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Latining America

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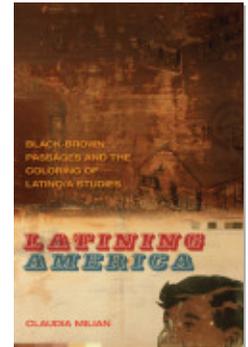
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CHAPTER THREE

INDIGENT LATINITIES

Bring back the most repugnant *Inditos* you can find.

— FRANCISCO GOLDMAN (2004: 30)

The previous two chapters touched on the copious Latined elements in the casting and negotiation of blackness and brownness. A black-brown reprisal follows, extending the ways that bodies exist beyond the boundaries and discourses that subject them. This chapter attends to Latino and Latina articulations of and adjustments to configurations of dark brownness and blackness, which get subsumed under a U.S. semiotic of amalgamated brownness. But U.S. Latino and Latina brownness, as a system of ethnoracial and cultural referentiality, is not in gridlock. It houses the corresponding colorings of dark brownness (*lo prieto*) and blackness (*lo negro*)—a portfolio that capitulates and confesses to “brownish blackness” and “blackish brownness.”¹ The standard U.S. Latino and Latina index, however, eschews problematic blackness, as dark brownness, framed here as a variant of blackness, retains its crucial “afterword,” brownness.² Yet this register also attempts to pass down this *de rigueur* concept brimming with referents of indigence to protruding Indianness and a blackness that sprawls to brownness as well as dark brownness.

Because black-brown–dark brown moments of equivalencies have had a long-term relationship, if you will, these characterizations of impecuniousness serve as the cornerstone for a panoptic body of indigent Latinities. These Latinities are by no means inert and inanimate. Indigent Latinities are expressly manifest and assume, to borrow from Danzy Senna, appearances that propagate “a confusion of races” and garner the inexorable spread of

“a new world order” on its subjects’ faces (2011: 79). Scenes from the iconographic life of brownness rotate around an enmeshed web of association for Latin participants currently obnubilated from the Latinidad map: blacks and dark browns.

Indigent Latinities are neither black nor brown, nor are they meant to connote literal squalor.³ They are intended as active signifiers within cultural imaginations that dramatize and rupture the meanings of a triumvirate of brownness, dark brownness, and blackness. Richard Rodriguez, Gabriel García Márquez, and Horacio Castellanos Moya annotate from different vantage points the dailiness of this racialized hue’s subjugation in informal as well as domestic economies. On the basis of these interlocutors’ illustrations, let us briefly turn to the practice and process of dark brownness. They lead us to the semiotic conceptions that inform my treatment of U.S. Latinness and Latinaness. The then-and-thereness of their take on Latin American dark brownness cues us in on the economy and implications of these representations in our American here and now.

For Rodriguez, an indigent Latinity in Mexico clings to *lo indio*, an Indianness marked by street vendors. He makes known that “[i]n private, in Mexican Spanish, *indio* is a seller of Chiclets, a sidewalk squatter. *Indio* means backward or lazy or lower-class” (1992: 14).⁴ The place of the indigenous comes across through the purchase by García Márquez’s family of three Indian servants — Alirio, Apolinar, and Meme — for one hundred *pesos* each. Working in Aracataca, Colombia, the Guajira Indians were, as García Márquez’s biographer Gerald Martin has it, “effectively slaves” (2009: 37).⁵ Indigenousness is staged through service and domestic duties, and Castellanos Moya’s arrangement of this world is no exception. His overlay makes Indianness a dark category peopled, in Central America, by domestic servants. Indianness is also a state affixed to undesirable women “with slanted eyes and toasted brown skin” (2008: 68).⁶ But brown is not decidedly brown in every occasion. It has complex and fickle constellations.

These snapshots of the trinity of race, class, and gender resonate with a news event from the summer of 2007. Peace Nobel Laureate Rigoberta Menchú was confused for a street vendor, bag lady, or beggar, in Cancún, Mexico, because of the Maya attire she was wearing. Menchú was subsequently removed from the five-star Coral Beach Hotel. The *Guardian* reported that “the human rights activist was in the Mexican coastal resort at the request of President

Felipe Calderón to participate in a conference on drinking water and sanitation and was due to give interviews at the hotel.” The establishment’s staff “relented when told who she was. It was said not to be the first time a hotel has tried to throw her out. [. . .] Commentators noted the irony of upmarket resorts discriminating against real Maya while trying to attract tourists with fake Mayan architecture and spectacles” (Carroll, 2007). Indigenous life is reduced to the Mexican landscape, or in Cancún’s case, a “‘pristine’ tropical paradise located in the land of the ancient Maya” (Castellanos, 2010: xxvii). There is no room for an indigenous body that looks and dresses “like an Indian” to leisurely vacation in Cancún as a tourist. Menchú’s appearance is ultimately indigenized as a beggar, vagrant, or peddler of indigenous crafts, relegated to “the proletarianization experienced in [Cancún’s] service industry” (78).⁷

Indigent Latinities are relevant to imputed blackness in the Americas. Citing Venezuelan use of the proverbial and problematic *mi negra*, Cristóbal Valencia Ramírez analyzed the 2006 presidential campaign in the South American nation. At that point in time, Hugo Chávez’s opponent, Manuel Rosales, pitched a welfare debit card that was to be known as *Mi Negra* (My Black). The *Mi Negra* plan, as the *Vivir Latino* blog dubbed it, was “complete with a black card and an Afro-Venezuelan *viejita* [little old woman]” (Woodard Maderazo, 2006). The presidential aspirant’s stipend called for a deposit between \$250 and \$450 per month into individual debit accounts for an estimated three million Venezuelans living below the minimum wage. “Rosales claimed that the proposal intended to give marginalized Venezuelans a direct share of the national oil profits,” Valencia Ramírez spelled out. “Rosales explained the proposal’s name as a reference to oil. However, the advertisements associated with the proposal featured almost exclusively black Venezuelans. Some of the ads showed toothless, grinning Venezuelans hoisting up the black card and singing the praises of *Mi Negra* and Rosales. The message behind the proposal — that Afro-Venezuelans were indigents — came through in the images and in discourses surrounding the proposal” (2009: 117). Circling the nub of the social production of the gendered *negra* is blackness as a guiding theme for a penurious condition of life. Rodríguez deals with this codified U.S. thematic of economic abjection and structural racism too. He notices that “the garbage men who appeared every Friday morning” in his Sacramento, California, neighborhood were “unmistakably black” (1982: 118).

While the connotations of these indigent overtones may change in meaning and are negotiated and responded to differently, my task is to look at how these ethnoracial and class specific significations continue to dwell within the distinctive cultural and ideological imaginaries for generic U.S. Latino and Latina brownness. Francisco Goldman's epigraph illuminates this context insofar as I am taking and bringing back the idea of "Indito" or "Indita" not just as a marker that adheres to the indigenous, U.S. Latino, or Latina subject. It also indicates other layers of "repugnant" Latinities, blackness. In providing a diagram for black-dark brown bodies, I would like to expound, as I have done in another venue, that I am cognizant of the hierarchies that surface between lighter and darker shades "of color" (Milian, 2004). Black-brown-dark brown populations are knowledgeable of how these racialized states are inhabited. My broad evocation of black and brown—cited in lowercase to trace but to also depart from the visible impressions of these racialized descriptions—does not suppose that these colors and colorings are immutable foundations for fully accountable U.S. African American, Latino, and Latina phenotypes. Black and brown detail the limitations of how these terms operate. But such utilization prompts a larger process encouraging new pedagogical approaches that assess the moving typological lines that challenge the imaging and organizing of the brown-black symbolic.

