



From Carthage to *cabeza de gato*: Afro-Iberian Civilization from Antiquity to Present in the Spanish Classroom

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This curriculum unit is recommended for:
Spanish III, grades 9-12

Keywords: Spanish, World Languages, geography, history, African-American Studies

Teaching Standards: See [Appendix 1](#) for teaching standards addressed in this unit.

Synopsis: Students of Spanish will learn about aspects of Afro-Iberian history, culture, religion, music and food through encapsulated lessons integrated into the Spanish III curriculum. Short, easy-to-integrate lessons readily scalable to lower or higher levels of Spanish will cover such topics as African conquest and colonization in Spain in classical antiquity, African influence on Hispanic religious life and public celebrations, African influence in modern art and the true meaning of “modernism,” and the issue of racial and social erasure of less-represented groups in Latin America through *mestizaje*. This unit should help teachers of Spanish restore balance and accuracy to Spanish curricula that emphasize the contributions of peninsular and indigenous Hispanics while underrepresenting the Afro-Hispanic presence and enduring cultural legacy.

I plan to teach this unit during the coming year to 75 students in Spanish III.

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Matthew Kelly

Introduction: Students Want Accurate and Representative Curriculum

“Me gusta más la clase de estudios africanoamericanos porque es mi cultura.” I had asked Spanish II students to write about their favorite classes as a quick write and was struck by how many students gave an answer like this one: *“I like African-American Studies class the most because it’s my culture.”* I was struck, but not surprised. The African-American Studies program has grown dramatically at my school because of demand, and a group of my Spanish III students last year pressed me in a concerted way to bring more Africana content to my classroom and to the school. The process was fruitful and our World Languages department formed new partnerships with individuals and institutions in the community.

The push for more Africana content in the classroom has dual motivators. First, there is the question of accuracy. About 33% of my students are black.¹ Many times, I have heard them report that they simply do not know anything about their own history and culture and that this bothers them. “We don’t know *anything*, Mr. Kelly,” one student told me. “They don’t teach us anything at all about history and geography because all they care about is reading and math scores. We don’t know hardly *any* history and geography, and we know our own least of all.” The other issue is representation: students want to see themselves and their communities reflected in the material they learn. “How would you feel, Mr. Kelly, if you went to school for thirteen years and never heard of anyone who looks like you doing anything that matters? It’s just depressing,” said another student.

Rationale: Aim for Accuracy and Representation Will Follow

Accuracy and diverse representation are of paramount importance, but there are right and wrong ways to implement them. With respect to bringing Africana studies to the classroom for the sake of correcting historic inaccuracies in the curriculum, it is critical that we be accurate. I spoke to a teacher not long ago who was planning to teach his students that Africans taught the indigenous Mesoamericans to build pyramids. That’s a disaster. We do not need to turn to fringe sources or disputed research in order to bring African culture and contributions to the forefront in the Spanish classroom. All the information we need is wholly mainstream and, for the most part, touched on in the curriculum already. My goal for this unit is to provide teachers with materials that will reach all students in the classroom with better lessons relevant to Afro-Latin cultures. That is not my only goal, however. I also wish to show that by bringing Africana studies into the Spanish classroom we will teach a representation of Spanish speaking language and culture that corresponds more truly to the diversity present in Latin America and particularly in the United States. African ancestry and cultural influence are high in Latin

¹ “SchoolDigger Independence High School.Pdf.”

America, and even more so in the United States than in Latin America generally with the number of Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, Cubans, and other Afro-Latin peoples living here. We do not teach African contributions to Hispanic civilization in order to get our diversity card punched or to patronize one or another historically marginalized group with token recognition. We teach African contributions because if we do not, we are presenting a fundamentally inaccurate version of history.

Accuracy is relatively easy in principle: facts taught in the classroom must be accurate and germane to the discipline; we avoid what is marginal along with what is dubious. It is a fact that colonists from Carthage in Africa built some of Spain's oldest and most important cities, and it is not a trivial detail. It ties into the Punic Wars that ultimately put much of world history in Roman hands. Accuracy is not hard. Representation is trickier.

The problem with representation is that you cannot give one group more representation without giving another group less. I am a white male, fifty-one years old at this writing. I work with many different organizations in many capacities and have done a lot of public speaking—but I find I am doing less and less over the past few years than I was doing ten years ago. I have had the conversation repeatedly: “Matt, we’d love to have you speak, but we have to think about the optics when it comes to our message on inclusion and diversity. We have to be intentional. If we put you at the podium, we’re making a deliberate choice not to put someone who’s not white, not to put someone who’s female, and not to put someone younger up there.” I get it, I really do—inclusion can look a lot like exclusion. I can imagine a teacher asking me, “Okay, so we include Picasso’s African period—what do I cut so I can work that in? Do I cut out his Blue Period? If I teach Carnival, do I cut out Day of the Dead?” That is a false choice, though.

Including Picasso’s African period—without which Cubism does not really make sense—does not mean we have to cut Cubism. Including Carnival does not mean we cut Day of the Dead. We can cut out a crossword or a bell ringer warm-up or an online game. We can put better procedures in place and cut time from handing out papers or taking up papers. We can cut some tired anecdote from when we studied in Spain five, ten or thirty years ago. There is a lot of stuff we can cut before we seize the podium from Cervantes or Goya. The truth is that while 25% of Latinos in the United States self-identify as Afro-Latino, we dedicate only a marginal part of classroom time in the Spanish classroom to those Americans’ heritage.² We are in little danger of going too far or doing too much.

Background and Educational Setting

Charlotte has changed a great deal in just a few decades. Just in 1990, the year Will Smith took the screen as the Fresh Prince of Bel Air, less than 1% of Charlotte’s population was born outside the United States.³ The decade that followed brought steady growth of the foreign-born and especially Latino arrivals to the city. Charlotte rose to the number four spot in growth of the Latino population during that decade and from 2000-2013 we took the

² Gustavo Lopez and Ana Gonzalez-Barrera, “Afro-Latino: A Deeply Rooted Identity among U.S. Hispanics.”

