his latent genius.

It is exactly this form of complication that Gomez expresses or that appears in the work of Nicolas Guillen. On Black Cuban Poet Nicolas Guillen Glasco notes, “(he) explicitly rejected what he termed the North American ‘road to Harlem’, that of racial separation (Glasco 1992).” However, Glasco fails to note Guillen’s stated admiration for Harlem Renaissance poet Langston Hughes and his profound respect for his ability to capture the true image of Blacks in the Diaspora. In fact, Guillen’s poems, “The ballad of my two Grandfathers,” shatters the myth of a single undifferentiated Cuba by emphasizing the specificity of the Afro-Cuban experience within the development of the Cuban nation. Guillen’s words in the poem challenge notions of relativism and the harmonious incorporation of blacks into the Cuban national identity. Glasco (1992) fails to recognize the radical integrationist project within DuBois’ ideas and calls for African Americans the politics of recognizing the specificity of the black experience in the context of the American or Cuban project. In short, for Glasco (1992) the predominant African American political stance was one of Black Nationalism and the Cuban stance is one of integrationism. This stands as an oversimplification of the politics of each group who pursued mixed strategies of integration and separation to achieve equality. But what is gained by challenging the stark boundary posed by Glasco?

By emphasizing the day to day struggle over representation we can draw critical similarities and differences between US and Latin American racial politics. DuBois offers a bridge to understand the challenge to achieve recognition of humanity and

overcome oppression that face sub-alterns. While the above “elite” expressions of “double consciousness are clear, it is important that we turn to everyday expressions. I argue that the struggle envisioned by DuBois manifests itself in the contested terrain of popular culture and more specifically popular music. It is in the genre of salsa music that we see that in the case of Latin American and the US inclusion vs. exclusion is not the central point of struggle but the struggle is over defining the terms of inclusion. Thus, Afro-Latinos have strategically asserted black identity and the specificity of the black experience to critique racial and other forms of inequality in Latin American societies.

It is important to first establish the intellectual project of DuBois and the similarity of his ideas with those of another important thinker from the African Diaspora, CLR James. Each of their work seeks to disrupt accounts of national projects and the experience of racialized individuals, by powerfully writing their experiences into the national project in a way that affirms both their humanity and their struggle. As Bagues (2003) notes CLR James and DuBois sought to vindicate blackness by overcoming the erasure of black experiences in the writing of western history and philosophy. He writes,

What C.L.R. James and W.E.B. DuBois did in their books *The Black Jacobins* (1938) and *Black Reconstruction* (1935) was to place squarely before us historical knowledge about two major events that reorder the narrative structures of Western radical history. Their projects created seismic shifts in twentieth-century radical historiography. One major development in twentieth-century historiography is the ways in which social theory became an integral part of historical understanding...Both James and DuBois were rewriting history from a stance in which experiences were not captured-or, if they were, they had been captured from a standpoint that the black subject was a savage or, in the case of the Reconstruction, that black male political equality led to the most corrupt and morally bankrupt state regimes in American history (Bagues 2003).

The salsa genre is one of the popular musical forms throughout Latin America. It is a form that was created out of an urban experience of Latinos mostly Puerto Ricans in New York but based heavily on Afro-Cuban rhythms. It has become a Pan-Latin American musical genre connecting music and dance. The salsa movement while connected to national projects also is a part of a broader construction of Latin identity or 'Latinidad'. That is, salsa music is simultaneously national and international in its formulation. There are differences of degree between Colombian salsa, Cuban salsa, and Puerto Rican salsa that sophisticated listeners can discern as well as different variations on salsa dancing connected to these sub-genres. However, one thing that is ubiquitous within salsa music is the presence of *El Negro*, *La Negra*, or *La Mulata*. Salsa music in its appropriation of African rhythms and fusion of more Western melodic structures is frequently lauded as a living example of the tropical fusion of cultures. Salsa music is often posed as a manifestation of racial democracy through the rhythms and the themes of blackness within the lyrics. However, if we examine the role blacks have played in salsa music specifically and Latin music more generally we find a series of problematic stereotypes.