My deployment of black, brown, U.S. Latino, and Latina denotes the discursive separation of these racially marked peoples and their representation in the academic fields overlooking their associative realities within the corporeal and geographic mappings of Latin-America. The intentional use of such categories as black and U.S. Latino and Latina conterminously works against the presumed ossification of monolithic U.S. African American blackness and Latino and Latina brown fixity. I apply these terms to punctuate moments of close relations that become the seeds of black and brown, shedding light on how these groups are accomplices in knowing each other's color lines. These strands echo the observations of *The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man's* main character, who comments, "It is remarkable, after all, what an adaptable creature the Negro is" (Johnson, 1989: 153). For our purposes, we should recall that such alterations—Negro, lo negro, lo prieto, and lo indio—also put across the idea that an indigent Latinity is malleable. Among this chapter's preoccupations are the tensions in the adaptability of Latino and Latina

brownness within U.S. African Americanness, alongside the inadaptability of blackness and dark brownness in brown Latinidad, which becomes an active exegesis of Latinities, as argued in the introduction.

I engage with how Latinos and Latinas come across, excogitate, and practice their blackness-cum-dark brownness. Blackness and a dark brownness recast as brownness are conceived not as a shared essence but as an open semiotic configuration that molds into porous Latinities in numerous arenas.⁸ I build on a blackness-in-transit and how it passes through Chicano and Chicana discourses about dark brownness and brownness.⁹ If, as Rodriguez suggests in *Brown: The Last Discovery of America*, U.S. African Americans have been unwilling “to admit brown,” this monograph is an exploration not only of the asymmetrical ways browns admit dark brown and black but also of how blacks admit brown (2002: 142). Fundamentally, U.S. Latino and Latina brownness cannot afford an entrance to dark brownness, because it would be an admittance of blackness. Dark brownness exposes an aesthetic and political challenge. Yet curiously, the distinct qualifier “dark” is hardly appended to the U.S. African American acknowledgments of brownness referenced in this chapter, perhaps because darkness and brownness, as embodied by U.S. African Americanness, are unalterably constituted as black.

W. E. B. Du Bois’s unraveling of the meaning of blackness as a problem within the white world’s problems holds relevance in U.S. Latino and Latina microcosms of brownness. Problematic blackness and darkness also resonate in U.S. Latino and Latina literature with brown leitmotifs. But U.S. Latino and Latina theming of brownness is pervaded not by blackness but by darkness. This dark brownness passes through Latinoness and Latinaness and remains as a repugnant Indian signifier. This relative whiteness—derivative whiteness—does not pass for white. Rather, it passes among whiteness and brownness (R. Rodriguez, 2002: 4). Such manipulation of skin tones is a Latino and Latina concealment that avoids Du Bois’s articulation of the “real question” required of blackness: “how does it feel to be a problem?” (1996b: 3–4). The comparable Latino, Latina, and Latin-American query for this deeply embedded U.S. interrogation sonorously shifts to “how does it feel to be dark brown?” The problem that thus warrants further disentangling is the logic of dark brownness and its knots to blackness. I discuss their operational semiotics for the representation of an economy of brownness that gives conceptual form to U.S. Latinoness and Latinaness. How does dark

brownness, often unambiguously personified at home, translate into public, ambiguous brownness, a pigmentation lighter than dark brownness?

I push a counternarrative to authoritative U.S. Latino and Latina brownness by thrusting U.S. blackness to that meshed North-South, Global South fusion of Latin referents, Latin-America.¹⁰ I account for signifiers that paradoxically perpetuate the racially crude signification of all things black, *lo negro*. Please do not misunderstand me here: I do not fathom *lo negro* as—or confine it to—a commanding phenotypic signifier of blackness in the African diasporic sense. When appropriating *lo negro* or *lo prieto* as overarching U.S. Latino and Latina exemplars—especially from groups that have ties to Mesoamerica—I am addressing how these problematic signifiers are denotative of “something” from which brownness moves away. Literature captures the idea of blackness as a derisive, living entity. I lay no claim to speak for the entire U.S. Latino and Latina population on black-brown matters, in the stern and popular understanding of these colorings, wherein blackness is assigned to U.S. African Americanness and brownness to Latinos and Latinas. Nor is my point to dissect, in an amplified fashion, how blacks and browns maintain stereotypes about each other (cf. Mindiola, Niemann, and Rodriguez, 2003). Instead, I search for the *negro* symbolic, endeavoring with how the texts mustered in this chapter voice resistance to the pool of signs ensnared in dark brownness and blackness.

Lo negro and *lo prieto* suggest a mingling of both blackness and darkness. This merger does not fall into obscurity. It precedes the category and rank of the dark Indian and its rich symbology. *Lo negro* harbors a loaded location that one does not want to inhabit. Sandra Cisneros inserts this discursive wedge in *Caramelo*, a novel that begins with Mexican-origin subjects alternating North-South geopolitical demarcations, in reverse, from the United States to Mexico. These transnational crossings are plotted as passing color lines between blackness and a caramel tincture that can also conform to the maxims of dark brownness.¹¹ But these U.S.-Mexican geographic passages cease as caramel-colored bodies are materially grounded through the corporal trappings of a labor based on ethnoracialized colorings. Cisneros intimates that “caramelo” folk recognize blackness through work.¹² *Lo negro* bears the traces of slavery. A Mexican American character—in another geography of the Global South, Little Rock, Arkansas—is quick to relate a popular saying that connects his arduous physical labor to his U.S. standing. “Today,” he

announces, “I worked *como un negro*, which is what they say in Mexico when they work very hard” (2002: 211).¹³

The Mexican idiom migrates and crosses genres, going from an oral, commonplace dictum in Spanish to part of an English/Spanglish sentence in American literature. Its familiar meaning is conveyed and preserved in Spanish, which translates, in English to “working like a *negro*.” Cisneros’s writerly fidelity is aligned with the American ethic of hard work, which has become a dark brown (American) precept of individual effort and asceticism. What takes primacy is not a literal translation of Mexican colloquialisms. It is, instead, the interpretive altering script of how the original text (the Mexican workforce’s blackness) migrates to a southern American setting through Mexican *caramelo* dark brownness. This swerving brownness spaces out these unsubdued bodies and opens them to a semiotic flux that puts brownness *at work*, while putting dark brownness *to work*.

Although the perception is that blackness may not be an inherent element in Mexicanness, its proximity echoes a veridical existence through manual work. *Lo negro* is an irremediable presence in tandem with a labor that most whites do not — and browns ought not — perform. Through a labor that resonates with blackness, Cisneros’s illustration begs a rethinking of subjects whose bedrock foundation may be regarded as strictly brown. Her *caramelo* subject iterates an Indianness that bespeaks blackness. Indianness accentuates a racializing process that can be manipulated and that may eventually catch up with the rest of the browned Latino and Latina population.¹⁴ Brown is dual-directional and lives among U.S. African Americans too. Its changeable dispositions and resonances bear witness to deliquescent black-brown categories.

The considerations I offer cobble through the discursive uses of blackness and brownness. This third chapter is a scrutiny of brownness as a method of U.S. Latina and Latino identification. So doing, I motion toward the unmapable and unthinkable in Latino/a thought: how Latino and Latina brownness and dark brownness not only commingle with U.S. African American blackness but also semiotically impart blackness. These ethnoracial categories augment one another and demand a new pattern of relational understanding. In summoning these identity formations, I exercise Lewis Gordon’s concept of the relational theory of race, where “black people and white people needn’t have been the historical black and white people. As long as a group

defines itself as white in such a way that it becomes the standpoint from which other races are judged on the basis of the degree to which they are less white, a slippery slope downward begins until the unreal figure of blackness looms at the point beyond which there is only nothing" (1995b: 95). The "unreal figure of blackness" in U.S. Latino and Latina life and its unrelationality to brownness encourages a new emergent relation: a blackness lived through Latino and Latina dark brownness. My examination delves into what kind of a dark American present do U.S. African Americans, Latinos, and Latinas live in and belong to? What is being left behind and withdrawn from the production of a comprehensive (black) U.S. African American and (brown) Latino and Latina future?

Starting from this, my line of inquiry first takes stock of contemporary approaches that produce a way of thinking about brownness as a disobedient and transgressive U.S. site or as a comparative experience formed by an accretion of displacements and political alignments. Some of the theories that are being put forth hinge on ethnoracial U.S. Latino and Latina brownness. Other critical frameworks take up brownness as a cultural sensibility, dissident practice, and shifting solidarity that are not necessarily constituted by Latino- and Latina-specific outlooks. On the whole, however, this chapter reexamines a U.S. Latino and Latina brown vocabulary. I am tackling U.S. Latino and Latina terms of engagement through this group's crafting of—and encasement in—its main narrative component, brownness. How the Latino and Latina brown story is being told protects a "community" that does not open up to dark brown and black beings, rhetorics, and signs.