³ Hanchett, “Charlotte in Five Tamales” (Lecture, Insights into Latino Communities in Charlotte Today, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, Charlotte, September 20, 2018).

number one spot for Latino growth.⁴ Latinos in Charlotte are more North and Central American than anything else; about a third of all Charlotte Latinos are Mexican, about a third are from Central America, and the remaining third is from everywhere else. We have a lot of Afro-Latinos but not as many as established centers for migration from the Caribbean.⁵

Charlotte used to have some of the most desegregated schools in the country. In 1989, just 0.1 percent of Charlotte schools were 90 to 100% non-white populations. Today, more than 20% of Charlotte Mecklenburg public schools are 90 to 100% non-white students.⁶ From the *Swann vs. Charlotte Mecklenburg Board of Education* Supreme Court ruling in 1971 to 2002, most children in Charlotte attended desegregated schools.⁷ The 1999 Supreme Court decision in *Capacchione v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg* declared the district unitary and freed the district from court-ordered scrutiny of the manner in which students were assigned to schools.⁸ As of 2016, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools was the most segregated large school district in North Carolina.⁹ At present, there is a movement underway to allow municipalities within the district to use public funds to set up charter schools giving priority to children from the immediate neighborhood. The proliferation of charter schools within the district has stymied the efforts of Charlotte-Mecklenburg School leadership to break up concentrations of poverty in the wake of *Capacchione v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg*.¹⁰ The resulting white abandonment of public schools has led to staffing cuts at my own school. The public schools now welcome a student population more heavily non-white than before.¹¹

Independence High School is a large urban high school with an enrollment just over 2,469 students and approximately 130 full-time teachers. The school sits on the boundary between urban Charlotte and the community of Mint Hill. Mint Hill, also in Mecklenburg County, is a traditionally working-class community with rural roots. The majority of the students come from less-represented communities. Black students are the largest group (33%), about even with White students (30.2%), and Hispanic students make up nearly a third (27 %.) The makeup is fairly even but until just a year or two ago, White students were in the majority. We have a growing cohort of refugee students, largely from Southeast Asia. 53.8% of all students receive free or reduced lunch. Academically we rank 254th out of 510 North Carolina high schools based on 2018-19 test scores.¹²

The school has a construction and engineering magnet oriented towards vocational training; a medical and health sciences magnet is supplanting an international studies magnet program. We have some relatively affluent students and many who experience

⁴ Hanchett.

⁵ Hanchett.

⁶ Poston, "When School Desegregation Mattered in Charlotte."

⁷ Poston.

⁸ Williams and Houck, "The Life and Death of Desegregation Policy in Wake County Public School System and Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools."

⁹ Ayscue et al., "Charters as a Driver of Resegregation."

¹⁰ Ayscue et al.

¹¹ Poston, "When School Desegregation Mattered in Charlotte."

¹² "SchoolDigger Independence High School."

grinding poverty, but the school as a whole is relatively prosperous by comparison with the highest needs schools.

Instructional Content

Sacred Journeys, Sacred Gatherings: African Roots of Carnaval

The first chapter of the Spanish III curriculum I use is on outdoor activities, with culture readings that put an emphasis on different kinds of trek. The readings detail the travels of two different types of pilgrim—sacred, on the Camino de Santiago de Compostela in the extreme northwest of Spain, and secular, on the Inca Trail in Peru. It is a unit full of geographical and historical information, but the kids have a little difficulty getting into it. Hooray, kids, let's get ready to...walk a thousand kilometers!

My thought is to liven up the chapter a little with urban outdoor experiences as well. La Tomatina is a festival that takes place in Buñol, a small town in Valencia in eastern Spain where young people have an enormous tomato fight. It is supposed to have origins in vaguely anti-authoritarian student shenanigans back in the 1940s and 50s, but mostly it is just a crazy food fight in late August without the menace (both human and animal) of the running of the bulls in Pamplona.¹³

The other more significant festival I want to pair that with is Carnaval in the Americas. Carnaval is the festival that marks the beginning of Lent (we know it as Mardi Gras) and is a blend of European and African traditions. While the festival itself is European in origin, the colorful costumes with beads and feathers are very much rooted in African tradition.¹⁴ The dances, too, are a mix of European and African steps and instrumentation. Carnaval festivities in the Dominican Republic are the oldest in the Americas, dating back to the mid-1500s, celebrated in La Vega even before it was observed in Santo Domingo.¹⁵

Revelers celebrate Carnaval all over the Roman Catholic world with local differences based in the local culture. Carnaval in Oruru, Bolivia, for example, features ten days of celebrations and dance rooted in indigenous Andean culture and was recognized as one of the Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Cultural Heritage by UNESCO in 2001.¹⁶ The Carnaval celebrations in Barranquilla, Colombia, on the other hand, are heavily colored by traditions drawn from the funerary rites of cultures in the Congo and Angola.¹⁷

The cradle of all Carnaval in the Americas is the Dominican Republic. The Spanish first introduced Carnaval celebrations in the American colonies here. The celebrations in the Dominican Republic have a very heavily African flavor with a lot of local variation based on the history and makeup of different communities. In La Vega, the first Carnaval of the Americas, brightly colored masked devils beat the buttocks of festivalgoers with the *vejiga*,

¹³ Menon, "8 Facts About The La Tomatina Festival in Spain - Festival Sherpa Online Guide to Festivals."

¹⁴ "The African Roots of Carnival – Ayiba Magazine."

¹⁵ "Carnaval Dominicano_ Dominican Republic Carnival Origin."

¹⁶ Zicari, "Carnival around the World Sprachcaffe."

