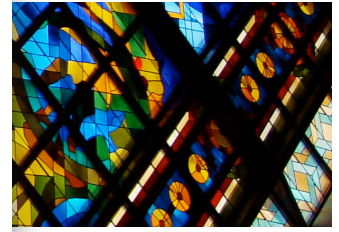




40 DAYS OF ENGAGEMENT on *Anti-Racism*



DAY 29

Can We Be Allies?

Carmen Ramirez



Learning

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The media, the government and even society at large tend to separate cultures or ethnicities in North America as if it gains something valuable by doing so. Could the saying “in unity there is strength” be somewhat true? Is it possible for African-Americans, Afro-Latinos/as and Latinos/as to become allies in the struggle against anti-Blackness? I am not trying to romanticize a unity, nor am I trying to take away the struggle and suffering from African-Americans in the U.S. by saying that Latinos/as suffer as well. Instead I agree with Jeremy Cruz, who states, “Anti-Black precedes and spills over into brown Latino lives. Our lives are often collateral damage of a fundamentally and anti-black transnational social order.”

I want to clarify that a unity is needed amongst European descendants, African-Americans, all Latinos/as, Asians, Middle Eastern, and Indigenous peoples in order to exterminate the entire neoliberal

world order. But for the purpose of this short essay I will argue that there is a historical commonality between African-Americans and Afro-Latinos that could unite them in the fight against injustice and oppression. I will first focus on the history of both African-Americans and Afro-Latinos, and then on colourism and its impact in both communities. Last, I will bring in my experience as a Latina as a way to connect and support the unity amongst both cultures.

It is easier to work together than work as individuals focused on smaller issues.

As early as 1549, the slave trade officially began in Brazil. People who were enslaved were brought to Peru, Mexico and Colombia. In the 1560s, Black people who were enslaved who spoke Spanish were present in St. Augustine in northern Florida. Around the same

time, South Carolina became the home to many Black people who were enslaved. All of these people were African descendants, and all experienced the slave trade in one way or another. However, not all Africans or African descendants were enslaved.

Eventually there began an anti-Blackness that continues to affect the lives of African descendants today. It is known that the majority of the African enslaved people suffered beatings, torture, familial separation and much more. There seemed to be some hope at the end of the Civil War, when slavery came to an end. This hope was short lived, because Jim Crow laws then came into effect. These laws helped guarantee the continued wealth of White people, while at the same time impeding African descendants from acquiring wealth. This was truer for the south than the north. Not only were African descendants kept from acquiring wealth; they also had no control over their own

lives or deaths. Between 1880 and 1940, African descendants were frequently controlled through lynching. This caused much pain and suffering for those that had to endure being lynched, and the families who had to watch their loved ones being hung.

Similarly, Afro-Latin Americans suffered loss, beatings, familial separation, poverty and oppression for many years. There is a difference that can be pinpointed. Afro-Latin Americans are invisible. African descendants in Latin America are considered to be part of the same culture, and therefore not separate from European descendants or Indigenous peoples. They are also no longer “African;” there is an agreement that all are *criollo*, and consequently racism is silent.

Perhaps a personal experience would be appropriate to explain the silent racism that plagues Latin America even today. I have travelled to Peru a number of times and these are some of the obvious things I notice upon my arrival. There are no African descendants working at the airport, malls, or supermarkets. Those who are observed are young and European looking. Specific to Peru is that the government stopped collecting racial ethnic data in 1940, and on that date concluded that Afro-Peruvians constituted 0.47% of the population (while Peru’s Commission on Andean, Amazonian, and Afro-Peruvian peoples estimated a 13.5% presence).

A contributor to the discrimination against African descendants

across the Americas is colourism. Although colourism has taken different shapes throughout the years it continues to have an anti-Blackness focus; cosmetic features associated with White Europeans are admired, internalized, and imitated.

As far back as I can remember, I have been encouraged by my extended family to marry a White, blue-eyed, blond man in order to “improve the race.” This is widely accepted and believed by many peoples of Latin America. Throughout my childhood, my mother believed my sister was smarter and prettier because she had European features.

Eventually, African descendants across the Americas began to fight for social justice. After many years of slavery and continued injustice even after the abolition of slavery, African-Americans began a civil rights movement that brought on some positive changes in the United States, such as the desegregation of schools. In the faith community, James Cone was an important leader. Black Liberation theologies focus on ending oppression of African descendants.

African descendants have had more challenges in having their concerns heard. A good example is in Ecuador, where president Rafael Correa campaigned for a “new beginning.” According to Alexander Ocles, an Afro-Ecuadorian leader, this “new beginning” translates into “erasing the past.” It is more difficult to fight against a system that does not acknowledge your existence.