The role these figures play in salsa music is most frequently as a site of sensuality, and play. In this case, salsa music is not different from Latin musical genres that were its precursors in expressions of blackness (Moore 1997, Kutzinski 1993). In fact, there is a dominant focus on the black or mulata body especially the hips and legs that move to the music. Frances Aparicio argues that the focus on the black female body in the music obscures the existence of racial oppression. She writes,

However what is ironic is in this synecdochal erasure is that it is precisely the black woman's hips, her pelvis, and her genitalia, her vagina, that have been subjected historically to racism through rape and sexual violence. This displacement, then, is one of signifieds: by trivializing her

hips *only*(sic) as a rhythmical and musical pleasurable entity, then Caribbean patriarchy can erase from the body of the mulata any traces of violence and racist practices for which it has been responsible throughout history (Aparicio 1998).

Salsa songs construct black bodies as objects of play and desire for consumption. This consumption via the act of sexual intercourse and marked by the climax is frequently expressed using metaphors of food. The expression, “Ay Que Rico” in reference to black bodies and the moment of climax is common. Aparicio (1998) emphasizes that salsa music is a patriarchal form, but when it comes to this form of objectification the bodies of black men and women are cast in quite similar terms. In a related genre merengue, the phenotypically white and blond Puerto Rican singer Giselle, in a song where she challenges her mothers scorn for her black lover emphasizes that the source of her desire is, “Por que el tiene sabor el negro/Because he has flavor the black man.” The reference to flavor again objectifies blackness and places the black male body, in this case, in a place of play, desire and available for consumption. These representations of blackness are frequently perceived to be positive and are used by black and white musicians alike. The presence of blackness is ubiquitous but is also contested. Just as problematic representations of blackness in the American context have been challenged by activists, academics, and popular culture figures there have also been analogous challenges within the genre of salsa that cannot be read as impositions from African American forms like soul or rap music.

Afro-Colombian salsa singer Joe Arroyo like DuBois and even more similar to CLR James attempts to rewrite the history of Colombian racial politics by recasting the image of La Negra in his song aptly entitled. “Rebellion.” The song in contrast to other

salsa songs places the black woman's body self-consciously as a site of violence, oppression, and contestation. Line by line the song challenges notions of a unified Colombian history and foregrounds the history of oppression and struggle that mark the specific Afro-Colombian story. While the refrain, "No le pega la Negra," is patriarchal in that the black woman has no voice in the song and is protected by men, it also is a profound challenge to the presence of the black woman in salsa music. However, a close reading of Joe Arroyo's *Rebellion* is necessary to understand the strength of the challenge to representations of blackness in salsa music particularly and throughout Latin American more broadly.

The song begins with Arroyo speaking rather than singing. In his light tenor he explains that he is going to tell a story:

Quiero contarle mi hermano un pedacito de la historia negra, de la historia nuestra, caballero (I want to tell it my brother part of the black story, our story)

It is important that he emphasizes that he is telling a "black" story. Through this the expression of negritude is clear. Further, by emphasizing that it is "our" story Arroyo grasps a moment of empowerment for blacks to tell their own stories. Here he is expressing the vindicationism contained in the project. Arroyo goes on to set the scene in Cartagena Colombia early in the development of the Colombian nation.

En los años mil seiscientos, cuando el tirano mando (En the 1600's when tyranny ruled) las calles de Cartagena, aquella historia vivio.
(In the streets of Cartagena, is where the story lived)

In the next line Arroyo emphasizes the specificity of the black experience but disconnects it from the national experience by emphasizing the Africaness of the blacks. Further, by emphasizing that they were placed in chains Arroyo highlights the specificity of the black experience. In the next few lines he expresses the contradiction of being glad to be on dry land but with the despair of their perpetual slavery in the next lines.

Cuando alli llegaban esos negreros, africanos en cadenas (When they
arrived here, these blacks, Africans in chains)
besaban mi tierra, esclavitud perpetua (they kissed my land, perpetual
slavery)
Esclavitud perpetua (Perpetual Slavery)
Esclavitud perpetua (Perpetual Slavery)

Later, Arroyo sets the stage for the powerful refrain by introducing a married couple and their Spanish master. The composition of the Master as Spanish is a gesture that emphasizes his Europeaness in contrast to the Africaness of the slave couple. This binary is unlike the myth of racial democracy and constructions of kinder gentler slavery and later mestizaje, Arroyo is emphasizing difference in his construction of the subjects of the song. The difference constructed by Arroyo culminates in violence, not against the black man, but against the black woman. Here, Arroyo takes the more common representation of the black woman in salsa music and transforms her body into a site of overt political contestation and historical struggle. The master through his actions has denied the couple any “normal” domestic relationship and in a sense has emasculated the black male by his actions.