¹⁷ Freitas, "Las Raíces Africanas Del Carnaval de Barranquilla Joseania Miranda Freitas."

a whip tipped with a dried, cured inflated cow's bladder that can leave a bruise that lasts for weeks. In Barahona to the Southwest, dancers strip naked except for body paint and loincloths to celebrate the legacy of the local Maroon communities, settlements of free Afro-descended people during the era of slavery. The *Pintaos* dancers ("Painted Ones") actually have a relatively recent origin in 1997 but are a Dominican staple now and have received high awards from the Dominican Ministry of Culture.¹⁸

The Arts: La Dama de Elche and Cubism's African Sources

The Lady of Elche and the forgotten African colonizers of Europe

I already do a great deal with Afro-Latino culture and community in the unit on plastic and performing arts. Through work I did on a previous curriculum unit, I've brought in a local Afro-Colombian poet, Kurma Murrain, to read poetry. Next year we'll bring dancers.

To add to the unit, though, I thought it would be good to introduce students to Spain's past as an African colony through La Dama de Elche (the Lady of Elche), one of Spain's most beloved cultural artifacts. Most students do not know that Near Eastern peoples sailing from cities in North Africa colonized a large swath of the European Mediterranean centuries before Europeans had colonies in Africa or the Near East.

The Phoenicians were the people of Tyre, in Lebanon, a West Semitic people related to the Biblical Canaanites and Israelites. One of the Phoenician colonies was Carthage, in Tunisia, which later founded its own colonies. The culture and inhabitants of Carthage and the Carthaginian colonies are known as Punic, from the Latin *punicus* for Carthaginian.¹⁹ The ancient peoples native to the Iberian Peninsula are known as Iberians. Where the Carthaginians founded colonies on the Iberian Peninsula they assimilated local Iberians and formed a culture known as Punic-Iberian.

The Lady of Elche is a Punic-Iberian funerary bust of an elaborately dressed and coiffed woman, likely representing the Canaanite/Carthaginian goddess Tanit worshipped by the ancient Iberians under Carthaginian colonial rule and cultural influence. The limestone bust is beautifully rendered and has the quality of portraiture. The National Museum of Archaeology in Madrid, where the bust is now housed, suggests she represents an aristocratic Punic woman divinized or linked to a goddess by her family. The sculpture is hollow and contains traces of human bone ash, suggesting it was originally a funerary urn.²⁰ The wheel-like rodettes (wicker or metal wheel shapes) binding her hair on either side of her head give the bust a very distinctive look that links the sculpture to other known representations of Phoenician women. Elements of the headdress link the sculpture to Tunisia.²¹

¹⁸ Girma, "Carnaval Dominicano Masks, Traditions, and Culture _ Moon Travel Guides."

¹⁹ Gill, "Find Out What the Word Punic Means."

²⁰ "MAN - Museo Arqueológico Nacional Dama de Elche."

²¹ Dashu, "La Dama de Elche and Other Iberian Heads."

The magnificent piece was discovered in 1897 on a private estate near Valencia in the Punic-Iberian heartland. Now dated to around the fourth century BCE, the figure was so finely rendered that scholars accused it of being a modern forgery as early as 1906. The discovery of traces of bone ash inside the cavity in the sculpture, the similarities of pigment traces on the surface of the sculpture to known ancient pigments, and the similarities of the sculpture to other known Punic artifacts discovered in more recent times all point to the bust's authenticity.²² The artwork, housed in Madrid, gives modern Spaniards a vivid connection to their country's links to classical antiquity and the cultures of the Biblical world.

The culture that produced this remarkable bust came to Spain from Lebanon by way of Carthage in Tunisia. The Phoenicians of Tyre (the civilization we know as Canaanite in the Bible) established colonies across the Mediterranean, the most powerful of which was Carthage.²³ These West Semitic colonizers intermarried with locals wherever they established themselves and promoted migration that spread ethnic diversity across the Mediterranean region.²⁴ For example, DNA sequenced from the body of a young Phoenician man from the sixth century BCE found in Tunisia near Carthage showed mitochondrial DNA linking his maternal ancestry to a very rare and ancient European hunter-gatherer lineage associated with the Iberian Peninsula, perhaps in the Balearic Islands or even central Portugal.²⁵

It is important to stress Spain's connection to its African past. Carthage founded many of Spain's most important coastal cities. Their culture connects to cultures many of the students know from reading the Bible, and the study of Punic culture gives an outside look into a world most students only know from a single source. The Phoenician example shows that even in the ancient world, ethnic diversity was common and that not all colonizers forced ethnically based domination onto their subjects.²⁶ I think it is also useful for students to see that an African superpower was building colonies in Europe millennia before Europeans built colonies in Africa. In addition, I think it is important to offer hard facts to counter some of the misguided cultural appropriation of North African cultural achievements by American educators. There is an increasing tendency to say, "We know the Moors of Spain were black! We know the Phoenicians were black! How do we know? They were from Africa, obviously!" Conflating the people of ancient Carthage, Tunisia, with the people of modern Luanda, Angola (7,900 km apart) just because they're on the same continent is no more rational than conflating the people of modern Stockholm, Sweden, with the Ulaanbataar of Wang Khan, Marco Polo's Prester John (7,400 km apart) because they share a land mass. That is just wrong, factually.

²² Luxán et al., "Human Bone Ashes Found in the Dama de Elche (V-IV Century B.C.) Reveal Its Use as an Ancient Cinerary Urn."

²³ Mark, "Carthage - Ancient History Encyclopedia."

²⁴ "Ancient DNA Study Finds Phoenician from Carthage Had European Ancestry.Pdf."

²⁵ Matisoo-Smith et al., "A European Mitochondrial Haplotype Identified in Ancient Phoenician Remains from Carthage, North Africa."

²⁶ Masterson, "Ancient Phoenician Life Was Mixed and Multicultural _ Cosmos."