U.S. Latino and Latina brownness evinces a process of brown becoming, as it incongruously admits dark brown derivatives that pass into brownness. If questions of Latino and Latina origins have been pursuing us since the first chapter through a nuevo U.S. genealogy, the variety and strangeness—alienness—of Latinos and Latinas are being situated in and broadened through a domestic American brownness ushering in a multitude of brown exponents.¹⁵ Yet the trajectory of American brownness through blackness has not been hazarded as an overlapping story that moves outside U.S. African Americanness. This chapter's second objective is to cross-consider, albeit briefly but as a point of incitation, how U.S. blackness is a source of brownness. U.S. African American brownness introduces another look at this Latino and Latina referent, which involves ongoing critical interrogations

about new forms of fluctuating brownness and who can narrate it. Third, I intersect U.S. African American brown textual articulations with Latino and Latina literary productions. My focus zooms in on a vexing dark brownness, as lived through the common denominator of the Mexican American domestic spheres chronicled by Gloria Anzaldúa (1942–2004), Cherríe L. Moraga (1952), and Richard Rodriguez (1944). This part of the analysis canvasses how Chicano and Chicana darkness is transformed into brownness as a line of ethnoracial and familial communication.¹⁶

A Brown Gathering: From the Browning of the Self to the Browning of America

The vast archive of brown, brownness, and brown pride holds such a prominent place in Chicano and Chicana public imaginations and identity configurations that these designations make up one informative entry in Paul Allatson's *Key Terms in Latino/a Cultural and Literary Studies*.¹⁷ Under his grid, "The term brown was adopted by Chicano/as in the 1960s and 1970s in line with the Chicano Movement redefinition of Chicano/as as a mestizo/a people. This racialization also signaled an attempt to insert a third racial category into U.S. racial discourses and debates alongside black and white. The civil rights' celebratory slogan Brown Pride typified this redefinition" (2007: 49–50).¹⁸ This Chicano generation—united as "la raza," or "the people"—laid out an alternative to the social and ethnoracial order, calling those "of Mexican descent to express pride in their ethnic origins rather than try to blend into a homogeneous white mainstream" (Jiménez, 2010: 43).¹⁹

Ian F. Haney López proposes that "Chicano activists remade [a] Mexican racial identity" set forth by judicial struggles that impelled a nonwhite racial identification (2003: 109).²⁰ "Had Mexicans not been treated as an inferior race," he brings to mind, "they would not have turned to a politics based on non-white identity" (157). This nonwhite identification gave Chicanos a "space in which to define a positive Mexican identity" (208). Haney López argues that the police shaped the unfolding meaning of Chicanoness, "but the Chicano movement also worked constantly, creatively, and self-consciously to fashion a new racial identity" (205). He adds, "According to Chicanos, and many Mexicans today, Mexicans were racially brown by nature, and contrary beliefs, politics, or attitudes could render one inauthentic but not actually

white” (208). Connections with indigenous ancestry were recaptured and the view of a brown people emerged.²¹ This nexus was of great significance, as we weigh in Moraga’s words that “the majority of Mexicans in the United States and México have historically denied (and been denied) their Native identities” (2011: 7).

And yet the movement’s emphasis on indigenosity led “Chicano activists to distinguish themselves from blackness” and “the black experience in the United States” (Haney López, 2003: 211–12).²² Blackness did not fit at this moment of brown pride and brown power. Neither was blackness accommodated in the nascent stages of Mexican American advocacy during the twentieth century’s early decades. At the time, “the idea of being American resonated among middle-class Mexican Americans” who envisioned “themselves as patriotic ‘white’ Americans” (Ruiz, 2004: 350). The League of United Latin American Citizens, founded in 1929, “maintained the color line between its members and African Americans” (351). Linkages with U.S. African Americans are delayed in what becomes a dyad of (Chicano and Chicana) empowering brownness and (Mexican American) assimilationist “whiteness.” The Chicano movement’s credo was that “Mexicans should be free from the inferiority imputed to blacks. Though Chicanos did not *want* to be white, neither did they *want* to be black” (Haney López, 2003: 212; emphasis added). I punctuate the verb *want* here. Its meanings — to wish, need, crave, demand, desire, or feel inclined toward — elide the slippages and detours of brownness. The wanting of a homogeneous brown recognition counts on the imposition of how a unified Chicano life should be socially framed and reproduced.

Once a Chicano and Chicana foundational narrative, brownness currently circumscribes a larger U.S. Latino and Latina body politic. Its inventory encapsulates an expansive symbolic. Brownness can refer to an irreversible marker of — and solution to — American uncertainty or to subversive practices that trouble ideological Americanness. By and large, however, brownness has become a metaphoric mapping that profiles Latino and Latina migrants — and the invading waters of immigration — in American public discourse and everyday life. Otto Santa Ana has studied, in-depth, how U.S. Latinos and Latinas have been metaphorically constituted in major mainstream newspapers, such as the *Los Angeles Times*, and the American political stage.²³ He contends that ubiquitous political metaphors like “a sea of brown faces” (2002: xv), “awash under a brown tide” (7), and “invasion of brown

hordes" (286), among many others, speak to how "Americans frame their domestic worldview and their [. . .] underlying political and social values" (8). John-Michael Rivera follows this subject of the invasive brown tide and the "excessive growth" of present-day Latino and Latina populations. This new demographic foments a "reality on the landscape of the United States": that "Latinos, and specifically Mexicans [. . .] [will] soon perhaps take over the map—a 'brown tide is rising'" (2006: 6). This public aversion to and dislike of (brown) Latino and Latina bodies implies the spoiling of America.

That unfamiliar and stigmatizing brownness can create a U.S. outbreak that displaces and infects the pure national body has been redirected and transformed as a matter of critical self-inquiry. Richard Rodriguez upholds in his third memoir a suffused brownness that fleshes out a load of his productive "impurity." Formative brown stains as a mode of belonging give credence to various actors and ways: ethnoracially, queerly, nationally, and literarily, to cite but a few of the liberating potentials behind what Rodriguez identifies, post-9/11, as the "combustible dangers of brown" (2002: xiii). Despite this elasticity in signification, Rodriguez inescapably concedes, "Brown is the color most people in the United States associate with Latin America. Apart from stool sample, there is no browner smear in the American imagination than the Rio Grande" (xii). Broadly speaking, the worth of Latin America as a region has been speculated about in terms of excrement. Former president Richard Milhous Nixon once impolitely discharged that "'people don't give a shit' about the place" (Grandin, 2006: 2). This political umbra branches out to Latin-American bodies. In Junot Díaz's indelible words, this fecal condition dates back to "the arrival of Europeans on Hispaniola, [. . . and] we've all been in the shit ever since" (2007: 1). Overall, brown becomes, as Curtis Márez relays, "part of a scatological vocabulary that marks Chicanos as matter out of place" (1996: 109).

Although I note that Rodriguez differs from Nixon's viewpoint, it needs to be reemphasized that he "salute[s] Richard Nixon, the dark father of Hispanicity" (2002: xii). Rodriguez's reverence for Nixon, "the working-class white kid," lies in his administration's coinage of the Hispanic category (95). He acknowledges, "It was not until Richard Nixon's administration that I became brown" (94). Unlike Nixon's ideological posture, Rodriguez's appropriation of and investment in brownness for the twenty-first century gives a shit about the fate of this human and regional "waste" and how it fails to take the

allotted place for excrement.²⁴ Rodriguez takes the color of feces as a consequential constitution and flowing mode of interaction from within (the self) and from without (the American citizen-observer). He welcomes the solid matter and liquefies it, adding more ethnicities, cultures, and modalities into the brown equation. And even though Moraga posits in her canonical essay “La Güera” that “I don’t really understand first-hand what it feels like being shitted on for being brown,” she shares a likeness with Rodriguez in forging a greater brown terrain of representation (1983b: 30). Brownness, in her view, is “a poverty” akin to “being a woman [and] being just plain poor” (29). Slightly more than two decades after Moraga’s vastly influential piece from *This Bridge Called My Back*, Rodriguez domesticates the brown mixture. He charts a new map that fertilizes the American landscape through all that “brownly” confuses, his brown thoughts bleeding “through the straight line” (2002: xi).

