

A stylized, minimalist illustration of a person's face and head. The face is a solid grey color. The hair is dark grey and voluminous, with a bright pink semi-circle on top. The eyes are closed, and the mouth is a simple pink shape. The text 'AFRO' is written across the forehead, and 'PERU' is written across the nose. The background is a solid grey color.

AFRO

PERU

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A Hidden Culture

A Hidden Culture: Afro-Peruvians

We journey, in the literary sense, to the South American country of Peru. Peru, like so many of its neighbors, has deep ties to their ancestry that we would refer to the indigenous people of the land and their lasting culture that date back centuries. For Peru, their indigenous legacy was the Inca and their historical footprint that laid the foundation of many modern cultural practices of Peruvians to date.

The Incas are well known to many in Lima, the capital of Peru, to be a meticulous group that created and designed structures we once believed weren't possible for a primitive society. For example, the Machu Picchu, the famous agricultural mega-structure and landmark of pre-colonial South America, generates a whopping 40 million dollars annually for Peru strictly from tourism. Unfortunately, the Incan Empire reign was cut short by the conquering of the Spanish in 1500s who took many lives in their conquest and drastically cut the population in half.

With the Spanish however, came another unexpected population, a hidden population. The Africans, who were brought over by the Spanish as slaves; forced into laborious tasks such as the buildings of road systems, bridges, and even churches. They even played a massive role in sugar plantations, which in turn aided the economic boom in the Americas. Slavery didn't come to end for centuries until 1854 and with it many plantation owners' rights to free work. Although slavery has been abolished since, it still has some lingering effects we see today as a grim reminder of our own society's past and its necessary evil in today's globalized economy.

As Peru slowly blended into the homogenous language speaking country we know today, it left behind a group that is often ignore by the public. The Afro-Peruvians. The Afro-Peruvians have been navigating society as a hidden population that faces many forms of discrimination by the locals. One of the biggest ones is being treated as if they are invisible, the issue not being addressed and typi-

cally outright blanketed as never having happened. Something of a social taboo in conversation, if any education on the topic was provided.

We've spoken to Angie, who gives us a deeper analysis of the issue. She begins to tell that Peru has a complex stance on the presence of Afro-Peruvians. "The one race, the Peruvian race'; the idea that there is no pure origin, a mix of everything--Afro Peruvians are the minority; the majority has indigenous heritage, which is seen as stronger and principal."

This is a paradoxical conundrum that has left the population of Peru disregarding the Afros who were once 50% of the population. The issue often at times even leaves other Afros refusing to acknowledge their ancestry in favor of blending in with a culture in order to survive.

A denial of their heritage also comes with the refusal to teach such heritage and culture and has pushed it on the back burner of society. In Peru, there is an extremely limited education pertaining to slavery, its origin, and lasting effects. Oftentimes this information cannot be accessed until on reaches college and even then, the classes are limited in number or are buried in archive work. Not only is accessing this information difficult, but the representation is also non-existent, and students of Afro heritage have lasting disconnect to their original lineage.

"Organization in Ashanti does research on this; school as a place of violence due to physical features: mainly hair and skin--because they feel devalued, many Afro-Peruvians do not continue pursuing education. Basic education becomes a traumatic process. Even the teachers are not equipped to advocate for students or are biased."

With limited education due to discrimination many Afro-Peruvians do not pursue higher education and in some situation no education at all. This has led to a depravity of undereducated Afros further propelling poverty and underserved communities in which they reside. Although it may seem like Afro-Peruvians in Peru are fighting an endless battle both Jorge and Angie have hope.

“Change is coming, as the children who experienced discrimination are now Afro-Peruvian activists with political consciousness around the Afro-Peruvian identity; it is a long process, but it will happen like it did in the U.S., in Brazil, etc. the current generation of Afro Peruvian activists are making much noise, everywhere, which has made people realize and think about how racism exists in Peru though it has been made invisible.”

In the past few decades, Afros have put the representation of their culture in their own hands and celebrate once a year a month of African heritage. There are many Afros who engage in dances, music, food, and many other activities that allow them to showcase who they are without the political backlash they may face in Peruvian society today.

Culture & Contribution

How Afro-peruvian assimilate the catholic religion

Cofradias allowed those Africans who were lucky to belong to one of them to achieve religious and standing positions in the community.

Brotherhoods represent an opportunity for Africans to gather and plan revolts and uprisings against slavery.

Catholic church created cofradias in 1540 to evangelize African and Andean people. The cofradias were brotherhoods formed by devotees to encourage the worship of saints. Two reasons that encouraged African to respond with an apparent willingness for Cofradias are:

Afro-Peruvian contributions to the Catholic Religion

El Señor de Los Milagros, an important religious icon created by an African slave who belonged to the cofradia de Pachacamilla, represented the African identity and origin until the twentieth century when the processes of assimilation and mestizaje transformed the icon and made it lose the AfroPeruvian culture and identity

Santa Efigenia, a saint who came from Eutopia to alleviate the calamity suffered by slaves in La Quebrada during the 18th century, allowed Afro-Peruvians to connect with the African diaspora and their stories and struggles.