Picasso's African period and the lost Cuban Cubist Wilfredo Lam

I tell my students that [*Les Femmes d'Alger \(O.J. Version O\)*](#) is perhaps the most important painting of the twentieth century in terms of understanding modern art. Picasso painted the work in Paris in 1907 after visiting the city's first ethnographic museum displaying masks and other carvings from Africa and the South Pacific.²⁷ The cubist painting is of a group of nudes, presumably prostitutes from Barcelona's red light district. Five nude or semi-nude women stand together in what is presumably a brothel. The woman on the far right is darker, from the colonies, presumably; the rest are European. The two European women on the right have faces that strongly resemble African masks.²⁸ The painting is open to interpretation, of course, but one clear explanation is that Picasso shows the European sex workers as living under a kind of colonial domination akin to what their counterparts in the colonies endure. Commerce makes a subjugated people of the poor in their own country.

It is good, of course, to point out that there is a direct through line from Picasso's encounter with African aesthetics to the later development of Cubism. It is better still to point out that Picasso's engagement with African art sparked for the movement in other artists and yes, there are Afro-Latinos among them. Wilfredo Lam was only five years old when Picasso painted *Les Femmes d'Alger (O.J. Version O)*. Growing up in Cuba of mixed African and Chinese descent, he left Havana for Spain in 1923 and by 1939 was a member of Andre Breton's circle of Surrealists in Paris.

Where Picasso embraced Africanness as perhaps both political symbol and artistic inspiration, Lam embraced it as an Afro-Cuban. He participated in Santeria (West African Yoruba religion transplanted to the Spanish Caribbean) and in his art Lam drew heavily from Santero culture and ritual.²⁹ His exuberant, geometrically rendered figures in [*La Jungla*](#) (1943) are a perfect example.³⁰ One cannot tell which figures are dancers and which are anthropomorphized trees, or which faces may be masks, but with Lam the African figures are standing in for Africans and not representing something for someone else. Wilfredo Lam was an important artist and part of a pivotally influential circle of artists. His work deserves a place in our curriculum.

The Daughters of Fufu: Afro-Latin Cuisine

As with dance, I hesitate to celebrate the cuisine of a given culture as a substitute for acknowledging the culture's other contributions to civilization. Every culture has cuisine; nowhere do people enjoy eating food that tastes bad. As with dance, celebrating a people's contribution to cuisine can be a kind of lazy consolation prize. That said, this generation of students is growing up in a period with huge interest in cooking and cuisine. Food is an easy hook to interest teenagers and a path of lesser resistance to engage students with other cultures.

²⁷ Maloney, "Pablo Picasso."

²⁸ Maloney.

²⁹ "MoMA Wilfredo Lam."

³⁰ "MoMA Wilfredo Lam."

Fufu and its cousins are a staple of West African cuisine, with variants consumed all over the continent.³¹ It varies from place to place and is known by different names, but always consists of starches such as cassava, yam, and unripe plantain pounded together with boiling water and formed into balls. These in turn are typically eaten with savory soups, stews or sauces. There are many varieties across the continent, with some having a mashed potato-like consistency and others made with semolina flour that are almost like pasta, but the concept remains the same.³²

Caribbean dishes like Dominican and Puerto Rican *mofongo*, Cuban *fufú* de plátano, [Peruvian and Ecuadorian tacacho](#), Colombian [Cayeye](#), and Dominican [mangú](#) are all derived from West African fufu. *Mofongo* is balls of mashed cooked plantain flavored with garlic and pork cracklings served with broth, typically eaten at night and often enjoyed by late night revelers. In Puerto Rico the plantains are fried while in the Dominican Republic they are roasted over coals.³³ Dominican [mangú](#) on the other hand is a hearty breakfast of boiled plantain served with fried salami, fried cheese, fried egg and garnished with onion pickled in fruit vinegar. Cuban *fufú* is very similar to *mangú* but flavored with fried pork, also eaten for breakfast.³⁴ Some Dominicans hold an unfortunate cultural stereotype that eating bananas or plantains for breakfast will make children intellectually inferior, while eating *conflé* (cornflakes) will make them more intelligent.³⁵ Nonetheless, islanders still enjoy delicious mashed plantains day and night in the islands.

On the continent, Peruvian *tacacho* consists of boiled plantain mashed with pork cracklings, formed into balls and typically eaten for breakfast.³⁶ Peruvians call *tacacho* an indigenous food but it is obviously a variant of fufu; bananas and plantains are not indigenous to the Americas, but were brought by the Spanish and Portuguese. The Spanish cultivated bananas from Africa in the Canary Islands as early as the beginning of the sixteenth century.^{37, 38} Colombian *cayeye* and *cabeza de gato* are a variant of *mangú* flavored with tomatoes, bell peppers and achiote. It is also a breakfast dish. Made from small green bananas it is called *cayeye* and when made with large plantains it is called *cabeza de gato*.³⁹

It is very clear that a home-cooked breakfast for millions of Spanish speakers in the Caribbean and South America is a dish that would be immediately recognizable as African across a very wide swath of Africa. That is going to be an important point in our unit on vanished peoples.

³¹ “A Quick Guide to Fufu, Africa’s Staple Food - OkayAfrica.”

³² “A Quick Guide to Fufu, Africa’s Staple Food - OkayAfrica.”

³³ Gonzalez, “Mofongo Recipe (Garlic-Flavored Mashed Plantains).”

³⁴ Darby, “Fufú Recipe - My Big Fat Cuban Family.”

³⁵ Gonzalez, “Mangú Dominicano - The Authentic Recipe with Video.”

³⁶ “Tacacho, Waking up to the Amazon PERU DELIGHTS.”

³⁷ “Tacacho, Waking up to the Amazon PERU DELIGHTS.”

³⁸ De Paz-Sánchez, “‘Plantain of Guinea’ The Atlantic Adventure of Banana.”

³⁹ Dinho, “Cayeye and Cabeza de Gato (Colombian Mashed Green Plantain) My Colombian Recipes.”

Vanishing Cultures: Where Have All the Africans Gone?