Yet Rodriguez does not yield to an “easy optimism” that could be produced by brown as a marker of “a reunion of peoples” (2002: xiii). Its “combustible dangers” signal national infidelities and less than honorable citizenships. The browning of America may direct us toward the future, as Rodriguez insists. But for our intentions here, a multisited brownness is probed as a manifestation that has been nearby all the while and notably from — to paraphrase Mary Douglas — the dangerous contagions of a U.S. African Americanness lived through blackness as much as through brownness. U.S. African American blackness, however, has been read as overdetermined, trapped in the perennial stasis of its “own” blackness. But blackness, like brownness, is also unsettled. As “ambiguous thing[s],” blackness and brownness, sewn together, lead to a “cognitive discomfort” that can be “very threatening” (2002: xi). Since blackness, brownness, and dark brownness move out of their allotted spaces, the habitual order of black and brown is emptied. This revision demands that the perceptions of a brown threat be dismantled and not be generated in an exclusively Latinized mode.

But brownness appears to have “stuck,” and not just as a site of U.S. Latino and Latina dread. It is also a signifier of other burdens and beings, incomprehensibilities, distinctions, and divisions. In an instance that could be read as transnational brownness, Cuban American memoirist and history professor Carlos Eire transposes a comparable function of Rodriguez’s excremental color to Regla, a poor Havana neighborhood. Regla’s viscous streaks, pre-

Cuban Revolution, are textually visualized as brown. Eire tells us, “The only color I remember seeing in that neighborhood was brown. The buildings were brown, the streets were brown, the people were brown. Even the statue of the Virgin Mary enshrined in the chapel of Our Lady of Regla was brown” (2003: 20). Brownness writes in — covers — the town and its dwellers. It blankets its representational contours with a destitute brownness that is remapped in the United States and that could host motley brown contributors.

The practice of a dissident brown aesthetics has also come to the fore. Márez propounds the term “brown style” to entail “a critical discourse that simultaneously counters Anglo repressions, opposes the white supremacist assumptions of highbrow taste, and affirms the qualities of Chicano difference” (1996: 109). It brings forward flamboyance as “a theory of style among contemporary working-class Chicanos” that can be “too ornate, too gaudy, too florid, too loud, too busy, too much — an embarrassment of riches” (110, 122). Additionally, a brown style is a “lowbrow(n)” avowal of popular taste, epitomized through “black velvet bull fighters, tattooed tear drops, bombshell hairdos, lowriders, zoot suits, Christ crucified in 3-D, plastic roses, ceramic black panthers, calendars with Aztec warriors and maidens” (120).²⁵ It impugns a highbrow style and “names the process of constructing and valorizing racial identities in the context of economic and political oppression” (121).

A brown style builds from a “working-class brown nostalgia” that looks backward into the Chicano heroic and recent past through *ranchera* music, the idealization of rural life, and Mesoamerican iconography (Márez, 1996: 124, 123). Brown nostalgia is not dormant, however. It orients us toward “remobilizations of brown memory” (128–29). Given Chicano and Chicana impurity and mestizaje, “working-class people become mixmasters” of this multifariously expressed brown cultural pattern, a gesture Márez calls a “collage.” “Because Chicanos are themselves collages — an amalgam of Indian, Spanish, Mexican, and Anglo elements,” he lets it be known, “their cultural products are also mixtures and fragments from diverse traditions. Collage is thus the stylistic corollary of mestizaje, the ‘impure’ status of racial and national mixture” (122).

Chicano and Chicana mestizaje is marked with substantive brown impurity. Its cultural affirmation occurs through continuous articulations of borrowings that culminate in a brown Chicano and Chicana collage. The greater

“we” of the brown world is unclear, as the brown style tangibly sways toward Chicano and Chicana subjectivities. This stylistic shift brings out questions on the genealogy of a brown collage. A collage requires technique, specialized procedures and methods, and execution in the composition and assembling of materials and referents not usually related with one another. What types of non-Chicano, non-Chicana, and non-Mexican provisions and entities get to crossover in this congeries? Where is blackness in this amalgam? Can hip-hop artist David L. K. Thomas, “Kemo the Blaxican,” be collaged—mixed and remixed—into this brown style?²⁶ Márez’s brown modality, nonetheless, imports a “decolonial aesthetics,” which involves ongoing artistic endeavors that can move in “radically different directions” and respond “to the darker side of imperial globalization.” Decolonial aesthetics practitioners engage “in transnational identities-in-politics, revamping identities that have been discredited in modern systems of classification [. . .]. They are dwelling in the borders, sensing in the borders, doing in the borders” (Díaz Neiro et al., 2011).

Outside the unyielding brown premise manifested in Latinoness and Latinaness, the production of brownness can operate in promising ways that subverts, as Hiram Perez has articulated, the “primitive, exotic, or ‘brown’ body commodified by dominant gay male culture” (2005: 171). Perez’s intervention in queer studies—*vis-à-vis* ungovernable brown impulses that are not based exclusively in Latino/a studies’ articulations of Latinidad—presents brownness as a cross-identification marked by “shame and racial embodiment.” To engage with Perez’s idea more fully, I am interested in this instructive excerpt:

What color is brown? In regard to race classification, brown is no more a natural color than black or white or yellow or red; brown is a verb. “Brown” designates a kind of constitutive ambiguity within U.S. racial formations—an identity that both complicates and preserves the binary opposition white/other. I use the category here to mark a position of essential itinerancy relative to naturalized, positivist classes such as white, black, Asian. Itself provisional as an identity category (a waiting station of sorts between white and black, or white and Asian, for example), I make use of “brown” provisionally myself—and tactically—to demystify how bodies are situated outside white/black or white/Asian binaries to consolidate cosmopolitan, first world identities. As a reposi-

tory for the disowned, projected desires of a cosmopolitan subject, it is alternately (or simultaneously) primitive, exotic, savage, pansexual, and abject. It is black and not black, Asian and not Asian, white and not white. In an age of weak multiculturalism, it is what it needs to be to maintain existing hierarchies, a race discourse morally divested from politics and social redistribution. That ambiguity designated here as “brown” is opportunistically and systematically deployed at times of crisis — as instanced by the intensified race profiling authorized by 9/11. (175–76)

As a verb, brown is that which is not only situated outside contrasting, racialized oppositions like white-and-black or white-and-other. Brown is a rotation system that surfaces at times of social and political crises. Perez’s brownness speaks of U.S. racial formations that rest on seemingly disowned, strikingly unusual, and inadaptable bodies that are scrutinized to promote, depending on the context, desire and governmental power. Brownness, while deeply provocative, unwittingly dialogues with cultural studies premises of *Latinidad*. Instead of a white-brown dyad, Perez introduces a white-other binary. This otherness applies to a larger range of subjects — a continuous becoming of brown people or a multiethnic progeny — that operate as “primitive, exotic, savage, pansexual, and abject.” To be sure, brown is a critical response in this formulation. But this brownness somehow remains static, since it does not apply to interethnic or intraethnic relations or variables, which is the intent behind flowing Latinities that are Latinizing the continuous motion from, for instance, black to brown to black and other dispositions.

