



# On The Question of Race

- 1 They ask me to write down  
my race

And I think  
and think  
very seriously

and consider  
writing down the truth  
and have my answer read

I have a dark man  
listening to a bolero  
lighting a match  
inside this body

I have an old lady  
showing pictures to her children  
talking in a language called Spanish  
inside this body

- 3 I have a drunk man  
asking for directions  
he wants to go home  
wants you to tell him  
which highway leads to Cuzcatlán

I have a kid in the fifth grade  
who says he's American  
"but my father's from El Salvador  
and my mother is black"  
I have all these people  
these drums  
these guiros  
all these aguacates

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I have another woman  
who looks like me  
she comes to me when I am dreaming  
she is trying to teach me the words  
to a language that I used to know

- 4 I have a brown man  
he is painting a picture  
we share a secret  
it hides in the memory of a kiss  
I have an old man  
he is singing  
patting juba  
passing the tradition on  
through the rhythms in his hands

I have all these voices  
that have not yet learned to speak  
orisha  
tormentas  
sewas  
ancestors

a school girl in Bahia  
and a young man cutting cane in Miami  
inside this body



this prescribed latinhood  
this Hispaniard name  
that doesn't agree with  
English only

I have all these rhythms  
these languages  
these songs

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6 I have my tia Menche  
tia Zoila  
a mi abuela  
A la señora con chile  
a la pupusa lady  
and Lorenzo's  
inside my body

7 I have my aunt josephine  
my uncle james  
and my grandfathers poetry  
inside this body

I have doubledutch  
miss mary mat  
and king of the mountain  
inside this body

8 I have 18th & Columbia Rd  
15 & Irving  
Petworth  
Shaw  
Julio Iglesias  
and Jackson 5  
and Lilo Gonzales  
inside this body

9 I have rare essence  
sarah vaughn  
tonya la negra  
and a yaqui deer song  
inside this body

11 I have the shrimp boat  
florida avenue bar and grill  
and doña ezusena  
inside this body

10 I have a son  
named John Enrique  
who's brown and black  
and human and tender

I have eastgate  
simple city  
spotsylvania county, va  
orangeburg, sc  
central square  
and old pascua village  
inside this body

I have you  
inside this body

I have my grandmothers laughter  
inside this body

17 But I stop

And simply  
write down

"Hispanic."

Enrique Aviles, 1991

17 But I stop

And simply  
write down

Black

Michelle A. Banks, 1991



### On the Question of Race Teaching Ideas

Two students can prepare to read this dialogue poem to the class. Read the shaded sections in unison. Alternate reading the other sections as indicated in the numerical sequence.

Please note that the authors both live in the Washington, D.C. area. A number of the references to street corners and neighborhoods refer to communities in D.C.

After listening to the poems, share in pairs your responses. How did they make you feel about the authors? About yourself? About application forms? (You may want to discuss how the categories on application forms are often included for positive reasons, to promote equity. Nevertheless, they tend to de-personalize and generalize our identity.)

Close your eyes and conjure images of all the people "inside of you." These ancestors can be either "real" or chosen ancestors. Open your eyes and write a list of these images. Then write a poem about who has contributed to who you are today.

Quique Aviles and Michelle Banks are writers, actors and teachers with the **Latinegro Theatre**, a project of the Latin American Youth Center in Washington, D.C. They write and perform theatre that challenges the audience to think about contemporary social issues. The performances typically involve the audience. For more information, write to: **Latinegro**, LAYC, 3045 15th Street, NW, Washington, DC 20009. **Photos:** Michelle Banks and Quique Aviles, © 1990 Rick Reinhard.