Finally, there is a religious festival called yunsa that's an adaptation of an Andean celebration which lends to the festivity an Afro-character. The yunsa is celebrated in El Guayabo, Ica and consists of AfricanPeruvian dances around a tree decorated with little mirrors, chains, pennants and loaded with gift

denied the human character of the black and mulatto population in general

Participation of Afro-Peruvian women in Cofradias

The use of masculine nouns in documents belonging to cofradias makes it difficult to observe female participation in religious activities during the colonial period.

The Cofradia de San Benito Palermo was the only brotherhood that emphasized in its documents the recognition of the sexes by referring on several occasions to "brother" and "sister."

Furthermore, women with public positions in the Cofradía de San Benito de Palermo helped to erase the "depersonalizing language" that



Reframing The Narrative

Let's Talk About It

When Beyonce performed at Coachella—highlighting Historically Black Colleges (HBCU'S), black musicianship, and overall black culture—a frenzy culminated within the black community. It was silent yet loud, and truly exemplified the diverse nature of black people within the United States and gave resonance to many who grew without. With this example in mind, I'd like to investigate this "need" for precedence through the exploration of Afro-Peruvians in Peru with emphasis in music, poetry and dance. Black heritage has historically existed as a feeling rather than a discussion and this ideology has blossomed into various art forms in Peru—many of which include, festejo, lando/zamacueca, décima and Afro-Peruvian music. By highlighting and dissecting these measures of communication, I hope to illustrate the necessity of giving visibility and recognition to those that are often not afforded the right or platform.

Flowers are Due

When the phrase "give them their flowers while they're still here" became a headline, many of us isolated this viewpoint to social media wars about the discography of our favorite artists who tragically passed away—but it truly encapsulates much more. Fundamentally, it means to show appreciation to those that are paving a legacy beyond themselves while they're still alive to receive it. And although my honorable mentions are not here to witness this, I'd like to virtually give flowers to two visionaries that helped establish and emphasize the rich and important history of Afro-Peruvians: Nicomedes Santa Cruz & Victoria Santa Cruz.

Beginning with the oldest sibling, Nicomedes Santa Cruz was a self taught intellectual who utilized words as an outlet for self discovery and activism. Through literature and music,

Nicomedes challenged preconceived notions and hegemonistic ideologies that shaped and often promoted the mistreatment of Afro-Peruvians. In his adult life, there are three major themes within his work: remembrance and celebration of black history/traditions, identifying and denouncing acts of racism and discrimination, and social justice (Aguirre, 2011). To bring back visibility to a group

of people that were often treated like second-class citizens, Nicomedes started "Folklore costeño" (Coastal Folklore). This newspaper would describe in detail both dances and instruments used in Afro-Peruvian music and dance such as: el cajon and la carrasca's(donkey jaw), often used in festejo—a form of rhythmic dance created by the African slave population on the Pacific coast of Lima (Ojeda, 2011). Nicomedes would go on to use these art forms to build his own legacy of music and poetry that often illustrated a depth in culture most were not aware of. Cumanana, one of his most cherished musical/lyrical albums, is filled with an explosion of rhythmic beats, warming melodies, and a community of voices that guide you in an unimaginable way. One track in particular "Ritmos Negros del Perú" utilizes decimas—which is a poetic pattern that follows a distinctive ten verse rhythmic pattern, and often only seen in Spanish origins. In this song, he begins by saying "De África llegó mi abuela/ vestida con caracoles/ la trajeron lo españoles/ en un barco carabela" 'My grandmother came from Africa/ adorned in shells/ Spaniards brought her/ in a caravel ship' (Ojeda, 2011). This style of storytelling through poetry and song, revolutionized the way Afro-Peruvians viewed their heritage and brought forth a path in which his sister would soon follow.

Victoria Santa Cruz was a pioneer in Afro-Peruvian dance. Movement was more than just discovering and learning an art form, it enveloped her entire life. In 1961, Victoria co-founded a theater in Peru with her brother and produced/choreographed three plays—one of which showcased the dynamic conflicts between enslaved people and their oppressors(McFerren, 2020). After graduating with a focus in theater and choreography, Victoria ventured to Africa and produced a ballet called "La muñeca negra"; a show of revival in regards to lost cultural memories due to slavery and imperialism(McFerren, 2020). Afro-Peruvian dance took the world by surprise at the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City wher---e

Victoria and a group she founded called “Teatro y Danzas Negras del Perú” performed Afro-Peruvian dance styles such as lando and zamacueca. To give some context on these two forms of dance, lando, for starters, is described as an “elegant dance with intertwined rhythms and a seductive undertow”(Eva Allyon, 2009), often only using the cajon for percussion. Zamacueca on the other hand is another form of folk dance that originated within the African community of Peru and was used to signify the game of courtship and flirtation, often utilizing the cajon and guitar for rhythmic and melodic union. Many of these forgotten pieces were brought back to life through Victoria’s “ancestral memory—” a practice of connecting back to African roots as a way to reawaken Black consciousness. In this self-exploration, Victoria used movement and sound to reimagine her identity in blackness, and ultimately find clarity within an institution that fuels itself on the invisibility of black culture.