If dread for the browning of the United States ideologically unites white America, the fear of hegemonic America sets off, to quote José Esteban Muñoz, choreographies of the self — narratives of being and becoming — through “brown feeling.” This brown sentiment “chronicles a certain ethics of the self that is utilized and deployed by people of color and other minoritarian subjects who don’t feel quite right within the protocols of normative affect and comportment” (2006: 676). Muñoz elaborates that brown feelings, as anti-normative persuasions, “are not individualized affective particularity; they more nearly express [. . .] a larger collective mapping of self and other” (679). It is under this type of brownness where “different circuits of belonging connect, [as] recognition flickers between minoritarian subjects.” Muñoz writes, “Brownness is not white, and it is not black either, yet it does not simply sit

midway between them. Brownness, like all forms of racialized attentiveness in North America, is enabled by practices of self-knowing formatted by the nation's imaginary through the powerful spikes in the North American consciousness identified with the public life of blackness" (680). The public life of brownness is being made and remade differently and in various ambits. But what draws my attention is the archival life of brownness. Can brownness be truly trusted to—and entrusted with—the task of, as Judith Butler (2005) might say, "giving an account of oneself," a representation, in this instance, of a newly formed brown folk? How will brown exchanges be inscribed in dark brown and black? Will they uniformly prevail as brown?

At present, the rhetoric of the browning of America is being promulgated at the national level through divergent interpretive propositions. Ronald R. Sundstrom has philosophically broached the public idea of U.S. demographic changes and social justice through Latino, Latina, Asian American, and mixed-race populations, and the ensuing national and ethnoracial transformations vis-à-vis this browning. Such "coloring" consists of conflicting sociopolitical positions around the central demands of race and social justice (2008: 2). For Sundstrom, the browning of America operates, at one level, as a "grand vision," a "social revolution," and a "remedy for all of our racial ills." It entices "those who are tired of racial divisions and who desire a 'color-blind' society." Moreover, this U.S. browning "connects to the popular interest to end so-called reverse discrimination in race-based public policy" (1).

In an equal manner, U.S. "nationalists and xenophobes" are preoccupied with this browning, seeing that it is "a threat to long-established racial and ethnic demographic patterns and associated patterns of the distribution of resources and powers. The browning of America, from their perspective, is the result of generations of chain immigration, illegal immigration, and the lax enforcement of present immigration laws" (Sundstrom, 2008: 1–2). Despite this perceived American fragmentation or restoration, Americans nonetheless take part in this national browning process through "the challenges, threats, and transformations to race, ethnicity, and social justice" (4). Sundstrom argues, "the browning of America offers important challenges to traditional conceptions of racial justice and ethnoracial patterns that expose assumptions based on nativism, xenophobia, and American nationalism predicated on the black-white binary" (6). This "newly *brown* America" allows

Latinos, Latinas, Asian Americans, and mixed-race groups to enter U.S. historical demands for social justice, as previously posed by Native Americans and U.S. African Americans (10). Such considerations exhibit resonances with a “pan-brown”-like coalitional function among the aforementioned minoritized groups whose broad vision is contingent on the ethical responsibility attributed to brownness and the ongoing browning of post-civil rights America.

Earlier, Perez asked “What color is brown?” Duly notable in these brown schools of thought are these accompanying concerns: How does one become ethically (and “ethnically”) brown, and with whom? What cultivates and upholds indefatigable brown becomings? What is a brown ethos? Even more, can a brown ethos be dark brown, or even unbrown? The logic of brownness that has taken shape in the renderings discussed previously has occurred through the disavowal of national norms. Brown “origins” detonate outside the self. Although brownness is not always the same, all differences are made coherent and captured under an interim brown pedigree with brown sensibilities. Latinoness and Latinaness are moving toward brown recognition, even as dark brown and black possibilities from within enact different bodily and social forms — fortuitously interrupting and rerouting the Latino or Latina signifier that presumably sediments it.

To familiarize us with the two great problems in brown — blackness and dark brownness — I will now survey the hues and voids of brownness first through U.S. African American cultural productions and then through Chicano and Chicana nonfictional reminiscences. I canvas how a Latino and Latina meditative “I” is modeled and speaks through this darker tertiary tint. I seek to grasp how these bodies stand the familial trials of their dark brown-and-black lives, leading the reader to assume the discovery of a newly created map — of brown fiction, let us say.

A Pile of Problems: The Brownness of Blackness, the Blackness of Brownness

The literary snapshots utilized in this part of my analytic treatment track the story of traditional Chicano and Chicana brownness to U.S. African American blackness. A pivotal question underlying this scrutiny is, in what ways is brownness, literarily speaking, transported and embodied in black? Latino

and Latina struggles with the dark body—which can also be read as a discursive black body that in Anzaldúa’s stance, opens “the door to old images that haunt me, the old ghosts and all the old wounds”—submit that they have obeyed the familial structuring of constitutive brownness (1983: 198). But Latino and Latina dark brownness is not fully covered up. And we cannot abandon it either, for what remains is the task of unraveling the implications of “that” black infiltration. The wide reach of brownness demonstrates that the contrast and organization of brownness is not whiteness, but dark brownness and blackness.

There cannot be a deferral in how we critically read the centrality of co-eval blackness and dark brownness within this group and its relationship to Latinness and Latinaness. The blackness of brownness has been documented in U.S. African American literature through the rubric of “colored.” There, brownness keeps showing up, and the coloring of blackness suggests an intrinsic admixture that invariably points to its different specters. Du Bois, Zora Neale Hurston, Audre Lorde, Richard Wright, and Malcolm X, to cite a few figures, allude to the shifting boundaries of blackness through brownness.²⁷ What to make of this steady tinge of brownness vis-à-vis blackness? What might this mean for the encrustations of Latino and Latina brownness? The anecdotal life of brownness through blackness furnishes us with a different logic for the brown imagination. The prequel to (Latino and Latina) brownness may as well be (African American) blackness, but we must not be captive to their presumed rigid modes of being. Of particular importance are how blackness and brownness are transmitted in the rehearsal of autobiographical memory and how these hues make the leap into other ontologies that uproot the usually expected Latino, Latina, and African American orientations.

As far back as 1845 Frederick Douglass called the reader’s attention to a “plain” fact, whereby “a very different-looking class of people are springing up at the south” (1997: 14). Noting that the plantation is a “little nation of its own,” Douglass described the shades of blackness as “black, brown, copper colored, and nearly white” (50, 39). Despite the notable differences that surfaced in the South, the plantation’s racial economy demanded that this difference be concealed.²⁸ Senna offers an eye-catching moment about the story of familial brownness upon discerning in her memoir that brown is the “literal” shade that confounds the black-white divide. Perusing her parents’ marriage

certificate from 1968 — the decade of “Black is Beautiful” — Senna speculates on racial colorings and official documentation. “In both the groom and the bride sections,” she narrates, “the third piece of information requested after name and age is ‘Color.’ While my mother is listed as ‘white,’ my father is listed as ‘brown’ rather than ‘black’ or ‘negro.’ Apparently my father insisted on this term.”²⁹ She concludes that her father “was trying to make a point about race as a social construct rather than an essential biological category. If they wanted to know his color, he would give them the literal color of his skin. He wanted to call attention to the absurdity of racial categorization, even on this most personal of documents” (2009: 27). Taking a second look more than four decades later, this certificate’s edges — its brown marginalia — have migrated to the main text. They are a harbinger of another political message: that brown, intricately appended to blackness, has been politically beautiful all along also. Some points for further deliberation accordingly pass through and reinvigorate old questions in black and white: Where does literal brownness reside? What is the direction of a brown Latinidad when we take into account a brown U.S. African American blackness? Senna similarly underscores a tension at the core of this study: What is the direction of brownness in black?

Side by side, brownness and blackness are continuative. They reopen and cannot be abandoned, especially as projects of epistemological inquiry. Langston Hughes distinguishes himself and his family in *The Big Sea* by saying, “I am brown. My father was a darker brown. My mother an olive-yellow” (1993: 11). Hughes details his color as one of a “copper-brown complexion” (50) and calls himself an “*americano de color*, brown as a Mexican” (78). This kindling of a Mexican-based brownness allows Hughes to pass, as we saw in chapter 2, as a Mexican in Texas. Henry Louis Gates Jr.’s memoir, *Colored People*, connotes a dialogue with brownness through the filters of blackness. The modification of these two colorings proffers a browned blackness that has yet to dialogue with Latino and Latina brownness. Upon first meeting his paternal relations during a family gathering, Gates informs us, “It came as a shock to realize that these mythic characters in Daddy’s tales were actual brown and tan and beige people” (1994: 69). These black dissimilarities demonstrate a mixture echoing brown mestizaje. As Du Bois proposes in *The Negro*: “In general the Negro population in the United States is brown in color, darkening to almost black and shading off in the other direction to

yellow and white, and it is indistinguishable in some cases from the white population” (1988: 185).