Un matrimonio africano, esclavos de (A African marriage, slaves of a
Spaniard, he mistreated them)
un espanol, el les daba muy mal trato
y a su negra le pego (And he hit the black woman)

In the next lines Arroyo's use of the term "guapo" to describe the black man carries several meanings. On one hand guapo means handsome emphasizing the sexuality of the negro. Other meanings for guapo include, nice, tough and brave. He casts the black man as a champion, a hero. From there, the hero then takes vengeance for his aggrieved wife while invoking the refrain, "Don't hit my black woman." From this point the chorus joins in interrupting Arroyo's singular voice, and expressing a more general community voice of, "Do not hit **THE** (authors emphasis) black woman. Here the men of the community are responding and the slave revolt has begun.

Y fue alli, se revelo el negro guapo, tomo (And went there, and revealed himself to him, the handsome black man, and took vengeance for his love)
venganza por su amor y aun se escucha (And you can here at the gate)
en la verja, no le pegue a mi negra (Don't hit my black Woman)
No le pegue a la negra (Don't hit the black woman)
No le pegue a la negra (Don't hit the black woman)

Oye man!! (Listen Man)
No le pegue a la negra (Don't hit the black woman)

By examining this verse we see clearly that Arroyo seeks to disrupt versions of Colombian history specifically and Latin American history more broadly that marginalize the experience of blacks or obscure the specificity of black oppression. At the same time, he does it within a specific Latin American music genre that is known for its representation of the myth of racial democracy and mestizaje. Challenging the usual representations of blackness within the genre defies critics who argue that expressions of black identity and resistance are imported from the African American experience. Arroyo articulates his point of view as an extremely popular and recognized "Colombian" artist with an international audience. His challenge expresses the existence of

inclusionary discrimination in the music and in Latin American societies. Arroyo's authenticity as one of the leading figures in Colombian salsa suggests that expressions of black resistance are not contaminations from the US black experience but fractal forms of response to oppression and culture as described by Paul Gilroy (1994) in his book, "The Black Atlantic." Arroyo invokes a second sight with regard to Colombian history and emphasizes difference, violence and specificity of black oppression in the Americas. Arroyo's expressions in music reflect challenges to representations of racial democracy within other forms of music like Spanish rap and the Puerto Rican rap/reggae fusion, called 'reggeton' as well as the work of Brazilian groups like Olodum. These expressions are not entirely disconnected from emergent and continued social movements in places like Colombia, Brazil, Honduras and Ecuador around issues of land rights, discrimination and other challenges that face populations of Afro-descendants. Critical to all of these struggles is a conception of black identity that invokes twoness or challenges a portrait of a harmonious national project. For example, Arroyo in his song not only suggests warring ideals but goes on to discuss a violent struggle for liberation. DuBois' work provides a useful lens to understand these challenges and offers the opportunity for creative comparisons across national borders and to understand transnational manifestations of black politics.

Engaging Du Bois opens up critical possibilities to understand these cultural expressions and movements as they relate to national, sub-national, and transnational racial projects and counternarratives. Those who obscure the relevance of DuBois in contrast attempt to render expressions of blackness parochial and limited to a specific national milieu. Thus, we have no ability to discuss transnational black politics. Further,

in emphasizing difference with the US these discourses minimize the experiences of oppression of blacks in Latin America and deny the authenticity of their struggles for cultural, political, social, and economic rights and recognition. Ultimately, critical engagement with Du Bois illuminates voices in Latin America that are obscured by emphasizing differences with the United States. If we are to understand these movements and expressions beyond theories of “contamination” we must be guided by theorists like Du Bois and CLR James as international intellectuals. In that sense, we are only merely doing justice to their understandings of their own critical projects.

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