Towards the end of the course in Spanish III we have a unit on vanished civilizations of the past that includes the Maya, the Aztec, the Inca, and the Nasca civilization. I intend to add to that the disappearance since the end of colonial times of the African population in Latin America.

A quarter of United States Hispanics self-identify as Afro-Latino.⁴⁰ However, of the 11.5 million enslaved Africans who survived the Middle Passage to the Americas, only 450,000 came to what is now the United States. The rest went to Latin America—800,000 to Cuba alone, 700,000 together to Peru and Mexico, millions to Brazil. Since the 1850s, though, many of these nations have had a policy of ethnic erasure. Latin American nations self-consciously promoted European immigration from the 1850s onward in order to dilute and whiten the populace.⁴¹ Furthermore, mixed descendants of Africans were encouraged to switch identities from *pardo* (“mulatto”) to *trigueño* (literally “wheat-colored”; olive-skinned European).⁴² Erika Edwards of the University of North Carolina at Charlotte has done extensive research on the process of *blanquamiento* (“whitening”) in Argentina. *Blanquamiento* was a well-established political ideology documented in art, such as in the painting [The Redemption of Ham](#) (1895) from Brazil showing a black grandmother, mulatta daughter, and quadroon grandson with a white father—each generation “progressing” to be more white.⁴³

The example of the disappearance of the black population of Buenos Aires is a salient example. In eighteenth century Buenos Aires, while slavery was common the great disadvantage (to whites) of domestic slavery was that household slaves incurred expenses in the form of food and lodging but generated not income. Enterprising whites quickly sought a remedy for this by industrializing slavery. Any Spaniard or *criollo* who could raise a small amount of capital could purchase a few slaves to work as artisans or craftsmen—carpenters, tailors, bakers, shoemakers, et al; virtually all the skilled trades were dominated by workers of color, most of them slaves. This further lowered the social status of white tradesman. For free whites who wished to profit from a trade, the clear pathway was to raise a small sum to purchase skilled labor that could then be hired out to workshops, factories and individuals.⁴⁴

Argentine slavery, and in particular slavery in and around Buenos Aires had a very different character from slavery in Brazil or in the southeastern United States. Urban slaves hired out as artisans and factory workers enjoyed freedom of movement before and after work hours and on days off and had the right to the proceeds of their own labor and efforts during that time. Agricultural slaves were ranch workers on horseback, free to range. Slavery, of course, was slavery, but even before abolition the slaves of Buenos Aires were not only numerous and highly visible but had some avenues open to purchase their

⁴⁰ Gustavo Lopez and Ana Gonzalez-Barrera, “Afro-Latino: A Deeply Rooted Identity among U.S. Hispanics |.”

⁴¹ “Q&A with Professor Henry Louis Gates, Jr.”

⁴² Edwards, “The Making of a White Nation: The Disappearance of the Black Population in Argentina.”

⁴³ “File *Redenção*.”

⁴⁴ Walter and Andrews, *The Afro-Argentines of Buenos Aires, 1800-1900*. 23-41.

freedom.⁴⁵ We should resist any urge to romanticize Argentine slavery as somehow mild or benign, however. Travelers observed that despite the legal avenues to freedom that existed in Argentina and Uruguay the commonest and surest path to freedom from bondage was death.⁴⁶

By the beginning of the nineteenth century the African-descended population of Buenos Aires swelled to 30% of the overall population.⁴⁷ In the census 1838, the black population of Buenos Aires was counted as nearly 15,000. In the census of 1869, this dropped to 482.⁴⁸ The 1895 Argentine census counted only 454 individuals “of African race” out of a nation of some four million people.⁴⁹ What happened to them all?

Popular folk history in Argentina suggests that the Afro-Argentine population was particularly susceptible to nineteenth century outbreaks of yellow fever. (In fact, less than 300 Afro-Argentines are recorded as having died in the epidemics.⁵⁰) Another story holds that Afro-descended men were rounded up and conscripted as cannon fodder during the 1865 war with Paraguay and perished to a man.⁵¹ This last fable probably draws on the historical reality that during the early years of emancipation, decades before, conscripted slaves were offered freedom at the end of their term of military service and thousands were drafted into the army, but this was a generation before the war of 1865.⁵² These explanations clearly fall short.

We know that even during the colonial period there was considerable incentive for free African-descended Argentines to pass as white. The Spanish colonies groaned under a Byzantine racial caste system with greater advantages conferred as one ascended to levels of greater whiteness, or, as it was, Spanishness. The disadvantages and restrictions imposed on non-whites were stringent, restrictive, and generally maintained across the reach of the Spanish Empire. Even before abolition, free blacks and mixed-ancestry individuals had great incentive to falsify personal records and genealogies whenever possible.⁵³

The disappearance of the Afro-Argentines can probably be chalked up to three factors. First, willful or negligent undercounting of black communities by census workers almost certainly took place, along with deliberate evasion of interaction with authorities by Afro-Argentines mistrustful of authority figures. Second, there was a tendency in Argentina to construct race as a social status rather than as set of inherited visible traits, and many individuals who would have counted as mulatto in the United States attained “white” status due to their level of social and economic advancement. Use of the term *trigueño* (wheat-toned), which did not denote African ancestry, supplanted *pardo* and *mulato* in official

⁴⁵ Walter and Andrews. 23-41.

⁴⁶ Walter and Andrews. 44.

⁴⁷ Cowles and Cussianovich, “Los Afro-Descendientes Buenos Aires Mitos y Real.”

⁴⁸ Cowles and Cussianovich.

⁴⁹ Walter and Andrews, *The Afro-Argentines of Buenos Aires, 1800-1900*. 65.

⁵⁰ Walter and Andrews. 89.

⁵¹ Cowles and Cussianovich, “Los Afro-Descendientes Buenos Aires Mitos y Real.”

⁵² Walter and Andrews, *The Afro-Argentines of Buenos Aires, 1800-1900*. 48.