On Latino and Latina cultural fronts, such personal histories as Piri Thomas’s *Down These Mean Streets* depict the doubleness in the construction of blackness and dark brownness within the makings of his Puerto Rican and Cuban family. Thomas, a self-proclaimed “skinny, dark-face, curly-haired, intense Porty-Ree-can,” provides a glossary at the end of his memoir for “all Spanish and slang terms” (1997: x; ix). He defines six different categories to register such imbricated gradations as white, black, dark brown (both in proper and diminutive form), almost black, and dark-skinned textures (339–40).³⁰ Esmeralda Santiago’s *When I Was Puerto Rican* (what is she now?) retells her first coming-of-age narrative through her nickname, “Negi,” an abridged version of “*Negrita*” (1993: 13).³¹ While these portraits provide some grounds for how blackness and its other manifestations are thought through at home, John Rechy’s memoir, *About My Life and the Kept Woman*, speaks from a Mexican American perspective to a more formal verbalization of whiteness. Recalling the overtones provoked by the (white) name of one of his (nonwhite) sisters, Blanca, Rechy emits the following anecdote:

Because her name meant “white” and her complexion was darker than my mother’s — and certainly my father’s — my determinedly “Spanish” grandmother on my father’s side ridiculed her. She called Blanca *la India*, inflicting pain that would bruise my sister all her life. [. . .] Many years later, my beautiful sister Blanca would legally alter her name to Blanche, attempting to banish the pain the grandmother had caused her by mocking her about her darker color. (2008: 64)

The anticipated whitening from the linguistic blanching of Blanca’s name does not lead to the discoloration of her dark body. On the contrary, the dolorous meaning of not possessing the phenotypic currency of whiteness continues to gyrate. Through Blanca and its “Latinesque” derivative Blanche, the reader “sees” a genotypic darkness that translates into Indianness. Latino and Latina dark Indianness has been indigenized over and above blackness. If dark brownness portends Latino and Latina Indianness, what does a dark brownness herald in black?

Román de la Campa’s life story, *Cuba on My Mind*, raises a telling observation that elaborates how “white” (Cuban) mestizaje subsumes (“non-Cuban”)

blackness. Cuban ideology, de la Campa explicates, is infused with a white interpretive lens that initiates and stands for blackness: “White Cubans do not doubt the distinct African profile of their music, religion, dance, mode of speaking, and other features, but they see themselves as translators, interpreters, or perhaps guardians of such a cultural legacy. It is a way of acknowledging that African influences define the national culture while continuing to speak for it from the perspective of Cuban creole whiteness” (2000: 11). Díaz parallels de la Campa’s point in his compilation of short stories, *Drown*. Blackness is indexed as an imported trait via the Dominican Republic’s “blacker” neighbor, Haiti. Subtly and intricately mapping out how blackness plays out within insular brotherly relations evoking larger national practices, Rafa, a main character in the story “Ysrael,” pesters his brother with insults that have more to do “with my complexion, my hair, the size of my lips. It’s the Haitian he’d say to his buddies. Hey Señor Haitian, Mami found you on the border and only took you in because she felt sorry for you” (1996: 5). Slightly more than a decade later, Díaz progresses with black Haitian marginality in *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. The novel addresses how blackness from abroad enters Dominican life. This particular escape from blackness in the Dominican diaspora is quite probing with regard to the U.S. racial economy, be it black, white, Latino, and Latina. *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* whirls from a complete lack, or denial, of an enunciatory blackness within the Spanish-speaking island of Hispaniola to a hyperreception of the enunciation — if not willingness to craft the self through the excessive use of the referent — “nigger” in the United States.³²

If stories of the self come into being with a new nation, as William L. Andrews has observed, the personal crónicas analytically catalogued in this section, paired with Díaz’s fictional vignettes, show how dark brownness and blackness are visualized in brown Latinidad and how brownness is launched into being in U.S. American mappings of Latino and Latina unlocatable “nations” (1992: 7). In examining a problematic blackness putatively perceived as unsettled in the Americas and unsettling to a brown domestic domain, I veer toward Chicano and Chicana self-portrayals, because in situating the reader in a commonplace — the home — these life stories foreground race in the construction of the personal. They outline how dark brownness and blackness live ambivalently in relation to each other. At the same time, I would like to make clear that I am not reading their perfect-bound experiences as

evidential in their undeniable, genuine lives.³³ I am interested, rather, in what has been conceived as brownness and the evidence of the exposed dark brownness that has been left behind on the page. These memoirists account for what become genealogies of human lives exhausted by darkness as they seek to provide coherence to the ideological incoherence reproduced at home. Their processes of rewriting a particular browning of the mestizo or mestiza self trigger new referentialities about the literature, politics, and ethnoracial group to which they “belong.”

Literary Homecomings, Brown Becomings

The revisiting of coming-of-age brownness and dark brownness by figures such as Anzaldúa, Moraga, and Rodriguez points to the reevaluation, during adulthood, of formative yet troubling instances during childhood where darkness was to be concealed. These literary cognoscenti cue into what Vicki L. Ruiz identifies as a “color consciousness,” one arranged at home through ethnoracial categories that expose the legacy of Spanish colonization in Latin America. “Color consciousness, with white as the hue of privilege,” Ruiz briefs us, “is not just a twentieth-century by-product of Americanization, but represents historical consciousness rooted in colonial Latin America” (2004: 348).³⁴ These differentiations are imbedded in Latino and Latina North America and are wedded to the dominant ideologies of new world whiteness. Estelle Tarica has alluded to this level of whiteness as a “selfhood invested in a new power,” the power of ideological whiteness simultaneously highlighting its powerlessness (2008: xx). Martha Menchaca has delineated the racial history of Mexican mestizaje in the U.S. Southwest and Mexico. She notes that black slaves, Indians, and mestizos fell, during the conquest, under a racialized order known as “the *casta* system” (2001: 62).³⁵ When the United States annexed the U.S. Southwest, Menchaca observes that “diverse forms of racial discrimination” were instituted on white Mexicans and Mexicans of color “depending on their racial phenotype” (277). Attending to forms of Chicano and Chicana Mesoamerican darkness opens the possibility of expanding our understanding of a Latino and Latina blackness that is not narrowly situated in the Hispanic Caribbean.³⁶

I undertake the production of the core practices and physical journeys of brown through the autobiographical opuses of Anzaldúa, Moraga, and

Rodriguez. They thoughtfully call our attention to how the discourse of dark brownness has not been ethnoracially exhausted. It merits another look through the semiotics of problematic blackness, its dilemmas, and the emotional states that these variations of brownness — dark brownness and blackness — evoke. I would like to clarify that although these figures speak to Chicananess and indigenoussness (Anzaldúa and Moraga) and an Americanness of Mexican descent (Rodriguez), I use the panethnic classification Latino and Latina.³⁷ I engage in a complementary dialogue that, while Chicano- and Chicana-specific, also points to its intersubjective relation to — and commingling with — a broader brown Latino or Latina subject. This does not mean that I conflate the two populations — and the academic fields, paradigms, and histories — that advance the discursive formation and operation of these groups: Chicano/a studies or Latino/a studies.³⁸ Chicano and Chicana cultural and intellectual life are summoned as a dynamic roadmap that also marks the construction and articulation of U.S. Latinoness and Latinaness.

Anzaldúa, Moraga, and Rodriguez's writings elucidate how Indianness and blackness inhabit their walks of life. They staunchly denote the contradictions that emanate from processes of racialization that also give rise to Chicano and Chicana *mestizaje*. Rafael Pérez-Torres deems *mestizaje* as one that "contend[s] with the varying forces that tug and nudge, haul and rend the shape of Chicano culture and identity." *Mestizaje* is a "conceptual tool" that gives concrete form to "multiple subjectivities," affords "discussions of identity to greater complexity and nuance," and "locates how people live their lives in and through their bodies as well as in and through ideology" (2006: xiii). Pérez-Torres's approach to a critical *mestizaje* thus "embodies the struggle for power, place, and personhood arising from power and resistance" and highlights "a historical consciousness" (51).