I will close with my story. My mother is of mixed race, Indigenous and White, while my father is mostly an African-descendant. Both were born in Peru. I have already discussed some Latin American experiences of race, so I will move on to my experiences in Canada. As a Christian looking back at the local Latino/a churches I assisted, race issues were never addressed. Canadian Black males are often stopped by the police due to racial profiling, but the local Latino/a churches do not discuss this, even though it can also affect African-Canadian Latinos. Just as in Latin America, it is considered that we are all one ethnic group of Canadian Latinos/as. Thus we ignore the needs of the African-Canadian Latinos/as.

How can my story connect and unite African-Americans and Afro-Latinos/as? My history resonates with that of many African-Americans. In fact, there are more similarities than differences. Yet we are influenced to view each other as enemies in movies, media, and social media. I have had positive experiences in partnering with Afro-Caribbean Canadians when we ignored the biases that were encouraged towards one another. I believe that we have been discouraged from being allies because it could have positive results in the fight against anti-Blackness in North America.

In conclusion, African Americans and Afro-Latinos have had similar histories. Africans came to the Americas and experienced slavery. Both have had to speak against racism and oppression.

Movements were necessary to help their causes which allowed their voices to be heard. The experiences of both African-Americans and Afro-Latinos/as may be akin. African-Americans and Afro-Latinos/as can be allies and journey together as other ethnicities and cultures join in. In unity there is strength.



Faith Reflection

Creator God,

Grant us the wisdom and love to work against anti-blackness. Help us, both Indigenous and racialized peoples, along with and White allies, to model a united front against racism. Help us become an example to the younger generation for a better future. A future where our skin colour will no longer be the one thing that determines whether we are accepted or not. We pray for genuine love for each other, reconciliation and acceptance of our differences.

In the name of Jesus we pray.



Children's Activity

Alana Martin

Talk about what it means to be an ally. Children can think about when they were an ally and when they experienced someone being an ally to them.

To help with the discussion, here are a few videos for kids on allyship.

- [Soyheat: Kids Explain Allyship](#)

Take the challenge and pass it on! After hearing those definitions, ask if a child is ready to explain allyship to someone else.

- [Evelyn From the Internets: How To Be An Ally](#)

(Note: Evelyn uses the phrase “Shut up and listen” in this

video—you may want to have a conversation with your children about when to say/use that phrase and when not to)

Discuss the questions posed: How can someone be a better ally to you? And how do you plan on being a better ally to someone else? Also, discuss how you will balance listening *and* speaking as an ally.



Group Commitment

Carmen Ramirez

Discuss these questions together.

- How might anti-Blackness be experienced in Canada?
- How can we as Canadians work against anti-Blackness? Discuss ways to work together.



- Make a commitment to learn more about Canadian Black History.



Advocacy

Alana Martin

Choose to support an organization that provides services to an Indigenous and racialized community. Your direct financial business and support helps to close the racial wealth gap, strengthen local economies, foster job creation, celebrate Black culture, and hold companies accountable. Here are a few examples:

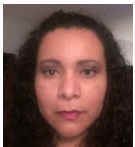
- [La Connexional](#) works to showcase the talents and contributions of the African, Black, Caribbean, and Latinx (ABCL) communities in Canada through a variety of mediums. Explore their project, LaTanadao, a

mobile platform that allows you to discover, interact with, and support African, Black, Caribbean and Latinx communities in your area.

- [Freedom school Toronto](#) is a youth- and parent-driven initiative that fights anti-Black racism in the school system, and works to create educational alternatives for Black children.
- [Black Legal Council](#) is an independent, not-for-profit community legal clinic that combats individual and systemic anti-Black racism by conducting

research, engaging in structural transformation, and providing legal services to members of Ontario's Black communities.

- [Black Owned Businesses](#) is a nation-wide directory of Black owned businesses and Black entrepreneurs. Search by industry or location to find hundreds of businesses ready for your business.



Carmen Ramirez is a PhD candidate in Practical Theology at Palm Beach Atlantic University. She also works as a consultant with the Forum for Intercultural Leadership and Learning (FILL), as an intercultural mentor, and as a facilitator for FILL's Deepening Understanding for Intercultural Ministries program.



Alana Martin is a Diaconal Minister in The United Church of Canada, and is the Minister to The GO Project, a ministry that inspires children and youth to put their faith and love into action in the world. Alana feels a deep call to creating accessible resources for young people to discover and deepen their faith in a way that compels them to follow in Christ's model of love, anti-racism, humility, and respect.