⁵³ Walter and Andrews. 46.

records, terms that did denote African descent.⁵⁴ Lastly, on a macro-social level there was the government's policy, influenced by racial theory, to "improve" the republic by encouraging European immigration to dilute the non-white presence. On the micro-social level, there was the inexorable march of intermarriage and assimilation. Even by the early 1800s, notices in newspapers refer to ostensibly *mulato* slaves with blonde hair and blue eyes. A 1905 report from a black Buenos Aires newspaper dealt with the marriage of yet another black *porteño* with a white person. The article called the black Buenos Aires community "an African tree that bears white flowers."

Teacher Strategies

Make it Personal

When students feel a personal connection to the work they are doing, I find they are more likely to put in their best work. One strategy I plan to employ is that of inviting students' personal investment in the work. On the food unit, for example, I intend to ask my Afro-Latin students to bring in family recipes for favorite dishes—but there is no reason *all* students cannot bring in a recipe and share memories of special occasions and food. If there is one thing teenagers are interested in talking about, it is food. More to the point, teenagers are interested in talking about themselves.

Make it Possible

One strategy I employ a great deal when teaching students about opportunities for study and service learning abroad is to guide students through doing their own research and calculations to see how long it would take them to save up the funds to do a given activity. I've had them look on real estate sites to see how much they'd need to save to rent a house for a month on the Costa del Sol, for example, or to save up enough money to volunteer for a summer on an organic farm in Catalonia. It is an eye-opening exercise for many students who thought travel was only for the fabulously wealthy.

Make it About the Students

I've heard many times at staff meetings that bad teachers are like opera divas and good teachers are like conductors—the conductor, of course, wielding the baton, the one instrument that makes no sound but brings out everyone else's voice. That is a vivid metaphor but honestly, it's just stupid. I mean, seriously, am I really supposed to elicit an explanation of expressing hypothetical situations constructed using the imperfect subjunctive plus the conditional tense from the students in the class rather than explaining it myself? Please. When I hear that metaphor, it's usually a good indicator the person repeating it hasn't taught in a classroom in fifteen years.

Still, it *is* good to remember the teacher does not have to do *all* the talking. It is great to show the students they are special and worthy by bringing in outside speakers to share their own insights—and good to involve the students in recruiting, welcoming, and introducing those speakers. I have made good use of guest speakers in the past and when the students are truly

⁵⁴ Walter and Andrews. 64-92.

involved and engaged guest speakers can be a terrific resource and inspiration. It's a great way to connect students with goings on in the community.

Instructional Implementations

Sacred Journeys, Sacred Gatherings: African Roots of Carnival

Looking is not Seeing: Using Observational Skills

Yale University Museum of British Art curator Linda Friedlaender developed a specific exercise, almost a game, to use fine art to teach observational skills. Her methods are used in varied professions from law enforcement to medicine. Participants are shown an unfamiliar painting with the identifying placard hidden and are given five minutes to jot down all the details they can about the work. At this stage participants are instructed only to observe, not speculate or interpret. When five minutes is up, participants share out all the details they observed. As needed, the leader may ask leading questions to draw out key details. Lastly, the group votes on the meaning and provenance of the painting. Groups of random adults presented with a previously unseen work are usually able to come to an accurate or close to accurate guess.

Share with students a picture of a masked devil dancer carrying a *vejiga* whip at the Carnival of La Vega in the Dominican Republic.⁵⁵ Play the game “What do you see in the picture?” Have the students divide a page in their notebooks in two, vertically. The right column is marked “Spanish” and the left marked “English.” They are to write down every detail they notice about the picture without speculation—first in Spanish, until they exhaust their capacity to describe the photo in Spanish, and then in English. After a set time, students share out and the teacher shares their observations on the board. The teacher then asks students to speculate on the nature and provenance of the photo they saw. When students come to a consensus as to what the photo represents, the teacher shares with them the actual origin and meaning of the photo. This is a stepping off point to sharing details about Carnival celebrations around Spain and Latin America.

The Arts: La Dama de Elche and Cubism's African Sources

The Lady of Elche and the forgotten African colonizers of Europe

Share with students a photo of The Lady of Elche and ask whom it might represent and what culture it might be from. Is it Aztec? Is it Maya? Does it come from a European culture? After students are given a chance to speculate, reveal to them that the sculpture comes from the Punic Iberians, descendants of a people from the Middle East and North Africa who settled cities in Spain in very ancient times.

Explain to the students that the Phoenicians of Tyre, mentioned in the Bible, lived in what is now Lebanon. The Phoenicians were all the descendants of those who lived in and migrated from Tyre and the region around it. Their civilization outside its cradle in Lebanon is known as Punic or, when speaking of the city of Carthage proper, Carthaginian. They had a culture and a

⁵⁵ Girma, “Carnaval Dominicano Masks, Traditions, and Culture Moon Travel Guides.”

language very similar to that of the Israelites and Canaanites of the Bible. They founded many colonies around the Mediterranean basin, including Carthage in North Africa. The African city-state of Carthage founded colonies of its own in Spain, including many of Spain's oldest cities. Carthage and Rome fought a series of wars for control of the region, wars which Carthage eventually lost. It was the Phoenicians and their later Punic descendants who spread the ancestor of today's alphabet in the ancient world.

The bust of a noblewoman or priestess known as La Dama de Elche was from this culture built by Middle Eastern and North African people who colonized the coast of Spain. The bust is hollow and was at one time filled with human ashes while they were still very hot; it was probably used as a funerary urn. The woman memorialized is shown in clothing and hairstyle that identify her with Tanit, a Punic goddess identified with the goddess Asherah mentioned in the Bible.

The Franco dictatorship of Spain rose to power when the military force that controlled Spain's North African colonies rebelled against the government and invaded the homeland with the help of North African mercenaries.⁵⁶ It was very important to the regime to show the ancient connection between the peoples of Spain and North Africa to justify their use of African colonial forces to capture the mainland and to justify Spain's continuing hold on African colonies in the twilight of the era of European colonialism. The Franco regime featured images of the Dama de Elche on banknotes and stamps.^{57,58} In contemporary times, the sculpture reminds us that long before Europeans were colonizers of the rest of the world, people from the Middle East and North Africa built cities in Europe.