The household uses of black and brown evince a consciousness of what Latino and Latina are not. Anzaldúa gives an example of how racialized categories have been put into motion. "When not copping out, when we know we are more than nothing," she says, "we call ourselves Mexican, referring to race and ancestry; *mestizo* when affirming both our Indian and Spanish (but we hardly ever own our Black ancestry)" (1999: 85).³⁹ If, as Rodriguez's mother has remarked, brown is "the most important symbol of a life of oppressive labor and poverty" (1982: 119), the guiding general concept has been,

as Moraga has put forward, “No one ever quite told me this (that light was right), but I knew that being light was something in my family (who were all Chicano with the exception of my father).” As Moraga imparts the inherently known convictions of her family unit regarding whiteness, there is, concurrently, an explicit view of what can be identified as an inhabited raced category that is classed. Chicano and Chicana become the signifiers for fieldwork and manual labor, as in “braceros” or “wet-backs.”⁴⁰ Moraga chronicles that for her mother, “on a basic economic level, being Chicana meant being ‘less’” (1983b: 28). Although lower-class darkness maintains its dark tone at the field, these categories, while inflated with racial darkness, can be altered and corrected through economic and racial mobility.

In his first life narrative, Rodriguez devotes a chapter to Mexican preoccupation with dark brownness. Blackness, a synonym of darkness, is a silenced marker. It is easier to lighten darkness than it is to “shed” blackness. Calling the fourth part of his book “Complexion,” Rodriguez fluctuates between related parenthetical and nonparenthetical admissions, declaring in his introductory paragraph, “My complexion is dark. (My skin is brown. More exactly, terra-cotta in sunlight, tawny in shade. I do not redden in sunlight. Instead, my skin becomes progressively dark; the sun sings the flesh)” (1982: 113). Not unlike Moraga, the motif of indigent darkness operates in Rodriguez’s narrative too:

My mother would see me come up the front steps. She’d wait for the screen door to slam at my back. “You look like a *negrito*,” she’d say, angry, sorry to be angry, frustrated almost to laughing, scorn. “You know how important looks are in this country. With *los gringos* looks are all that they judge on. But you! Look at you! You are so careless!” Then she’d start in all over again. “You won’t be satisfied till you end up looking like *los pobres* who work in the fields, *los braceros*. (113)

The apprehensions of being compounded by *lo negro* unmask a personal and familial dread evolving around the fear of being deprived of white-like benefits that are organized along American racial and economic lines.⁴¹ The reminder that Rodriguez looks like a *negrito* gives greater scope to the employment of this problematic diminutive of *negro*. It is made deliberately smaller. Through a mother’s loving tongue, *negrito* does not offend. Applying *negro* instead of *negrito* would otherwise seem more direct and irrevocable. But in

another poignant moment, Rodriguez recalls when (racial) dirtiness is to be washed and contained. “My mother would grab a towel in the kitchen and rub my oily face sore when I came in from playing outside. ‘Clean the *graza* off of your face!’ (*Greaser!*)” (119). Rodriguez sketches his engagement with the politics of *lo negro* through professedly secondary revelations. Though encased in parentheses, these disclosures are far from parenthetical. They are part of Rodriguez’s dark brownness, affirmed in his third annals of the self through the assertion, “I think I probably do. (Have brown thoughts.)” (2002: 47). These immediate first and second thoughts allow the reader to take note of the author’s break and continuation of an inner dialogue with the dark brown self.

Rodriguez proceeds to describe his family’s different brown colorings. The diverse spectrum in his family circle of “cosmic” and “uncosmic” brownness is mediated through the sorting out of a language that somehow exonerates culpable darkness.⁴² Rodriguez states, “There was affection and a kind of humor about these matters. With daring tenderness, one of my uncles would refer to his wife as *mi negra*. An aunt regularly called her dark child *mi feito* (my little ugly one)” (1982: 116).⁴³ The ugliness of *mi feito* blackens, under a vigilant diminutive, the dark child’s skin. The familial dictate of *mi negra* (my black one) summons a possessive pronoun, communicating his uncle’s right to address “that” *negra* as his. Rodriguez’s uncle guards and contains his wife’s (deprecatory) blackness within the familial and spousal domain.

Outside the home, Rodriguez is not exempt from the deployment of racial slurs for dark brownness. He recounts an incident where strangers yelled, “Hey, Greaser! Hey, Pancho!” and “I pee on dirty Mexicans” (1982: 117).⁴⁴ An undesired dark brown complexion is also synthesized through what Rodriguez suggests as Indianness. Rodriguez, however, sounds encumbered with his dark brown genealogy, appearing as a xenogenic offspring. The sculpting of his family engenders their brown looks. Rodriguez proclaims that his father’s face recalls France and that his complexion is white. His mother, “whose surname is inexplicably Irish — Moran — has an olive complexion” (114).⁴⁵ But Rodriguez is “the only one in the family whose face is severely cut to the line of ancient Indian ancestors,” and, as such, he “grew divorced from my body” (115, 125).

He recalls one night when he locked himself in the bathroom, studying his dark skin. “I began soaping my arms,” he recounts. “I took my father’s

straight razor out of the medicine cabinet. Slowly, with steady deliberateness, I put the blade against my flesh, pressed it as close as I could without cutting, and moved it up and down across my skin to see if I could get out, somehow lessen the dark. [. . .] The dark would not come out. It remained. Trapped. Deep in the cells of my skin” (1982: 124–25). Rodriguez’s excerpt has some insights with Moraga, who despite being born with what she appraises as the features of her Chicana mother and the skin of her Anglo father, she calls forth a type of double consciousness (1983b: 28).⁴⁶ “It is frightening to acknowledge,” she elicits, “that I have internalized a racism and classism, where the object of oppression is not only someone outside my skin, but the someone inside my skin” (30).⁴⁷ Moraga leans toward a formative socialization that, to apply Sandra K. Soto’s term, permits her to undergo a “self-racialization” (2005: 250).⁴⁸ Rodriguez does not strive for a racialization of the self, but his double-sided skin markers surround him. Darkness cannot be shed or cleansed. It nests as a template for dirty.

Indian, Rigoberta Menchú explains from a Maya context, means being measured between combinations of “very dirty” (1994: 3), as was the case with her father, and “filthy” in her situation (92). The locations of these problematic dark and dirty Indian markers are what force Anzaldúa to shelve the rough draft of her essay “La Prieta” (The Dark One) for a year. For Anzaldúa’s “sixth generation American” family of Mexican descent, it means eyeing the body from the moment of birth so as to privately wrestle with the meaning of what is detected before the racially unspecified body is publicly presented to the outside world (1983: 198). Put differently, another private part of the domestic sphere is the visualization of the home. Dark brownness is an integral part of the family, but it is a matter that stays behind closed doors. And while dark brownness may be hidden at home, it is still revealed by the main purveyor of said coloring, our now-browned autobiographer.

Anzaldúa opens her essay with this disclosure: “When I was born, Mamágrande Locha inspected my buttocks looking for the dark blotch, the sign of the indio, or worse, of mulatto blood.” Anzaldúa mentions mulatto with a double “t,” instead of using the Spanish term *mulato* (or in her case, *mulata*) with one “t.”⁴⁹ This use infers the crossing and circulation of ethnoracial hodgepodes in a U.S. Latino and Latina context. There is not one location for mixture or *mestizaje*, as dark brown *mestizaje* coalesces with black mixture. Anzaldúa’s *mancha* — racial stain — from babyhood is cordoned off.