Wrap Up

A theme happens to recur in the works of the Santa Cruz siblings, and I believe it’s the concept of remembrance. This belief that rediscovering parts of a culture, both painful and joyful, could spark a journey of clarity has been proven consistently through the impact of their art. Not only to themselves, but the rest of the world. Nicomedes and Victoria successfully illustrated that black people in Peru are not a monolith. Their ability to bring light to the history of Africans in Peru has exemplified in more ways than one, the multifaceted nature of Afro-Peruvians and why they must take up space.

Collaborators

Angie Edell Campos

What good is knowledge when it is not shared? It is a question that I constantly asked myself during my academic training. The information that we accumulate through our life experiences, knowing the world and the educational trajectory have a valuable knowledge that must be transmitted, otherwise, what is the use of knowing so much? What good is that book studied?

Knowledge frees us, that is the main motivation of this space, to contribute to the world and especially to those Afro-descendant and racialized women. Share knowledge.

Angie Campos is a young Afro-Peruvian feminist activist for human rights and social inclusion. Social worker by profession, social communicator by passion and artist by resistance.



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After Decades of Erasure, Afro-Peruvians Will

Finally be Counted in the National Census Néstor David Pastor

<https://www.okayafrica.com/census-to-count-afro-peruvians/>

Peru should fully embrace its Afro-Peruvian heritage and end discrimination – UN rights experts Mar 5 2019

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2020/03/peru-should-fully-embrace-its-afro-peruvian-heritage-and-end-discrimination>

Informational Links

[Black Studies Across The Americas](#)

The Department of Ethnic and Race Studies (DERS) is partnering with the Office of Internships and Experiential Learning to request funding for a collaborative international research program, "Black Studies Across the Americas." In this hybrid program, cohorts of DERS faculty, faculty from fields not traditionally associated with Ethnic and Race Studies (Business, Mathematics, Science, and CIS), BMCC students, and students from international institutions in Latin America will work together to complete research projects in Black Studies and create educational outcomes that will benefit their respective communities (websites, course assignments, projects, resources, or presentation materials). Potential collaborating institutions are located in sites where we have established relationships through study abroad and which serve Afro-descendant populations: Argentina, Brazil, the Dominican Republic, and Peru. Faculty will be recruited across departments to mentor students throughout their research and BMCC students will receive stipends for their participation and students abroad will also receive support through their respective institutions, which will be provided with funds.

[Peruvian Policies In Regards to Discrimination](#)

El pueblo afroperuano forma parte indispensable de la sociedad peruana. Actualmente, es el segundo pueblo más grande en el país y está conformado por más de 800 mil personas a nivel nacional, quienes se ubican a lo largo de todo el Perú. Además, el pueblo afroperuano conserva costumbres, saberes y prácticas, pero sobre todo ha brindado aportes invaluable a la construcción de la nación peruana. Sin embargo, pese a la presencia y los aportes del pueblo afroperuano al país, este colectivo afronta diversas formas de discriminación étnico-racial. Estas permanentes prácticas han sido derivadas del racismo, entendido como una ideología que justificó la trata esclavista en la colonia e inicios de la república, para así esclavizar

a millones de africanos/as junto a su descendencia en las Américas. Además, estas prácticas se fueron normalizando al pasar del tiempo y se instalaron tanto en la forma de pensar de las personas, así como en las instituciones propias a la conformación de los Estados, ocasionando que, en consecuencia, se profundicen y justifiquen las distintas formas de desigualdad y exclusión, que fueron conformadas y configuradas durante siglos. De esta manera, el pueblo afroperuano actualmente afronta severas limitaciones para ejercer sus derechos.

[Monica Carrillo Zegarra](#)

Monica Carrillo Zegarra, M.F.A., is an Afro-Peruvian writer, performer, and human rights advocate, founder and former director of LUNDU Center for Afro Peruvian Studies and Advancement (<http://lundu.org/>) In the artistic world, Carrillo goes by the name "Oru." She creates poetry that mixes afro-beat, hip-hop, and Afro Peruvian music to bring attention to the ongoing effects of racism and sexism. Her productions "Unicroma" and "Poetics of Reparation" included a CD, a book and a live performance with musicians and dancers. As a songwriter and performer, she has been featured in the GRAMMY®, Latin GRAMMY® and Independent Music Award's winner album "El Orisha de la Rosa." She holds a M.F.A in Performance Media and Interactive Arts from Brooklyn College, a Bachelor's degree in Journalism from The National University of San Marcos (Peru), a master's degree in Political Journalism and Cultural Analysis from The University of Antonio Ruiz Montoya (Peru), and a specialization in International Law and in Human Rights from Oxford University, (England).