For contemporary perspectives on La Dama de Elche, have students read the poem "La Dama de Elche" by the late beloved Uruguayan poet Amanda Berenguer. In the poem, the statue speaks and presents herself as witness to the rise of empires and the horrors of Hiroshima. She is, in the poem, an enigmatic figure, at once pagan priestess and Moorish princess. She, the personified bust speaking in the poem, is hollow—able to resonate or to be filled with meaning by the spectator.⁵⁹ Divide students into groups and have them give their own interpretations of the figure speaking in the poem. What does she represent?

Picasso's African period and the lost Cuban Cubist Wilfredo Lam

The question for students is, while everyone remembers Picasso's African period and the influence of African art on the development of Cubism—a good thing to remember, of course—why don't we remember the Afro-Cuban painter Wilfredo Lam? He was not a minor painter. He worked and moved in the orbit of Andre Breton and the rest of the Paris Surrealist circle. He won the 1964 Guggenheim International Award; Romare Bearden asserted that in Europe he was regarded as "one of the 20th-century masters, along with Leger, Braque, Matisse and Picasso."⁶⁰ Why is his work not taught or well-known here?

⁵⁶ "This Day in History July 18 1936 Spanish Civil War Breaks Out History.Com."

⁵⁷ "Spain 1 Peseta 1948 Banknotes.Com."

⁵⁸ "Dama de Elche Spain 3.50 Ptas Wwww.Sellosmundo.Com."

⁵⁹ Berenguer, *La Dama De Elche*.

⁶⁰ Fraser, "Wilfredo Lam, 80, A Painter, Is Dead - The New York Times."

Introduce Wifredo Lam and his biography with a look at Lam's work *La Jungla (1943)* alongside *Les demoiselles d'Avignon* and some of Picasso's other early Africanist Cubist works. To reinforce cultural content along with vocabulary for the arts, tell the students to imagine they are curating an exhibit for MoMA on the influence of African art on major 20th century artists. They will digitally curate an exhibit of selected pieces by Picasso and Lam alongside complementary or reminiscent pieces of African art. The virtual catalog they create will contain brief descriptions of each piece using target vocabulary. Alternately, students may select one or two other important but underappreciated painters and pair them in a digital exhibit with examples of a significant influence on their work (for example, Leonora Carrington, Greek mythology and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, or Remedios Varo and Hieronymous Bosch).

Vanishing Cultures: Where Have All the Africans Gone?

Describe and discuss with your students the historical and demographic background behind the rise, and subsequent vanishing, of the African-descended Latin American population. You may wish to use clips of Henry Louis Gates' documentary series *Black in Latin America* – or you may not. As good as the series is, I would encourage sampling from it to be deliberate, targeted and relatively brief in order to remain as much as possible in the target language.

If a speaker from the community is available, invite a community representative in to speak to the class or to the school about the Afro-Latino experience in Latin America and in the United States. We had a noted local poet, Kurma Murrain, speak to us last year, but it does not have to be someone prominent in arts and letters. I think you will be surprised at the extraordinary things ordinary people have to say about their life and experience navigating different cultures.

Assessments

Sacred Journeys, Sacred Gatherings: African Roots of Carnival

Posters and Virtual Gallery: Carnival in Spain and the Americas

Introduce Carnival with anecdotes and photos drawn from around the web; sources may drawn from resources previously sourced above. Explain to students that many of the elements of costume, music and dance in Carnival in the Americas are drawn from West African customs, particularly from funerary rituals. Ask students to speculate why Africans converted to Christianity might use funerary rituals to observe Carnival.

Students will use technology to access information about Carnival celebrations across the Spanish-speaking world. Students will choose a locale and create a poster or digital presentation showcasing the festivities particular to that place. Students will write a summary of the information they uncover and will record a presentation in Spanish sharing a report out on their findings. Written and spoken presentations will be scored based on the PALS rubrics. In order to be eligible for scoring, presentations must name a specific Carnival observance and tell which traditions predominate or are evidence in Carnival celebration: European, African, or indigenous. Students must tell about the dances, dancers and other traditions associated with the

holiday. Students must include images of the celebration. For a superior score, students may contact an eyewitness to Carnival celebrations in the place and ask for a personal statement or reflection.

Interpretive Communication: A Dance Lesson

Interpretive language skills usually develop ahead of productive language skills but we do not often assess them using innovative or interesting methods. For this activity, students will have to show interpretive language competence by learning a new skill in the target language.

Dance is an integral part of Carnival celebrations. Select a dance associated with a region of interest and have native speakers from target cultures come to the class as guest instructor to teach your students how to dance it. (At my school, these students would very readily and easily be conscripted from the upper level Spanish classes and from the English Language Learners program.) Guest instructors will be instructed to speak only in Spanish. Students will be scored based on their readiness to follow directions and success in faithful execution of the steps as taught.

The Arts: La Dama de Elche and Cubism's African Sources

The Lady of Elche and the forgotten African colonizers of Europe

Include as a culture question on the unit test for the unit on arts of the Spanish-speaking world:

The sculpture known as the Dama de Elche is one of the most-visited and best-loved artifacts in Spanish culture today. What is it and what do we know about the people who made her? Why was it significant in 20th century Spain? What meaning does the Dama de Elche sculpture have for us today?

In my departmental setting, I would pair this with another culture question and weight the two as 20 points out of a 100-point test score. Alternately, this could be posed as a stand-alone essay score. As an alternate assignment, students could video record an interview:

The sculpture known as the Dama de Elche is one of the most-visited and best-loved artifacts in Spanish culture today. The statue has come to life and granting interviews to journalists. With a partner, record an interview with La Dama de Elche. The interview must answer many questions for our viewers. Who is La Dama de Elche and what do we know about the people who made her? Why was she significant in 20th century Spain? What meaning does the Dama de Elche sculpture have for us today?