Its direction is to be indexed by familial ranks of darkness. Her tone gets compressed to being “dark like an Indian.” As inspected by the elder matriarch with detectival skills, Anzaldúa’s smear extends beyond the buttocks, and the family’s worst fear is confirmed by fiat. Later, Anzaldúa’s mother bemoans her daughter’s skin color — “morena, *muy prieta*, so dark and different” — and lessons her daughter on how to navigate a nuanced line colored by blackness, Mexicanness, Indianness, and un-Americanness. “Don’t go out in the sun,” she urges. “If you get any darker, they’ll mistake you for an Indian. And don’t get dirt on your clothes. You don’t want people to say you’re a dirty Mexican” (1983: 198). As a substitute for blackness, darkness is grasped as Indian. It is a secretive blackness of sorts, a problematic and undesirable one that can be known and recognized only through Indianness.

Yet, as Moraga notes in *The Last Generation*, “in this country, ‘Indian’ and ‘dark’ don’t melt” (1993: 57). The linked chain of darkness and Indianness within the constituents of U.S. Latino and Latina, though, does melt at the semantic level. It becomes brown. Moraga allows us to read how she structures her personhood through her mother’s brown bloodline as an acting intermediary. Brownness is a necessity that permits Moraga’s self-analysis and her use of “that” brown space that her mother seemingly abandoned: “*I am a white girl gone brown to the blood color of my mother speaking for her*” (1983a: 13).⁵⁰ The meaning of the blood-color brown endows Moraga with a clear image that entails a collective task of doing — of brown doing or acting brownly in affirmative representations of Chicana lineages to brown indigeness.⁵¹ It is not coincidental, one might add, that Moraga textually directs our gaze to her mother’s “brown hands” (1993: 91).⁵²

The Negro problem, in Du Boisian singular or plural terms, is a new brown-dark brown variable. Resistant dark brownness and blackness are vehicles to understanding how Latinoness and Latinaness are semiotically founded within the realm of the familial and then modified outside the household. Anzaldúa is first measured in the domestic realm. Her critical awareness succeeds as one that is sorted out through the internal values along racial lines and gendered alliances. In the eyes of her mother, she admits, and “in the eyes of others I saw myself reflected as ‘strange,’ ‘abnormal,’ ‘QUEER.’ I saw no other reflection” (1983: 199). We find two functioning gazes. One of them reflects what Emma Pérez would reference as a “colonial mind-set” that “believes in a normative language, race, gender, class, and sexuality” (2003:

123). The other, also identified by Pérez, is a “queer-of-color gaze,” Anzaldúa’s visual scrutiny “that sees, acts, reinterprets, and mocks all at once in order to survive and reconstitute a world where s/he is not seen by the white colonial heteronormative mind” (124). Anzaldúa’s queer counterpart to the stigma of dark difference in her family is momentous. She has taken the insulated life of normative brownness to a type of “queer succession,” an admixture of illegitimacies — illegalities — that have been denied admittance into her family. Her queerness, radical consciousness, the “blemishes of individual character,” race, nation, and spiritual beliefs are the stigma that can now “be transmitted through lineages and equally contaminate all members of a family” (Goffman, 1963: 4). But this “pan-contamination” is the new Anzaldúan *mestizaje* that doubtlessly adheres to “her” queerness. It transmits, in Alicia Arrizón’s language, “spirited connections with others who, like her, reclaim the word *queer*, using it to designate a type of citizenship.” We find a political strategy that concretizes Anzaldúa’s *mestiza* body as a “reflection on a ‘planetary’ citizenship [that] brings local and global meanings to the signifiers *lesbian* and *brown*” (2006: 156).

Anzaldúa’s darkness is constituted not just by dark brownness but by a myriad of unsanctioned *manchas* also. These *manchas* are undarkened through the unifying potential of their incremental brownification. As Anzaldúa puts it, “We are the queer groups, the people that don’t belong anywhere, not in the dominant world nor completely within our respective cultures. Combined we cover so many oppressions” (1983: 209). Anzaldúa conjures the self outside repressive matriarchal restrictions. Our chronicler browns herself and participates in a broader brownification that has, at one level, acquiesced to the grammar of the home. But she has also created a new lexicon that is heightened by a surrogate brownness where the Latina body surrounds herself with other worlds. Hers is not just a mere valuable brownness in the normative sense that her family desires. Anzaldúa denies that brownness and replenishes it with a brownness that voices valuable information about the praxis of browned worlds of differences. This brownness gains more and more importance through the stream of marginal signs that keep flowing and radiating through it: queerness, unbelonging, and nonnormativity.⁵³

Anzaldúa catalogues through her *prieta* status how brown mothers internalize the betrayal of *la raza* — the Chicano and Chicana race that, to sum-

mon Moraga's phraseology, "dissolves borders," since this identity can also be constitutive of "Quichua, Cubano, or Colombiano" (1993: 62). In failing to adequately improve or better the race, Anzaldúa's mother offers the world another virulent dark descendant. Even so, her offspring ceases to be dark through the course of time, as the function of her brood has discursively moved into brownness as an act of signification. But the dark brown space lingers and has not been emptied of its scornful relation to brownness. How Anzaldúa's darkness has passed over into brownness, which is lighter than a *muy prieta* state and dark brownness, has not been critically put to the question and amended in Latino/a studies.⁵⁴ How has this conversion from *muy prieta* to brownness occurred? If Anzaldúa was once *la prieta*, how did she pass into brownness—in effect, become "an ex-colored *prieta*"? What happened to the dark brown/black matter? These black–dark brown questions become particularly hefty and germane. Rodriguez, as a case in point, records that "an uncle had been told by some man to go back to Africa" (1982: 117). He also says that he knew his older sister with dark skin "suffered for being a 'nigger'" (115). "Nigger" is so close to dark brown that it resiliently fits—"represents"—Rodriguez's sister more so than "dirty Mexican" (or even "spic"). How to track this passing from "spic" to "nigger"? What to do with the mirroring form and function of "nigger" in the brown map?

Brownness is far from settled, especially for Latinos and Latinas encountering a dark brownness. If dark brownness is unreliable as a tool for an American way of life, brownness is untrustworthy as a Latino and Latina narrative. Werner Sollors's optic on black-white "interracial literature" can be applied to U.S. Latinos and Latinas, since "the 'mixed-race' space" has been "cleared in favor of monoracial occupancy" (1997: 6).⁵⁵ That monoracial occupancy at this juncture is the sociocultural production of a new brownness that has seized dark brownness.⁵⁶ By becoming brown, these semiotics of the self are not susceptible to forms and bodies that take the subject away from the predominant content and function of the browned Latino and Latina economy of difference.

Brownness and Latino/a Studies

I have sifted through a new economy of brownness and how its imbued meanings are communicated in Latino/a studies. This chapter's components have

argued that decisive brownness as a basic feature and mode of knowledge production poses imprecisions and tremendous challenges for the field.⁵⁷ My premise has been that we must make sense of and critically coordinate the symbolic interactions between a joint dark brownness and blackness. In such a way, there would not be one semantic unit framing the subtleties and contradictions in the brown ecology of Latinos and Latinas.

Can the field still afford to hold the same brown thought in all U.S. times and places? Since there are various kinships of brownness, what type of difference will dark brownness make? I have yet to find an epistemically sound framework to be — and think, characteristically and accordantly, in — brown, although I understand that as a Latina, I may be marked not just as brown but also as dark brown “out there.” What, I ask, is the substance, the mainstay, of brownness? I raise another set of suitable questions: Do brownness and its different scenarios pose a new problem for Latino/a studies? Does Latino/a studies need brownness as a guiding syntax that inscribes its being in the American landscape? What is a brown methodology? These pressing queries are open ended. They indubitably necessitate further examination and variegated responses. But I direct attention to them so as to rethink and rework the shaky constitution and unstable processes of becoming a U.S. Latino or Latina.

Having identified the cultural indicators and representational emergence of a permissible Latino and Latina brownness that annexes dark brownness, the next chapter concentrates on dark brownness as a literary iconicity scripted for a “new” Latino and Latina generation, U.S. Central Americans. Central Americans are drawn together as a group whose signifying order of underdevelopment, peonization, and illegality is naturalized. They are almost impossible to know within the properties and relations of established Latino and Latina brownness. At stake is the troubling and new understanding of certain subgroups that are allotted a different space in U.S. Latino and Latina everyday life.