You will be scored using the PALS Presentational Speaking rubric.⁶¹ Costumes and props are encouraged.

This version sounds like a lot more fun.

⁶¹ "PALS Rubrics Prince William County Public Schools.Pdf."

Picasso's African period and the lost Cuban Cubist Wilfredo Lam

Have students create a bound or digital children's biography of an important but less-recognized artist. The book must include fifteen pages or slides with at least two or three lines of text each and should be accompanied by illustrations including selections of the artist's work. To be eligible for scoring, students should include an appropriate number of slides or pages with engaging illustrations (which may be contemporary photographs or examples of the painter's work). Scoring will be on the PALS rubric with particular attention to correct use of preterit and imperfect past tenses.

Alternately, students may produce and record the narrative in another form, such as with a video recording of paper puppets or *manga kamishabai*, Japanese paper theater. In this case, scoring would be done on the PALS presentational speaking rubric.

Vanishing Cultures: Where Have All the Africans Gone?

Discuss the personal and political drives behind the process of *blanquamiento*, or whitening. Show the students the painting *The Redemption of Ham* and explain the historical context. Have students write a letter in Spanish from one of the characters in the painting (the grandmother, the mother, and the son-in-law) expressing hopes and concerns for the future. The letter will be scored on the PALS rubric with particular attention to correct use of subjunctive mood for expressing hopes, wishes, and fears.

Appendix I: Teaching Standards⁶²

IL.CLL.2.4 Compare fiction texts and non-fiction texts about familiar topics.

IL.CLL.3 Use the language to present information to an audience.

IL.CLL.3.1 Use a series of phrases and sentences to create descriptions with some details about familiar topics and experiences.

NH.COD.2.2 Analyze simple texts containing familiar vocabulary from other disciplines in terms of the main ideas and supporting details. NH.COD.2.3 Interpret simple processes from other disciplines using the target language.

NM.CMT.1.2 Use memorized words and phrases on familiar topics to interact with communities of learners of the same target language.

NM.CMT.4.1 Recognize aspects of the target culture and language in the students' culture and language.

NM.CMT.4.2 Identify products made and used by members of the target culture and the students' culture.

⁶² "Standard Course of Study," World Languages Table of Contents, accessed November 1, 2018, <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/curriculum/worldlanguages/scos/>.

Appendix II: Resources for Students

[La trata de esclavos](#) is a Spanish-language infographic on the transatlantic slave trade from Educ.ar, an Argentine education web portal. They seem to report lower numbers of enslaved persons trafficked from Africa than other sources I have seen; a look at the footnotes shows the sources drawn on are a little older. The infographic is otherwise well done and is in Spanish intermediate learners should understand.

For a quick refresher on the basic facts of the transatlantic slave trade, the BBC offers [Quick Guide: The slave trade](#) with more up to date figures.⁶³ The BBC offers a similar brief on the transatlantic slave trade in Spanish, [Cifras de la esclavitud](#).⁶⁴

Appendix III: Resources for Teachers

I have mixed feelings about [Remezcla.com](#).⁶⁵ On the one hand, the Latin pop culture, news and entertainment site makes liberal use of the unfortunate label “Latinx” to describe Latin people in a trendy, supposedly gender-sensitive way (as if “Latin” will not do.) Gross.⁶⁶ On the other hand, the site offers so much in up to the minute Latin culture (with a heavy United States focus) that I find it hard to stay away. Did you know there is a [Calavera Catrina-themed Dia de Muertos Barbie from Mattel](#) now?⁶⁷ Did you know about the [world’s leading underground Latin rap competition](#), sponsored by Red Bull?⁶⁸ Remezcla.com knows. I do not feel good enough about the site’s even quality to refer students to it directly, but it is a good way for me to stay plugged in.

Whether or not you have time to read Henry Louis Gates, Jr.’s *Black in Latin America*,⁶⁹ please explore the four-part miniseries available for purchase from PBS. Of the 11 million Africans who survived transit during the transatlantic slave trade, only around 450,000 made it to the United States. Where did all the millions who went to Latin America go? Why are they so invisible today? I strongly recommend the PBS [Black in Latin America](#) portal.

Appendix IV: Resources for Classroom Use

[MoMA Learning](#)⁷⁰ is a good resource for art and artists. Students and teachers alike will find great material on Wifredo Lam, Pablo Picasso, Frida Kahlo and others.

[Chef Zee Cooks](#)⁷¹ is a great resource for videos on Cuban and Dominican cooking. Chef Zee offers traditional fare but has updated recipes aimed at heart healthy eating as well. She has a series of videos in Spanish offering traditional recipes in the target language

⁶³ *Africa Quick Guide: The slave trade* BBC News

⁶⁴ *Cifras de la esclavitud* BBC Mundo

⁶⁵ “Remezcla The New Latin Wave.”

⁶⁶ Douthat, “Liberalism’s Latinx Problem.”

⁶⁷ Simon, “Mattel Barbie Dia de Los Muertos Toy Brand Launches New Doll.”

⁶⁸ Luzmilla Carabolo, “Batalla de Los Gallos 2019 A Competition for Underground Latino Rap.”

⁶⁹ Gates, *Black in Latin America*.

⁷⁰ “MoMA Learning.”

⁷¹ “Chef Zee Cooks - YouTube.”

good for giving students comprehensible input, along with a host of videos in English. Her delivery in Spanish and English is in clear, precise language with very careful diction.

[PALS Rubrics](#) are among the best common assessment tools for performance-based assessment in World Languages. These easy-to-use rubrics are the perfect go-to for scoring interpersonal and presentational communicative skills across different task types. It is very easy to train students to evaluate their own work and that of peers using these concise and descriptive rubrics.⁷²

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